





## SHORT TAKES

## AP'S MOVE TO REORGANISE DISTRICTS MAY GET DELAYED

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 27

The Andhra Pradesh government's move to reorganise the districts may get delayed further. The office of the Registrar General replied for a query under the Right to Information Act, 2005 raised by city-based Inaganti Ravi Kumar recently, stating that Census 2021 and other related field activities were postponed until further orders due to the Covid-19 pandemic and no new dates were decided.

The office said that for Census 2021, initially the period from January 1, 2010, to December 31, 2019, was fixed for mapping the jurisdictional changes and date of freezing boundaries was December 31, 2019. However, due to the pandemic, the Census and other related field activities were postponed and the date of freezing of boundaries was extended upto March 31, 2021, for all states and Union Territories and will be effective till the Census is over.

Moreover, it takes a minimum of three months to complete the preparatory works for reorganisation of the districts under the provisions of AP District Formation Act, 1974. Besides, the poll code is in force in all seven Assembly segments falling under Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency where a bypoll is due. The state government intends to complete the mandal and zilla parishad polls early. If the State Election Commission announces the schedule, the poll code will be in effect until the election process is over.

As the thumb rule says that no alteration of jurisdictional boundaries are to be taken up during the Census year and the Census is likely to commence once the prevalence of Coronavirus subsides, the AP's plan to reorganise districts is likely to be deferred.

Though Telangana state managed to reorganise 10 districts into 33 districts in 2016-17, at that time, there was no rule on freezing of boundaries as it was not a Census year.

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## ARTIFICIAL ROBO SAND TO RESOLVE SAND SHORTAGE

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 27

The usage of 'Robo sand' has been proposed to resolve the shortage of sand by an expert team from the Siddhartha Engineering College. The team said constructors are using artificial sand in Hyderabad, Bengaluru and other places for quality constructions.

They were speaking at a seminar, 'Investigation of usage M-sand and stone dust', conducted by the Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (CREDAI).

VR. Siddhartha Engineering College Dean Dr Panduranga Rao giving a presentation on Robo sand said that their college conducted research on how manufacturing sand can be used as an alternative to prevent a sand shortage. He said that the shortage of sand is increasing day by day which is putting a huge impact on constructions.

He said that constructions can be done using Robo/M-sand under which dust from gravel can be used in the form of sand. He stated that the best example of this is the construction of the flyover near the Siddhartha College using 'M-Sand'. Many other constructions have already taken place in Vijayawada as well as Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

Siddhartha College of Engineering Assistant Professor M. Tej Sai said structures built using M-Sand (Robo sand) will be strong for a long time. He said that some precautions need to be taken while using the sand like adequate water should be used during the mixing of the cement.

VRSEC Professor Dr Chava Srinivas and CREDAI President RV Swamy and others addressed the seminar.



CM programme co-ordinator Talasila Raghuram (left), commissioner of police B. Srinivasulu (second from left), collector A. Md. Imtiaz (centre), municipal commissioner V. Prasanna Venkatesh, East constituency in charge Devineni Avinash (left) inspect the retaining wall construction at Krishnalanka in Vijayawada.

## Retaining wall soon to prevent inundation by Krishna floods

CM to lay foundation stone for the construction of retaining wall on March 31

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 27

The menace of flooding on the banks of the Krishna river in Vijayawada could be a thing of the past with the construction of the first of its kind flood protection wall. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy will lay the foundation stone for the construction of the 1.5 km-long second phase of the retaining wall on March 31.

The actual retaining wall is 2.28 km long, of which only one km could be built during the slow pace of construction works. During the 2019 election, Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy promised to complete the construction of the wall and sanctioned ₹125 crore funds and going to start

works on March 31.

The retaining wall will be constructed from Kanakadurga Varadhi to Kotinagar Tarakaramanagar, Ranigarithota, Bhupesh Gupta Nagar colony and other areas on the banks of the Krishna river. Every year during floods as many as 2,500 families living on the banks of the river are facing severe problems due to inundation. Those families were shifted to safer places by the government and were provided with food and shelter. With the upcoming river protection retaining wall there will be no problems to the families during floods.

The upcoming retaining wall can stand floodwater up to 11 lakh cusecs. During the last two years, about 8 lakh cusecs of



A file photo of retaining wall at Krishnalanka in Vijayawada.

floodwater was witnessed during the rainy season in 2019 and 2020. The water from the Prakasam Barrage downstream continued for months creating severe problems to the

families. In the year 2019, the crest gates at Prakasam barrage were open for 80 days while in the year 2020 the gates were open for 120 days releasing lakhs of

cusecs of floodwater downstream into the Bay of Bengal.

The locals of various colonies of Krishna riverbank said that they were facing inundation difficulties for the past 20 years and earlier TD government failed to construct the retaining wall. They said that they used to leave houses every time during floods, hoping to get rid of inundation problems due to floods with the construction of a first of its kind retaining wall.

Krishna district collector A. Md Imtiaz said that about 575 families will be relocated to Jakkampudi or New Rajarajeswaripeta who are residing on the bank of the river who are affected during the floods every year.

## GOVT NOT GIVING IMPORTANCE TO HOUSE SESSION: TD

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 27

Telugu Desam MLA Dola Bala Veeranjanya Swamy on Saturday accused Jagan Mohan Reddy Government of not giving due importance to assembly sessions while taking major decisions affecting all sections of people in the state. He maintained that this is because Jagan regime has taken the ordinance route, as it is unable to provide answers to people by holding assembly sessions.

The TD MLA said that the neighbouring Telangana and even parliament are holding their budget sessions.

Veeranjanya Swamy said the AP Chief Minister had made it a habit of bypassing the assembly. He stated that Jagan Mohan Reddy will go down in history as an "Ordinance CM".

In this regard, the MLA re-called how major decisions including the three capitals and replacement of State Election Commissioner had been affected through ordinances. "It is very unfortunate that even the budget, which plays a key role in giving a new direction to development and welfare, is now being approved through an ordinance," he pointed out.

## Kurasala to Jagan: take up delta modernisation plan

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 27

Agriculture minister Kurasala Kannababu said ministers have appealed to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to take up delta modernisation works to ensure free flow of water in canals toward reducing losses to life and property during calamities.

Participating as chief guest of Krishi Vignana Kendra's 25th year celebrations at Undi in West Godavari District on Saturday, Kannababu said ministers have also sought from CM ₹15,000 crore multipurpose facilities centres having warehouses and cold storage plants for agriculture produce and fish products, apart from processing units in every Lok Sabha

constituency of the state.

The minister disclosed that the Chief Minister has positively responded for these two requests. He pointed out that modernisation of deltas will create additional water facilities for cultivation. And, scientists at multipurpose facility centres will give timely suggestions to cultivators for increasing their yields.

Kannababu said Jagan Mohan Reddy is working hard for farmers, including extending them a power subsidy of ₹750 crore, which no other government in the country is doing. CM's Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBKs) with required skilled staff, including 11,000 agricultural scientists, are always available to farmers for resolving their difficulties.

The minister pointed out that fertilisers and pesticides are also available in RBKs, which can be applied as per suggestions of scientists, so that farmers can enhance their yields and income.

Housing minister Cherukuvada Sriranganatha Raju said record yield is expected during this Rabi season. He exhorted scientists to take steps for enhancing paddy yield per acre to 90 bags.

Presiding over the function, Undi MLA Manthana Ramaraju requested the state government to supply water to farmers till April 15 for getting better crop yields. KVK coordinator N. Mallikarjuna Rao, Acharya Ranga University vice chancellor A. Vishnu Vardhan Reddy and others were present.

## CM URGED TO FILL VACANCIES IN MISSIONARY SCHOOLS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 27

Vijayawada catholic bishop T. Joseph Raja Rao on behalf of all Christian-aided missionary schools urged Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to fill all vacant posts in such schools.

Addressing bishops, principals, correspondents

and representatives of various Christian institutions across the state here on Saturday, Raja Rao said that for the past few years the vacant posts were not filled in RCM, CSI, Lutheran, Baptist, ECI and other Christian schools by the government resulting in closure of some schools.

Monsignor M. Prasad

said that Jagan Mohan Reddy, who gives top priority to education, should protect Christian minority schools, which were offering quality education even before India had achieved independence. Bishop M.D. Prakasam said that the Telugu Desam government had neglected Christian institutions.

## DELAYED | PAY

Lapses in paying stipend to medical students by the college management

## Panel probes charges against Katuri Medical College

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 27

A two-member fact-finding committee headed by government hospital medical superintendent Dr Shiv Sankar Rao inspected the Katuri Medical College (KMC) at Guntur on Saturday.

Sources privy to the probe said the committee inspected records over

allegations of lapses in paying stipend to medical students by the college management. However, it will take some time for the probe committee to go through records before preparing a comprehensive report and submitting it to NTR University of Health Sciences.

KMC students have appealed to members of the probe committee that

■ **NTR UNIVERSITY** of Health Sciences authorities are seriously taking the irregularities committed by private medical colleges in payment of stipend to students.

they take their feedback too on the issue. Students said they will show the committee their bank account statements that

clearly revealed how the college management failed to remit their full monthly stipend into their accounts.

In this context, students referred to the state government's order making it mandatory for private medical colleges to pay stipend to their house surgeons, post-graduates and students of specialised courses on par with gov-

## YSRC will create history in bypoll, says Peddireddy

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 27

Claiming that the YSRC government has taken the slew of welfare schemes to every poor in the state, panchayat raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy exuded confidence that the party will create history in the ensuing Tirupati Lok Sabha by-election.

Addressing the public meetings at Satyavedu constituency in Chittoor district on Saturday along with party's candidate for Tirupati LS by-election Dr M. Gurumurthy, Peddireddy stated that AP is already on the top in implementing a large number of welfare schemes.

"In the 21-month loge rule, Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy led state government ensured all the development schemes reach every eligible poor in the state, irrespective of their political affiliations, religion, caste and region and without giving any scope for corruption. Electing YSRC candidate for Tirupati LS seat will accelerate the region's development to many folds," he added.

Interacting with the mediapersons in Nellore city on Saturday, YSRC district convener and Sarvepalli MLA Kakani Govardhan Reddy,

charged at the opposition Telugu Desam for engaging in false propaganda against the ruling party. He alleged that the TD, which deputed all its key leaders for the bypoll, has been trying to provoke people's sentiments with their fake propaganda. He said the opposition parties are going to face defeat in the by-election.

About the schedule of the YSRC candidate's nomination for the bypoll, Kakani said Dr M. Gurumurthy would file his nomination on March 29, after paying tributes to Dr B.R. Ambedkar statue at VR Circle in Nellore, followed by a rally to the collectorate. He appealed to the party leaders and workers to join the rally on Monday.

Meanwhile, Dr Gurumurthy along with Deputy Chief Minister K. Narayana Swamy, minister Peddireddy and YSRC MLAs have campaigned at various places in the Satyavedu constituency. Addressing the public, he promised that he would do his best to develop the Tirupati LS segment and strive to better the love of people of this constituency by improving facilities, including health, education, etc. Dr Gurumurthy said that he would dedicate his life to public service under CM Jagan Mohan Reddy's leadership till his last breath.

## GOVT IS COMMITTED TO HELP SUPPRESSED COMMUNITIES, SAYS RAMAKRISHNA

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 27

Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, government adviser (public affairs), said that the credit for establishing the ST Commission goes to Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and the YSRC government.

Addressing a programme set up to felicitate ST Commission chairman Kumbha Ravibabu at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram on Saturday at Vijayawada, Ramakrishna Reddy said that the Chief Minister had introduced welfare schemes to benefit every individual without discriminating against caste and region.

Ramakrishna Reddy stressed that the government was committed to the welfare of Scheduled Tribe people and had appointed Dr Ravibabu who is an intellectual in the community. He recalled that Ravibabu worked as assistant pro-

fessor in Andhra University for 15 years and moulded students into good citizens. He also was a good spokesperson in the national and international arenas, the adviser said.

Dr Ravibabu expressed his gratitude to Jagan Mohan Reddy for appointing him chairman of the ST Commission and said that he would stand by the community for their development and well-being.

He said that the CM had made a mark with his style of governance by establishing many corporations for the downtrodden SC/ST and weaker section people.

Dr Ravibabu said that the Constitution had given many rights to the Scheduled Tribes people and he would create awareness among the people on their rights.

He said that he would strive to ensure that the funds allocated to the ST are utilised for the community.

## TTD gets constant data from FSI

From page 1

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, TTD divisional forest officer (DFO) Chandra Sekhar said, "Apart from setting up four 40 feet high watch-towers in Tirupati and five towers in the Tirumala forest belt spread over 2,950 hectares, forest fire-fighting squads equipped with advanced fire-fighting equipment and watch tower staff have been posted on a round-the-clock basis to spot smoke."

Whenever the watch-tower staff sees any smoke or fire, they will alert the squads, who will reach the spot and use

blowers and the other equipment to remove dry leaves and douse off the fire, the DFO added.

According to him, TTD is also constantly receiving data from FSI, which uses satellite-based remote sensing technology and GIS tools for preventing and managing fires through the creation of early warning in fire prone areas, monitoring fires on real time basis and estimation of burn scars.

The TTD has also dug up over 50 km of fire lines of 10x20 metres size amidst the thick shrubs and forest trees in order to contain the spread of the fire.

government medical colleges. In a related development, sources said NTR University of Health Sciences authorities are seriously taking the irregularities committed by private medical colleges in payment of stipend to students.

University vice chancellor Dr P. Syama Prasad said, "We are going to initiate necessary measures

soon for ensuring that all private medical colleges pay stipend to their medical students as per norms." Sources say, on their part, managements of private medical colleges have expressed their unhappiness with fee structure fixed by the state government for B and C categories of colleges, stating it is "unviable".



## SHORT TAKES

## THIS YEAR, NO HOLI CELEBRATIONS AT RAJ BHAVAN

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 27

Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan has decided not to organise Holi celebrations at Raj Bhavan.

Governor's secretariat, in a statement issued on Saturday, said that in the wake of the rise in the number of Covid-19 cases, the Governor had decided not to celebrate the Holi festival.

However, the Governor appealed to the people in the state to celebrate the festival by staying at home and observe Covid-19 guidelines behaviour by wearing a mask, washing hands with sanitiser or soap and maintaining social distance. He also appealed to all the eligible persons to undergo Covid-19 vaccination, and it is safe and would help break the chain of virus infection.

## CONSUMERS RIDICULE COTPA AMENDMENTS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 27

Nearly 82 per cent of users consider the proposed ban of designated smoking areas in airports, hotels and restaurants is tantamount to harassment, mental anguish and cruelty.

The Public Response Against Helplessness and Action for Redressal (Prahar ) on Saturday released the findings of the first-ever survey among actual users of tobacco products on the likely impact of the proposed COTPA Amendment Bill 2020. The respondents have outrightly opposed the proposal to ban sale of loose cigarettes.

Explaining the need for the study, Abhay Raj Mishra, president and convener of Prahar, said "It is an established principle that before framing any law which affects a class of stakeholders, the views of the affected party must be sought. However, in the course of framing and seeking a public response to the provisions of COTPA Amendment Bill 2020 no such attempt was made to take the opinion of the actual users of tobacco products. Unlike other groups, consumers are not cohesively represented by any associations or bodies. Therefore, Prahar took it upon itself to collect the views and table it for the consideration of policymakers."

Abhay Raj said that the survey found that 82 per cent of users condemned the proposed ban on designated smoking areas in airports, hotels and restaurants and 87 per cent of the respondents were against banning sale of loose cigarettes as they believe that this move could compel smokers to buy full packs and lead to an increase in consumption.

He stated that as per the survey, 57 per cent of consumers buy loose cigarettes as it helps them to restrict their habit.

On disallowing branding of tobacco products at the point of sale, 76 per cent of respondents said they do not support this proposal as it will limit their fundamental right to make an informed decision as branding is a reinforcement of the legality of the product they are buying. He further stated that on the contentious issue of increasing the age for tobacco consumption from the current 18 years to 21 years, 78 per cent of respondents ridiculed the proposal as all those above 18 years of age were adults as per the Constitution.

He said that the survey was conducted in 14 cities spanning Hyderabad, Vijayawada, Delhi, Jaipur, Lucknow, Ranchi, Kolkata, Guwahati, Mumbai, Nagpur, Vadodara, Bhopal, Chennai and Bengaluru.

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## Covid-19 tests in all schools

190 students tested positive in 10 days

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 27

East Godavari joint collector Keerthi Chekuri said that 190 students from a private college near Rajamahendravaram had tested Covid positive in the last 10 days. The situation is being reviewed from time to time and all students are being provided treatment.

Education minister Adimulam Suresh conducted a video conference with concerned officials on Saturday and asked about the situation in educational institutions.

Chekuri said that the private college has a residential facility and the virus spread to more students. She said that steps were being taken to stop the spread of the virus.

She said that there was nothing to worry about any other educational institution in the district as none had reported any case. She said that Covid tests are being conducted on 2,000 students every day. She said that the 'Naadu-Nedu' programme has resulted in an increase in student-strength.

According to sources, the first covid-19 case was reported in Tirumala Junior College near Rajamahendravaram on March 16 and the cases increased to 190 till Saturday. Sources said that 10 cases were reported in ZP high schools in Turangi near Kakinada. 10 members of a family tested positive in Thondangi mandal after returning from Tirumala.

## Most girl students tested negative

FROM PAGE 1

Similarly, authorities have conducted Covid-19 tests on 550 girl students of the campus engineering college. Results are available for 200 students, who have all tested negative. Results of remaining 350 students are expected to be out by late night Saturday.

Students who have tested Covid-19 positive have been accommodated in hostel rooms in four isolation blocks. They have been given medical kits containing a pulse oximeter and tablets.

Other students have been quarantined in hostel room of two other blocks.

All students are being supplied food packets in their rooms to avoid their gathering at one place and spreading the virus in the process.

Health authorities are also collecting samples of nearly 300 teaching and non-teaching staff for running Covid-19 tests on them.

Their results are also expected to be out by late Saturday night.

Authorities say that those who have already tested Covid-19 positive will again be tested after five days to know their status. Accordingly, a decision will be taken whether to discharge them or continue in the same facility for some more days.

## Deliver sops to students individually: Minister

from page 1

He suggested that Jaganna Gorumudda benefits should be delivered individually to the students in order to avoid mass gatherings. He directed district collectors and joint collectors to ensure thermal screening in every educational institution in coordination with officials from the medical and health department.

Suresh said that half-day schools would start on April 1. He said the

biometric system has been updated for the half-day schools and directed the officials to use biometric attendance without fail.

State director of school education Vadrevu China Veerabhadru, Intermediate Board Commissioner V. Ramakrishna, higher education special chief secretary Satish Chandra and other officials participated in the review meeting.

## All staff given work from home option

from page 1

The matter was immediately brought to the notice of district collector Chevuru Harikiran. A Covid test was conducted on 60 employees on the collector's instructions. As of Saturday morning, another 18 employees were declared positive and sent to home isolation. All staff members were immediately given the work from home option while the entire office was sanitized. But this development has spread fears in the collector's office complex.

An officer told *Deccan Chronicle* that not all employees had shown Covid symptoms but were isolated as a precautionary measure.

Public negligence is

presumed to be the main reason for the increase in Covid cases, which for the last two months was in single digits but was now increasing.

Two days ago three family members of a forest officer in Siddavatam mandal were confirmed Covid positive.

It was on March 31 last year that 15 cases were reported for the first time in Kadapa district. At one stage it had risen to almost 1,000 cases per day. However, since December there has been a steady decline and it fell sharply in January and February.

There has been a resurgence from the third week of this month. A total of 40 cases were

reported in Kadapa district on Saturday. In addition, a total of 55,861 positive cases were registered in the district. So far 55,187 people have fully recovered from the disease and 84 are in home isolation.

Harikiran and SP Karur Karunapati Nagendra Kumar Anburajan have decided to impose heavy fines on those who come out without a mask. Shops allowing customers without masks would be strictly dealt with.

Anburajan told reporters that police teams would conduct inspections everywhere and warned that fines would be levied if anyone appeared on the roads without a mask.



Inmates of the Women's Hostel of AU Engineering College wait in a queue to get tested for Covid-19 as positive cases were on rise at the AU Engineering College hostels in Visakhapatnam on Saturday. — K. MURALIKRISHNA



Sanitation workers spray the disinfectant on the premises of Andhra University Engineering College after a huge spike in COVID-19 positive cases in Visakhapatnam on Friday. — P. NARASIMHA MURTHY

## 947 new Covid cases in AP

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 27

Andhra Pradesh registered 947 fresh cases of Covid-19 infections with no death in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported on Saturday that out of 42,696 samples tested, 947 persons were infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of 1,49,58,897 samples tested so far in the state, 8,97,810 persons were found infected with the virus and of them, 8,85,892 recovered while 4,715 are still active with

the virus. Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Chittoor found to be the worst affected with 180 followed by 156 in Visakhapatnam, 145 in Guntur, 113 in Krishna, 61 in Kurnool, 58 in East Godavari, 56 in Srikakulam, 43 in Nellore, 40 in Kadapa, 35 in Anantapur, 23 in Prakasam, 19 in Vizianagaram and 18 in West Godavari.

Chittoor continues to lead the state with the highest number of Coronavirus cumulative cases with 874, followed by 623 in Visakhapatnam, 604 in

Krishna, 599 in East Godavari, 431 in Guntur, 312 in Kurnool, 275 in Anantapur, 266 in Nellore, 216 in Srikakulam, 192 in Prakasam, 129 in Kadapa, 100 in West Godavari and 94 in Vizianagaram.

No new Covid-19 death was reported with the toll remaining at 7,203.

The state health authorities discharged 377 patients after recovery.

AP conducted the Covid-19 test on 2,80,129 samples per one million population and registered a positive rate of 6.

## CIVIC BODY REMOVES TRASH BINS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KURNOOL, MARCH 27

Kurnool municipal corporation took a unique initiative and dispensed dumper bins from all the vantage points, leaving no place for residents to throw trash. Now, the residents have to use trash bins at their places which will be collected by the sanitation staff. Anyone contravening these provisions will be fined, a KMC official said.

KMC Mayor Ramayya said this measure had been taken to make the city garbage-free. With the new system, each ward member is responsible for ensuring garbage is not thrown at street corners and ensures cleanliness. He said the city would be made plastic-free and aspires to be an ideal Judicial capital of Andhra Pradesh.

The KMC ward members pitched an umbrella at the place where dumper bins used to be in their wards and were seen coaxing residents to dispose of their trash responsibly and counselled residents about the need to dispose of garbage in bins. The KMC Mayor Ramayya took out this maiden initiative and appealed to the public to comply with the new rules.

## AQUA FARMERS MUST RENEW THEIR PONDS

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KAKINADA, MARCH 27

West Godavari district collector Revu Muthyala Raju said that aqua farmers and its allied units should renew their licences immediately as per Andhra Pradesh State Aqua Culture Development Authority (APSADA) Act.

Mr Muthyala Raju convened the district level implementation committee on the authority with officials at Eluru on Saturday. He said that to give minimum support price to aqua products during the Covid-19 pandemic situation, the government brought the Act, and 29,288 aqua farmers should submit their documents in a prescribed proforma to the officials and get the endorsement.

He said that licences in aqua allied units like fish seed hatcheries, shrimp hatcheries, Feed Meals, Packing Industry, Ice plants, Cold Storages, Processing Plants, Aqua Labs, Aqua Shops, Fresh Water AquaCulture Licences, BW AquaCulture licences and others.

He said that 1,302 applicants have submitted for new licenses, and the mandal level committees should verify their applications and give them licenses. He said that once the farmers register their names of APSADA, they need not renew their licence in their life term. The Joint Collector K. Venkata Ramana Reddy, Fisheries Joint Director A. Chandra Sekhar, APCCB Executive Engineer K. Vijaya Mohan, Irrigation Superintendent M.V.V. Ravi Babu, Ground Water Department Deputy Director V. Vijaya Babu and others were present.

District Industries Centre GM P. Yesudas, Aqua Culture farmer V. Ramachandra Raju, Sea Food Processing Plant representative K. Anand and others were present.

## 3 ARRESTED FOR SANDERS SMUGGLING

DC CORRESPONDENT  
KADAPA, MARCH 27

The Forest Department's protection watcher has come out to help the red sandalwood smugglers. Pullampeta sub-inspector Sangem Vinod Kumar of the Rajampet police subdivision pulled out of the case on Saturday. Nagalakkagari Sivanjaneyulu Reddy, an out-sourced forest protection watcher from Tippayapalle, Pullampeta mandal, was arrested for collaborating with smugglers.

While moving 20 red sandalwood logs in a car, police arrested Shivanjaneyulu and Sudhakar Reddy, a resident of Ambavaram village in Keshinayana mandal and Chevuni Subrahmanyam Reddy, a resident of Devasamudram village.

in Pullampeta mandal. Pullam Peta police sub-

inspector Sangem Vinod Kumar got a tipoff from reliable sources and he and his staff carried out the attack on Saturday morning. Twenty red sandalwood logs illegally cut from the forest were loaded into a vehicle in a garden and attacked and captured. Three suspects were arrested. Kadapa District Superintendent of Police Karur Karunapati Nagendra Kumar Anburajan disclosed the details to reporters. The SP said 20 red sandalwood logs, a Renault Duster car, a motorbike, three cell phones and Rs 5,000 cash, axes and other material were seized from the smugglers.

Pullampeta SI Vinod Kumar and Rajampeta DSP Sivabhaskar Reddy, who took the initiative in arresting the smugglers, were honoured with the award, the SP said.

## CONSTABLE SLITS WOMAN'S THROAT

DC CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUPATI, MARCH 27

A constable from APSP battalion allegedly slit the throat of a woman, who has been residing close to his house, in Kovur town of Nellore district, on Saturday morning.

As per reports, the constable has developed a grudge against the

woman as he believed that she was responsible for his wife's death, who committed suicide a while ago.

According to Kovur CI Ramakrishna Reddy, the APSP constable, Suresh's wife committed suicide by hanging herself due to some unknown reasons a month ago. Suresh believed that their neighbour was responsible.

## COP, LECTURER KILLED IN MISHAP

DC CORRESPONDENT  
VIZIANAGARAM, MARCH 27

A lorry, carrying an iron ore load, knocked down a motorcycle, killing a man and the pillion rider in Vizianagaram on Saturday.

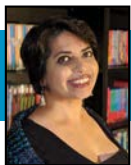
The victims were identified as P. Rama Raju, a constable with the armed reserve department and





## DECCAN Chronicle

28 MARCH 2021



Shreya Sen-Handley

Off the beaten track

## Defend our freedoms, just connect the 'dots'

Around the world in March, millions died from Coronavirus, cancer, and the many maladies we don't seem able to prevent or cure. And with our new irrational rejection of vaccines, including the ones that have conclusively, over centuries, helped eradicate disease, millions more will perish. But, after rampaging diseases, our single biggest problem is male violence, surely, whether it manifests itself in full-scale warfare, environmental degradation, or the brutalisation of the vulnerable, including women?

This month (and every other in my long career as a woman), I have despaired over the widespread murder of women. As I lament the loss of London's Sarah Everard, the six Asian women gunned down in Atlanta, and the rising tide of femicide of the past weeks in India, I am gripped by a terrible *déjà vu*. We've all been here before, reassured by our leaders that they'll take firm steps to protect women, we watch history repeating as they blithely fail. And like a cracked record I find myself railing against our mistreatment again; fitfully hopeful that speaking up might make a tiny difference. Didn't the Suffragettes' dissent eventually garner votes for British women? Didn't the recent Indian Farmers' Protest, especially the tenacity of its women, focus the world's attention on their predicament? Yet, over time, so little has changed for the better in man's treatment of man, and indeed, Woman, that my faith in our voices being heard has been shaken.

What would our sagacious leaders suggest we do instead?

Talk less, say Japanese Olympics chiefs Mori and Sasaki. If women stopped airing their concerns, according to them, 'women's problems' would simply evaporate (so negligible are they). And isn't it a fact, such men point out, the moment women stop 'nagging', nobody hears about these issues again? Proving they never actually existed. All it requires then to solve 'women's problems', is for women, or nags, hags, and "Olympigs", as Sasaki would have it, to keep quiet.

Be seen less, spouts the Uttarkhand CM, in charge of an Indian state of around 5 million women. Bare female knees, sayeth he, will be the undoing of society. Leading to the collapse of morals, sense, and civilisation, ultimately. Haven't we heard that (and similar) from the patriarchy, times without number? Nor can it be wrong, surely, if so many men agree? Women revealing anything at all, including their capabilities, are immoral, dangerous and destructive. The only women worth respecting are the ones you can't see. Or hear. Because quiet, retiring women, whether locked in their homes, muzzled, or DEAD, can't upset our perfectly inequitable planet.

Walk less too, we're told often. Women shouldn't go anywhere on their own, except in a straight line between work and home. Not that every place of work is acceptable! If you work in a spa for example, you might get bumped off by frustrated men, and the fat-cat-owned media will slaver over it, but have no sympathy to spare. And even less action will be taken. Taking the path that suits you — literally and figuratively as well — is not for women, you expect Dark Age patriarchs to proclaim. But no, this is the message from our modern judiciary and police: guardians of our wellbeing. In Britain this month, not only was it revealed that a policeman had murdered homeward-bound-after-sundown Sarah Everard, they then stymied multiple vigils to mourn her in the name of Lockdown. Like all stalwarts of the status quo, I suspect they'd suggest a woman's place is at home if they could. The necessary Lockdown mantra of 'stay home, stay safe' has never been just a pandemic-protection slogan when it comes to women, but imposed rules to live by through history. It kept us so safe sometimes, we never felt pain again: as the reality of 137 women killed around the world DAILY by men intimately known to them attests.

But if staying home, staying covered, staying silent, hasn't spelt safety for us, what will? Unlike the prized collection of exotic birds we're sometimes perceived to be, safety is only a small part of our needs. We must continue to educate. Teaching women early to be free, to aspire to every wonderful opportunity this world has to offer, and young men to respect these same freedoms and aspirations in women, is key. But as the mother of both a son and a daughter, I've discovered that this is harder to achieve than I'd imagined. We encourage, support, and role-model the right behaviours for both, yet find that the occasional stereotype, or mild sexist trope, still winds its way home. Through conversations with our children, their friends and teachers, it's become obvious that this is the influence of playground chatter, media and the Internet; as much of which we vet as possible, like all concerned parents. Yet, the trickle that filters into their lives is proof of the pervasive nature of prejudice, and how impossible that is to eliminate entirely. And is shielding from reality the right approach anyway? So, we discuss inequities with them instead, explain why they're wrong, where they come from, and how best to address them. Thus teaching them both NOT to 'know their place'.

That isn't a complete solution either, is it? Just like protecting ourselves isn't enough, nor protesting. What's required, of course, is a major overhaul: systemic change that runs deep and wide through society, and belongs to us all. The answer then, though neither original nor revolutionary, lies in connecting the dots — literally! Because "dots", funnily enough, is what middle-class India calls its daughters. Our political leaders and corporations don't want upheavals, and activist organisations sometimes grow too big to make a deep-rooted difference. But if we can join, in small but ever-widening circles, our young women (and many peaceable men) — the dots — to work towards change, whilst providing support and the benefit of our experience, there's hope yet. The possibility even of societal transformation. Then, no matter what our sex, sexuality, class, caste, colour, age or creed, we might finally walk, in darkness and in light, bare-kneed or bare anything-at-all, any which way we please.

**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 @shreyasenhana.

Subhani



## India's Gilded Age



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

One thing that stood out during the recently concluded session of Parliament was how ministers of the Union kept parroting ad nauseam "It is not the business of government to do business". It left me wondering as to whether they really even understood the full import or implications of their utterances.

I could not help wondering every time the above proposition was articulated that the next inevitable and portentous consequence would be that it no longer would remain the business of government to be in government. By the time the grand garage sale of India's public assets would be over economic and, by extension, political power would have become so intensely concentrated in the hands of chaebols and oligarchs that they would be the real overlords of India giving even the American gilded age a run for its money.

No government would in future either be able to challenge them meaningfully or deliver public goods and services for the teaming millions who make up the bulk of our populace and require them most.

The Gilded Age, 1870-1899, was a period in American history when a few people through gross chicanery and outright sophistry became vulgarly wealthy in a very short span of time.

The eminence grise of the gilded age were the quick-rich moguls namely John D. Rockefeller, Andrew W. Mellon, Andrew Carnegie, Henry Flagler, Henry H. Rogers, J.P. Morgan, Cornelius Vanderbilt and John Jacob Astor. However in the popular imagination of American people they are still the robber barons who had become affluent through illegitimate means.

The later iterations of the

gilded age have been periods in the history of nations when public assets created out of public money have been privatised on a mega scale.

The person who really put wheels under this large-scale privatisation of public assets in the penultimate decade of the twentieth century was Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

On becoming the Premier in May 1979, she sold off steelmakers, carmakers, aerospace firms, oil and gas giants, airlines and the telecoms monopoly in the face of robust protests by well meaning and sober public intellectuals, and even the directly impacted workers of these former state-owned enterprises. Even public housing was pawned of the tenants who lived in it.

However, in the ultimate analysis, this privatisation turned out to be more of a societal shock, rather than therapy for an ailing economy. It was a violent act of economic engineering enforced by resorting to the coercive powers of the state. Its social implications were colossal. Short sighted un-egalitarian, and antithetical to the notion of public investment, it did not lay the underpinnings for either sustainable or pervasive prosperity. It was a chimera.

In fact, a 2005 study by economists Blanden, Gregg and Machin found that: "The rapid increase in UK income inequality that began in 1979 is sometimes justified by the argument that society is now more meritocratic so that it is easier for the poor to become richer if they are willing and able to work hard. In fact, our research shows that the opposite has occurred — there has actually been a fall in the degree of social mobility over recent decades. Children born to poor families are now less likely to break free of their background and fulfil their

potential than they were in the past. Thus the only enduring legacy of the Thatcher years was that while the rich became richer the poor became poorer."

Post the collapse of the Soviet Union in the mid and late 1990s, Russian President Boris Yeltsin launched a ruthless privatisation programme of the Soviet created and commanded economic model incubated public sector. In what became the hugest disposal ever of state-owned property, history enterprises were sold at a rate of over eight hundred per month. By time the process ended 77 per cent of Russia's large and mid-size organizations and 82 per cent of the small ones were transferred to private owners. These 15,000 privatised assets accounted for two-thirds of industrial output and over 60 per cent of the industrial work force of Russia, the official successor state of the Soviet Union.

The auctions conducted to privatise these assets were completely rigged. The most lucrative enterprises did not even come up at these public sales. These were either simply farmed out to favoured businesspersons or were disposed of through opaque processes.

Productive establishments and other precious assets were simply pawned off at a fraction of their worth. A tiny clique of oligarchs and carpetbaggers simply took over much of Russia's economy and became filthy rich. They snapped up valuable state assets at rock bottom prices. More often than not oligarchs just stripped their acquisitions of all value simply leaving a shell of a company behind. They acquired natural resources and then re-sold them at hefty premiums and parked the money abroad. Another favoured modus operandi was the

**A country that lifted 271 million people out of poverty between 2004 and 2014 is today staring at the spectre of a growing income and wealth inequality**

acquisition of majority shareholding in valuable state properties. Having achieved that goal the minority shareholders that more often than not was the Russian State or provincial governments became putty in their hands. The bottomline was not wealth generation but wealth extraction.

As a consequence, billions of dollars of public money found its way into private hands as unearned income. The result was that there was hyper-inflation, the bottom dropped out of the Russian currency and ordinary people were forced into the most extreme form of destitution. It was a plight far worse than even the years of Communism.

Similarly in India today there are capitalists who are benefiting from a very similar modus operandi. They are "growing fatter" by the hour cornering public assets at basement prices aided and abetted actively by a collusive state. Airports, airlines, public sector units, power utilities are all being put on the chopping block under a fallacious construct that it is not the business of government to be in business. The consequences of such a ill-conceived strategy in the name of privatisation and disinvestment would haunt India for decades to come.

A country that lifted 271 million people out of poverty between 2004 and 2014 is today staring at the spectre of a growing income and wealth inequality. Even before the pandemic hit India in all its ferocity India's richest one per cent held more than four-times the wealth held by 953 million people who make up for the bottom 70 per cent of the country's population. If there is a time to revisit the fundamental construct it is now. It must be reemphasised with all the force at our command that it is indeed the business of government to be in business or there would be hell to pay in the years ahead.

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

## LETTERS

### ARMY MALE BIAS

The apex court directive to reconsider giving permanent commission to Short Service Commission women officers in the Army is highly admirable and underlines gender equality (*Army's male bias: Slap on the wrist for now from SC, DC, March 27*). By all means, the prejudice against women in forces must be stamped out. Women have proved they are second to none. It calls for a great deal of learning from the armies of Australia, Israel and the USA which have benefited from women's services. Further, it helps to remove the shortage of officers.

**Dr C. Ghanshyam**

*Visakhapatnam*

### AMARAVATI LAND

The ruling party is making allegations against TD leadership on the reported land scam in Amaravati. Two FIRs have so far been filed in this regard. Twenty months in power, the YSRC is still groping in the dark. If an outsider 'hears' about this hullabaloo, he or she might think that the ruling party has finally unearthed solid evidence. Yet, nothing seems to have convinced the courts so far. What is the use then of repeating all the allegations without being able to take action?

**Govardhana Myneedu**

*Vijayawada*

### PAKISTAN'S OFFER

India must react positively to Pakistan's olive branch to normalise our acrimony, irrespective of Pakistan's compulsions to make the move. If it's really a change of attitude, this should show on the ground by ushering in certain CBMs like demolishing terror launch pads and the like. Of course, there's lull at the LoC since Pakistan Army Chief's dovish offer to bury the past and make way forward. Our Army chief keeps his fingers crossed in anticipation of some more tangibles to come through.

**K. Nehru Patnaik**

*Visakhapatnam*

## 50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

### Navy joins Pak Army to quell disturbances

CALCUTTA, March. 28

Free Bangla Radio today announced a provisional Bangla Desh Government headed by Major Jia Khan and said its forces were on the march to Dacca from Chittagong.

The Government would be guided by "Banga Bandu" Mujibur Rehman, who is directing the liberation struggle from his revolutionary headquarters in Chittagong, the Radio said. It said the March to Dacca began at 0845 hours today.

Major Jia Khan, who was the liberation Army Chief since the start of the resistance movement on March 25, in a broadcast appeal sought recognition to his Government from peace-loving Governments.

He also sought material assistance for the freedom fighters.

Saeed Naqvi

Wide Angle



## Acknowledge potential of Pope-Sistani historic tryst

Pardon my Lucknow chauvinism, but the benighted city once had intimate links with the centre of Shia Islam, Najaf, in Iraq, which Pope Francis visited early March in what must be counted among the pontiff's most epoch making journeys. His 50 minutes conversation with Shia Islam's highest spiritual authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, in his modest, rented house in a Najaf alley, must have enriched both.

"A humble and wise man", the Pope said of Sistani. "It felt good, for my soul, this meeting." This was no hyperbole; this seemed to reflect the tenor of the conversation, where only interpreters were present.

Yes, that Lucknow link: in 1850, the Begums of Oudh (Awadh) established what came to be known as a bequest, a trust, of ₹6 million to be spent on the maintenance of the shrines at Najaf and Karbala. Stipends for Indian scholars were also established. After the first war of Independence in 1857, the British administered the bequest, which gave them leverage over the Shia clerical authority from Najaf to Tehran. By default or deliberation, the system continued until 1979 when Saddam Hussein consolidated power in Baghdad. Saddam's Ba'ath atheism would have been uncomfortable with

Indian indulgence of Shia sectarianism. What would Pope Francis have made of the fact that "Allah o Akbar" was inscribed on the Iraqi flag only after Operation Desert Storm in 1992?

Another Lucknow link would have come up tangentially: Awadh antecedents of Ayatollah Khomeini, leader of the Iranian revolution. Khomeini's ancestors migrated from Kuntur, a *qasbah* not far from Lucknow, known for a line of Shia theologians.

The Pope would have been briefed on the vast difference between Sistani and Ayatollah Khamenei (Khomeini before him) on the role of the clergy in the affairs of the state. The issue had divided the Shia clergy down the middle. How can the Iranian revolution of 1979 be deemed to be an "Islamic revolution" without the second coming of the messiah who, in Shia theology, happens to be the 12th Imam who had "disappeared" in Samarra, Iraq. He would appear only on the Day of Judgement.

The clergy in Qom were at sixes and sevens. I was in Qom to meet Ayatollah Montazeri when this was a common topic of discussion. A revolution had come their way, pending Roz e Mahshar, Judgement Day. What label was to be pasted on the great happening? That is when the theory of Vilayat

e Faqih or Vali Faqih, the Intermediate Imam, was enunciated. Pending the return of the Imam, an Intermediate system, under the Supreme leader, would govern, guided by the teachings of Islam.

Sistani and a section of the clergy even in Qom see their role differently — as spiritual guides only. Was Francis comfortable with Sistani on this score? The different circumstance of Tehran and Baghdad must have been part of the briefs prepared for Francis.

In 1979, the Shah was eased out and the Ayatollahs ushered into Tehran. Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been moved from Najaf to the suburb of Neauphle-le-Chateau on the outskirts of Paris, was that very year flown to Tehran. Why this complicated trapeze act?

In the mid-1970s, the US had Communist parties coming out of their ears in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, Chile, why, even in Afghanistan. Post Shah fervour in Iran would cause Persian Communist Parties, Tudeh and Mujahedin e Khaalq, to surface from the underground. The Ayatollahs, the mosques filled with their cadres, would pounce on the Communists. That the Ayatollahs became apparent only when the siege of

the US embassy in Tehran lasted 444 days, an embarrassment on a scale the Americans had never experienced.

1979 also happened to be the year in which Saddam Hussein consolidated himself in Baghdad. Neither the Ayatollahs nor Saddam were buddies of the US, but each could easily be tempted to seek US help against the other. This suited US officials like Martin Indyk, former Ambassador to Israel, who devised dual-containment — supply arms to both and make them fight. The monkey-between-two-cats policy lasted eight long years.

More to the point for the Pope would have been the after-effects of the post 9/11 wars thrust on Iraq, Syria, Libya, leading to the trek of millions looking for havens in Europe which, in this instance, was fighting xenophobia at home, a creeping aversion to the outsider, resulting in avowedly illiberal politics. True they are religious leaders whose mission was not to discuss politics, but rampaging identity politics are nothing but putrefied religious ideas.

Islamic terror, for instance, is cited as a cause for increasing Islamophobia by politicians like, say, Marine Le Pen in France. Such examples are strewn across Europe and other parts of the world. What was at fault was a one-sided media focus on Islamic terror,

fuelling a Muslim sense of helplessness and anger, there being no outlet for his point of view.

Some of this Sistani must have addressed during their conversation. I hope he reminded the Pope that the first act of occupying forces was to vandalise the National Museum, the great storehouse of artefacts, books, scrolls representing one of the world's great river civilisations.

It might be something of a hyperbole that his meeting with Sistani, laden with peaceful intent, reversed the Jihad or crusade launched in 1095 by one of his earlier predecessors Pope Urban II. The eleventh century Pope was rattled by the Muslim occupation of the holy lands. Also, within a hundred years of Prophet Muhammad's death, the Muslims had established their rule over Spain and beyond. The pace of Muslim spread was unnerving. Pope Francis' expedition, on the other hand, provides a soothing touch to a people battered and bruised, having been on the declining side of the civilisational giant wheel for too long, a far cry from the days of Pope Urban.

*The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi*



IN BRIEF

PATOLE: CONG WILL RECONSIDER SUPPORT TO MVA

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 27

The row over the Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut's statement that NCP chief Sharad Pawar should lead the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) has not died down as the Maharashtra Congress has once again issued a threat to Shiv Sena saying the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government in the state is in power because of its support.

State Congress chief Nana Patole said that if Raut does not stop criticising Congress leadership, they will have to think over their decision of supporting the government.

"The MVA government exists due to Congress' support. A time has come to make them understand that they (Sena and NCP) are not the government. If Sanjay Raut continues to speak against the Congress, we will have to take our own decision," said Mr Patole in Bhiwandi on Saturday. Mr Raut had said in New Delhi that the UPA is 'paralysed' now and hence a non-Congress leader like Mr Pawar should lead it at the national level. His statement has invoked an angry reaction from the Congress leaders, which asked whether the Sena leader was a spokesperson of Mr Pawar.

Reiterating his support the NCP chief, Mr Raut said that "some people in Delhi" are preparing to form UPA-II, which is why the existing UPA needs to be strengthened if the opposition is to fight the BJP.

The Congress leader also hit out at Mr Raut saying he should stop advocating Mr Pawar for the post of UPA head. Those who are not a part of the UPA should not talk about its leadership, he said.

KANHAIYA CALLS MODI 'BIGGEST LIAR'

**Morigaon (Assam), Mar 27:** CPI leader Kanhaiya Kumar hit out at BJP on Saturday calling Prime Minister Narendra Modi "the biggest liar" and comparing the saffron party's top Assam leader Himanta Biswa Sarma with King Kansa, the tyrant ruler of Mathura in the Mahabharata.

The former JNU students union president termed Modi's statement in Bangladesh, where he is on a visit, about going to jail for that country's freedom as a "big lie".

He urged the people of Assam, where the three-phase poll for the state assembly began on Saturday, not to support those who are selling the resources of the country in the name of nationalism.

Launching a scathing attack on Modi, the Left youth leader questioned whether annually two crore jobs have been created or black money has returned to the country as was promised by him in 2014.

"What has happened in five years? How are the same people seeking votes again? When I came here someone said that I can be a challenge to Modi. I said that to challenge Modi one has to be the biggest liar of the world".

Referring to Modi's comment in Dhaka, Kumar said, "Have you heard what has he (Modi) said in Bangladesh? He said he had also contributed in Bangladesh's freedom struggle, that he had participated in satyagraha and went to jail... Only BJP leaders can create such level of lies," Kumar said.

In the Bangladesh war, India supported the freedom movement in that country and Pakistan opposed it. "So a question arises that where was Modi on his satyagraha?"

"Was he put behind the bars by the Pakistan government or the Indian government? It is nothing but a big lie," Kumar said while campaigning for CPI candidate Munin Mahanta. Modi had said in Dhaka on Friday that he was part of a satyagraha held to back the liberation of Bangladesh. It had led to political slugfest back home.

He was speaking at the national parade square in the Bangladesh capital to mark the celebrations of the golden jubilee of its Independence and the birth centenary of the father of the nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Training his guns at Sarma, he said "There is one leader who calls himself Mama (maternal uncle). Kansa was also a mama (of Lord Krishna). You can see the political truth. I just want to know how many promises which were made five years ago have been fulfilled (in the state)". Sarma, who is also the Assam health minister, is fondly called 'Mama' by youths for his handling of the Covid situation.

SONOWAL CONFIDENT OF GETTING 100 SEATS

MANOJ ANAND | DC GUWAHATI, MARCH 27

Over 74 per cent voters exercised their franchise on Saturday in the first phase of the Assam Assembly polls which were held amid heavy security in 47 constituencies of the state.

Except some Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) glitches no major incidents reported so far from any of the poll bound Assembly segments.

After casting his vote at Sahitya Sabha Bhavan in Dibrugarh, Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal, who is contesting from Majuli, told reporters that that BJP would get over 100 seats.

Besides Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal, the first of three phases of the Assembly election has also decided the fate of other prominent faces in the fray like state Assembly speaker Hitendra Nath Goswami (Jorhat), state Congress chief Ripun Bora (Gohpur), Asom Gana Parishad chief Atul Bora (Bokakhat), Congress Legislature Party leader Debabrata Saikia (Nazira), jailed Rajiv Dal president Akhil Gogoi (Sivasagar) and Assam Jatiya Parishad president Lurinjyoti Gogoi (Duliajan).

This election has been pitched as a battle between the BJP's '10 promises' and the Congress' '5 guarantees'.

12 VULTURE CARCASSES FOUND

**Kolkata, Mar 27:** Twelve vulture carcasses were found at Mal in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district on Saturday, a top forest department official said.

The carcass of a stray cattle was also found at the spot, near Chel river, the official said.

Chief Wildlife Warden V K Yadav said preliminary findings indicate that the kidney of vultures got damaged due to high dose of diclofenac and similar drugs which is given to cattle.

"We are also looking into whether the carcass was poisoned. Samples have been collected and sent to the Vulture conservation and breeding centre at Rajabhatkhawa, Buxa Tiger Reserve," Yadav said.

The chief wildlife warden said the government has banned the use of diclofenac drug to cattle all over the country as well as in West Bengal.

"However, it's being used in villages by local quacks. We are doing a market survey and had discussed with the drug controller of West Bengal and written to Director, Animal Husbandry to stop the use of such drugs," he added.

TEJASHWI HITS OUT AT BJP

**Ratabari/Dholai (Assam), Mar 27:** Terming BJP as 'Badka Jhoota Party' (Biggest Lying Party), RJD leader Tejashwi Prasad Yadav on Saturday said the problem of unemployment will end once the betrayers will be dethroned.

Addressing two back-to-back rallies at Ratabari and Dholai in Barak valley of Assam, the Leader of Opposition in Bihar Assembly said the situation of inflation was not so severe during the tenure of the Congress. "BJP means Badka Jhoota Party. You need to be careful of them. The BJP does not talk about 'mudda' (issues) but talks about 'murda' (dead). And what are the main issues?... Our democracy and Constitution is at stake. We need to save that," he said.

- PTI

Sporadic violence marks first phase in West Bengal

Didi's purported audio clip seeking help from BJP leader to win surfaces

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 27

Intermittent violence marked the first of the eight-phase Assembly Elections in West Bengal on Saturday with the 30 constituencies spread across five key districts in the state's western belt, which went to the polls, witnessing a record number in the voters' turnout of almost 80 per cent.

Till the reports last came in the evening, the voters' turnout stood at 79.79 per cent out of over 73 lakh voters who got the option to decide the fate of 191 candidates.

Though the polling recorded a high figure, attacks and counter attacks between the ruling Trinamul Congress and BJP became evident throughout the day despite the presence of a massive central paramilitary forces' deployment.

At Kanthi South in East Midnapore, Soumendu Adhikari, who is the brother of Nandigram BJP candidate Shuvendu Adhikari, had a narrow escape when his car was vandalized by a group of armed TMC workers in the broad daylight near a polling booth at Sabajput.

His driver Ramgovind Singh, however, suffered injuries.

Soumendu, who recently joined the saffron party, claimed that he reached the booth after getting complaints of rigging by the TMC there. At Salboni in West Midnapore, Sangjukta Morcha candidate of the CPI(M) Sushanta Ghosh, who is also a former minister, was heckled by a group of angry TMC activists. He was rescued by the police from the spot. Four persons were held by the police later.

At Bhagabanpur seat in East Midnapore, officer-in-charge of Patashpur police station Deepak Kumar Chakraborty and a central force jawan were injured when they led the troops to stop a clash



Women show their identity cards as they wait to cast votes at a polling station, during the first phase of Assembly polls in Midnapore on Saturday.

- PTI

between the TMC and BJP cadres who hurled bombs on each other. The injured duo was admitted to hospital.

At Dantan in West Midnapore, the central paramilitary forces lathi charged after the TMC and BJP workers clashed with each other over tearing party flags and leaving four injured.

In another incident, the villagers of Dadra at Keshiary in the district blocked the road by putting wood logs. They accused the central forces of beating them after they protested against their alleged order to cast votes in favour of a political party.

Later, a TMC delegation led by MP Sudip Bandopadhyay lodged a complaint with Chief Electoral Officer, West Bengal Ariz Aftab claiming that the central forces jawans tried to influence the voters in 15 constituencies.

In Purulia, TMC candidate Sujoy Banerjee was seen allegedly threatening to "shoot" some BJP

workers in presence of the police near a polling booth during a heated altercation. The Election Commission has sought a report on the incident.

Meanwhile, two-time West Bengal chief minister and Trinamul Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee, who is contesting from Nandigram, landed in a tight spot on Saturday after an audio clip in which she is allegedly heard asking a local BJP leader, who was earlier in her party, to work for her victory in the hot seat against her nemesis Shuvendu Adhikari surfaced.

While Ms Banerjee remained silent, her party strongly supported her over the audio clip of two minutes and 52 seconds which appears to be a phone conversation she recently had with Proloy Pal, BJP district vice-president of East Midnapore.

In the evening, TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh, in a bid to counter the BJP's attack on the

CM over her plea, claimed having an audio tape which allegedly has the conversation of two saffron party leaders — Mukul Roy and Sisir Bajoria — about creating pressure on the Election Commission in tweaking the rules for fielding party agents at polling booths which require them to be voters in the particular constituencies first.

Mr Roy, however, called it "fake".

During her alleged talk with Mr Pal, Ms Banerjee said, "You are a very young chap. You also work very well. I know everything about you. Please help us this time. You will have no problem. Be assured about that."

Mr Pal, however, replied, "My family, inspired by you and your ideology, came into politics. The day you took oath as the CM, I performed a yagna inviting five Brahmins to it and took out rallies also. But I feel sad to see myself not getting the president's post (in the district) after doing so much for you,

Didi."

To placate him, the TMC chief allegedly argued, "I know everything. But do you know who did it? It was the handiwork of a local leader who once used to be in our party. He did not allow me to visit either Nandigram or Midnapore. They ran it like their zamindari. You know everything brother!"

Mr Pal, however, reasoned, "You may think of anything but I already left the party. I want to work for the present party with dedication. I cannot betray it..."

The CM still sounded keen and tried to convince him to work for her.

Refusing her politely this time, Mr Pal said, "I thank you a lot for calling up me despite you being such a big leader, Didi! But please forgive me (for not accepting your request)."

The BJP which tweeted the audio clip lodged a complaint against the CM with West Bengal's Chief Electoral Officer, Ariz Aftab, and demanded her

Biden invites Modi, world leaders

**Washington, Mar 27:** US President Joe Biden has invited 40 world leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to the Leaders' Summit on Climate to underscore the urgency and the economic benefits of stronger climate action, the White House said.

The two-day summit will be held virtually on April 22-23 and will be telecasted live for public viewing.

It will be a key milestone on the road to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) this November in Glasgow, the White House said on Friday.

Besides Modi, other leaders invited for the summit include Chinese President Xi Jinping, Russian President

Vladimir Putin, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Saudi Arabia King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Bhutanese Prime Minister Lotay Tshering are the other two leaders from South Asia to be invited for the meet.

The White House said a key objective of both the Leaders' Summit and the COP26 will be to catalyse efforts to keep limiting warming 1.5 degree Celsius' goal within reach.

— PTI

Modi: India, B'desh want stability, love and peace

**Dhaka, Mar 27:** India and Bangladesh want stability, love and peace instead of instability, terror and unrest in the world," Modi said.

Modi said he was waiting for this opportunity for many years and during his visit to Bangladesh in 2015, he had expressed desire to visit Orakandi, which has come true now.

"I am feeling the same emotions as felt by the Matua community members in India after coming to Orakandi," Modi said.

Analysts said Modi's planned temple visits carry a political significance at the time of the ongoing assembly elections in West Bengal.

Modi announced that

India will upgrade one girls' middle school and set up a primary school in Orakandi, from where Harichand Thakur disseminated his pious message. He said during the Covid-19 pandemic, India and Bangladesh proved their capabilities.

"Both nations are facing this pandemic strongly and fighting it together. India is working by considering that it its duty that the 'Made in India' vaccine reaches the citizens of Bangladesh," he added.

Analysts said Modi's planned temple visits carry a political significance at the time of the ongoing assembly elections in West Bengal.

— PTI

India records over 62,000 Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MARCH 27

Cricketer Sachin Tendulkar tested positive for Covid-19 as India recorded 62,258 fresh cases and 291 deaths in one day.

The latest figures are again the highest single day spike in the last five months.

While the Delhi government said lockdown was not the solution to contain the spread of virus, the Maharashtra government announced night curfew in the whole of state and banned all gatherings effective from Saturday.

The state has also closed malls, restaurants and gardens from 8 pm to 7 am though home delivery of food in the night has been exempted.

With several festivals lined up in the coming days, the government is keeping fingers crossed.

Union Health Secretary Mr Rajesh Bhushan on Saturday chaired a high level meet with 12 States and UTs reporting a surge in cases during which they were advised to focus on stringent containment and public health measures in 46 high burden districts.

These states are Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Punjab and Bihar. They were told that increased testing and vaccination, effective tracing, prompt isolation, efficient clinical treatment, and adherence to Covid appropriate behaviour pivot of five-fold containment strategy.

The states were informed that the country has seen the sharpest rise in weekly Covid-19 cases and fatalities since May

● **ALMOST 90%** of the Covid-19 deaths continue to be in the category of those aged above 45 years. Findings of studies also depicted that while 90 per cent people are aware, only 44 per cent actually wear face masks.

● **ONE INFECTED** person could spread Covid-19 to an average of 406 other individuals in a 30 day window without restrictions which could be reduced to just 15 by decreasing physical exposure to 50 per cent and to a further 2.5 (average) by decreasing physical exposure to 75 per cent.

2020 (7.7 per cent and 5.1 per cent, respectively). The focus was on 46 districts that have contributed 71 per cent of the cases and 69 per cent of

the deaths this month.

Of total 36 districts in Maharashtra, 25 are most affected that account for 59.8 per cent of the cases reported in the country during the past one week.

During the meeting, a granular analysis of affected districts in these States and UTs along with some key statistics was presented.

Almost 90 per cent of the Covid-19 deaths continue to be in the category of those aged above 45 years. Findings of studies also depicted that while 90 per cent people are aware, only 44 per cent actually wear face masks.

One infected person could spread Covid-19 to an average of 406 other individuals in a 30 day window without restrictions which could be reduced to just 15 by decreasing physical exposure to 50 per cent and to a further 2.5 (average) by

decreasing physical exposure to 75 per cent.

It was also highlighted that the concept of 'second wave' reflected more the laxity among everyone regarding Covid appropriate behaviour and Covid containment and management strategy at the ground level. Hence, stringent action including effective containment and contact tracing for at least 14 successive days in the 46 districts was strongly recommended for breaking the chain of transmission and not frittering away the gains of collaborative efforts of last year.

Meanwhile, Adar Poonawalla, CEO of the Serum Institute of India, on Saturday tweeted saying trials have begun in India for Covovax - the Covid-19 vaccine being developed in partnership with American vaccine developer Novavax.

A DAY AFTER MUMBAI FIRE, POLICE REGISTER FIR

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, MARCH 27

A day after 11 people killed in fire at a Covid hospital, the Mumbai police has registered an FIR against the director of the mall where the hospital was situated and director of Sunrise Hospital among others.

The Police has booked Rakesh Kumar Wadhawan, executive chairman of HDIL (owners of the mall) for culpable homicide not amounting to murder under the section 304 of Indian Penal Code.

The Bhandup police registered the FIR on Friday late night. Meanwhile, the hospital has written a letter to Mumbai police asking to register an FIR against the administrator, who has been appointed by the NCLT, to look after the operations.

The Bhandup police booked directors of the HDIL Dreams Mall — Rakesh Jumar Wadhwan, Nikita Amitsingh Trehan, Sarang Wadhwan, Deepak Shirke and others — and directors of Privilege Healthcare Services Private Limited (which owns Sunrise Hospital) — Amitsingh Trehan, Nikita Amitsingh Trehan and Sweetie Jain and other responsible persons of management. So far nobody has been arrested.

Speaking on the development, senior inspector of Bhandup police station Sham Shinde said, "We have booked them under the Indian Penal Code section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and 34 (common intention)."

RGI TURNS DOWN ASSAM GOVT'S REQUEST

**Guwahati, Mar 27:** The Registrar General of India (RGI) has turned down a request of the Assam government to continue financial support for completing pending work of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) beyond March 31 this year.

Taking strong exception to the "inordinate delay" in completion of the entire exercise, the office of the RGI in a letter suggested to the state government to terminate the services of "surplus staff" and hand over the workload to government staff, besides shift the NRC office to a government building.

In a letter on March 4, the Assam government had sought an additional Rs 3.22 crore per month beyond March 31 for completion of the pending NRC activities in addition to the allocated Rs 1,602.66 crore for the entire project.

RGI Joint Director Jaspal Singh said in a letter dated March 23 to the Assam government secretary (Home and Political) S R Bhuyan, "All the activities of NRC updation were to be completed within the approved cost of the scheme by 31.03.2021 and there is no further provision of funds for the expenditure made under the scheme beyond 31.03.2021.

"The time and cost for completing the pending work and winding up the project has also not been explained in the proposal. The requirement of software developed for various NRC activities may be assessed and the renewal of software which are not required may be discontinued immediately."

The letter also said that the requirement of Rs 3.22 crore per month beyond March 31, 2021 "appears to be too high".

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs had approved the revised estimates of ₹1,602.66 crore up to December 31, 2019 with a condition that the amount would not be revised further before winding up the entire process by March 31.



## SHORT TAKES

LANKA RELEASES  
ALL 54 INDIAN  
FISHERMEN HELD

Colombo: Sri Lanka has released all 54 Indian fishermen arrested this week for allegedly poaching in the country's territorial waters, Indian officials confirmed on Saturday.

The Indian official sources here said that 40 of them were released on Friday and the remaining 14 have been released this morning.

The 54 Indian fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy on March 24 at two different locations in the north and northeastern seas. The Navy also seized their five trawlers. Upon their arrest, the Indian High Commission here said that they were providing consular assistance to the arrested fishermen. It said the fishermen's issue needed to be treated in a humanitarian manner.

The Indian High Commission in a statement said the bilateral mechanisms were being utilised to see an expeditious settlement of the issue.

FOX NEWS SUED  
OVER FALSE POLL  
CLAIMS AGAIN

New York: Vote machine maker Dominion is seeking over \$1 billion in a lawsuit lodged on Friday against Fox News, alleging the network broadcast false claims that its machines were used to rig the 2020 election that Donald Trump lost.

This is the second defamation complaint against the conservative news channel, which was already sued in February for similar reasons by another voting machine company, Smartmatic.

Dominion alleges that Fox began endorsing Trump's false claims the election was rigged in favor of Joe Biden because the channel was losing its audience, which includes many of the ex-president's supporters.

"So Fox set out to lure viewers back — including president Trump himself — by intentionally and falsely blaming Dominion for president Trump's loss by rigging the election," the suit argues.

IRAN, CHINA  
INK 25-YEAR  
ALLIANCE

Tehran: Iran and China signed a 25-year "strategic cooperation pact" on Saturday in the latest expansion of Beijing's flagship trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative as the US rivals build closer ties.

Negotiations for the deal, launched five years ago, sparked controversy in Iran last year and virtually no details of its contents have been released.

China is Iran's leading trade partner and was one of the biggest buyers of Iranian oil before then US president Donald Trump reimposed sweeping unilateral sanctions in 2018 after abandoning a multilateral nuclear agreement with Tehran.

The China-Iran pact, which Tehran said included "political, strategic and economic" components, was signed by the two countries' foreign ministers, Wang Yi and Mohammad Javad Zarif, reported.

"We believe this document can be very effective in deepening" Iran-China relations, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said.

Myanmar junta kills over 90  
protesters on 'day of shame'

## Lethal crackdown across country on Armed Forces Day

Yangon, March 27: Security forces killed more than 90 people, including some children, across Myanmar on Saturday in one of the bloodiest days of protests since a military coup last month, news reports and witnesses said.

The lethal crackdown, which took place on Armed Forces Day, drew strong renewed criticism from Western countries. British Ambassador Dan Chugg said the security forces had "disgraced themselves" and the U.S. envoy called the violence horrifying.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the junta leader, said during a parade to mark Armed Forces Day that the military would protect the people and strive for democracy.

State television had said on Friday that protesters risked being shot "in the head and back". Despite this, demonstrators came out on the streets of Yangon, Mandalay and other towns, as they have done almost daily since the Feb. 1 coup that ousted elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Myanmar Now news portal said 91 people were killed across the country by security forces.

At least 29 people, including a 13-year-old girl, were killed in Mandalay, and at least 24 people were killed in Yangon, Myanmar Now said. A boy as young as five was earlier reported among the dead in Mandalay but there were conflicting reports later that he may have survived. Another 13-year-old was among the dead in the central Sagaing region.

"Today is a day of shame for the armed forces," Dr. Sasa, a spokesman for CRPH, an anti-junta group set up by deposed lawmakers, told an online forum.

— Reuters



Protesters taking part in a demonstration against the military coup in Yangon's Hlaing township on Saturday. — AFP

## US, UK embassies blast junta

Yangon March 27: The US embassy in Myanmar condemned the junta for "murdering" civilians on Saturday as the military celebrates its Armed Forces Day.

"Security forces are murdering unarmed civilians, including children, the very people they swore to protect," said a statement released on the embassy's Facebook page. "These are not the actions of a professional military or police force."

● THE EUROPEAN Union and the United Kingdom said on Saturday that actions by Myanmar's junta are "indefensible" after scores of anti-coup protesters were reportedly killed as the country marked Armed Forces Day.

The European Union and the United Kingdom said on Saturday that actions by Myanmar's junta are "indefensible" after scores of anti-coup protesters

were reportedly killed as the country marked Armed Forces Day.

In a statement released on Facebook, the EU embassy in Myanmar said, "This 76th Myanmar Armed Forces Day will forever stay engraved as a day of terror and dishonor. The killing of unarmed civilians, including children, are indefensible acts."

"The European Union stands more than ever by the courageous people of

Myanmar and calls for an immediate and unconditional end of all forms of violence and the restoration of democracy," the statement also read.

The British ambassador wrote in a statement released on Twitter that "the security forces have disgraced themselves by shooting unarmed civilians." "Dozens of innocent people have reportedly been killed, including children," he added.

— AFP/Agencies

Biden offers help to  
reopen Suez Canal

Cairo, March 27: Dredging and tugging aimed at freeing a mega vessel stuck in the Suez Canal failed on Friday to end a blockage that has lifted shipping rates for fuel tankers and scrambled global supply chains for everything from grains to baby clothes.

U.S. President Joe Biden said his administration was looking at what it could do to help, after the 400-metre (430-yard) long Ever Given ran aground in the vital trade waterway on Tuesday due to strong wind. "We have equipment and capacity that most countries don't have. And we are seeing what help we can be," Biden told reporters in Delaware.

A U.S. official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the Navy was prepared to send a team of dredging experts to the canal, but was awaiting approval from local authorities.

The latest effort to dis-

lodge the ship with tug boats was suspended late on Friday, and attempts resumed on Saturday, three sources at the canal said. The Suez Canal Authority (SCA) could not immediately be reached for comment.

Shipping rates for oil product tankers nearly doubled after the ship became stranded, and efforts to free the giant vessel may take weeks and be complicated by unstable weather, threatening costly delays for companies already dealing with Covid-19 restrictions.

All its 25 crew members, who have remained on board, were safe, in good health and spirits, Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement (BSM), the Ever Given's technical manager said.

A Dutch rescue team had confirmed two additional tugs would arrive on March 28 to help dislodge the ship, BSM said.

— Reuters

China wine duty:  
Aus to tap WTO

Sydney, March 27: Australia's trade minister threatened to take China to the World Trade Organisation on Saturday over its "unjustifiable" decision to hike duties on Australian wine imports for up to five years.

In the latest salvo between Beijing and Canberra, China's commerce ministry announced levies ranging from 116.2 percent to 218.4 percent would be slapped on Australian wine imports from Sunday.

Trade Minister Dan Tehan said the tariffs meant it was "basically impossible" for Australian wine to be competitive in the Chinese market.

"This decision which has been taken by the

Chinese government is extremely disappointing and completely unjustifiable," Tehan told reporters in Melbourne.

"We will be looking at next steps, and those next steps will include looking at taking this matter to the World Trade Organisation." On Friday, the Chinese commerce ministry said it was imposing the duties after an investigation found "dumping and subsidies on imported wines" from Australia impacted the Chinese market.

Wine exports to China hit a record A\$1.3 billion (\$900 million) in 2019, according to Australian government data, making it the biggest market by value for the product.

— AFP

Biden attacks new  
Georgia's vote law

Washington, March 27: Georgia's sweeping new voting restrictions came under attack on Friday, with civil rights groups challenging them in court and President Joe Biden saying the U.S. Justice Department was examining what he called an "atrocious" of a law.

Among other limits, the Republican-backed law enacted on Thursday imposes stricter identification requirements, limits drop boxes, gives lawmakers the power to take over local elections and shortens the early voting period for all runoff elections. It also makes it a misdemeanor for people to offer food and water to voters here in line, in a state where people sometimes wait for hours in the heat to vote.

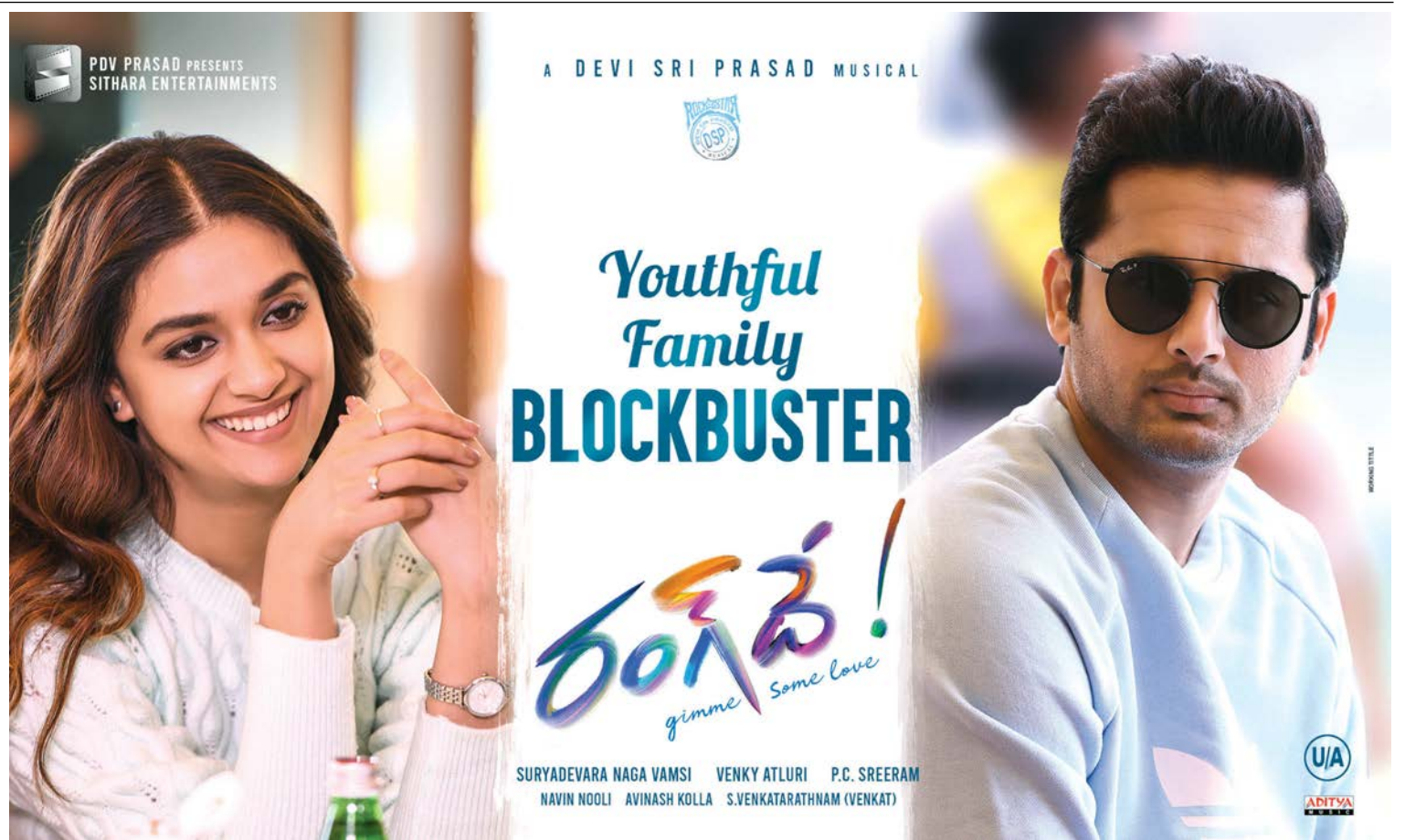
The legislation has alarmed Democrats, who just months ago celebrated historic wins in the presidential election and

two Senate campaigns in Georgia that helped deliver the White House and U.S. Senate control to their party in Washington.

Biden, the first Democratic presidential candidate in three decades to win Georgia, on Friday accused Republicans there and in other states of mounting a broad assault on voting rights.

It's an atrocity," Biden told reporters, shortly after comparing the restrictions for a second straight day to racist "Jim Crow" laws, which were put in place in Southern states in the decades after the 1861-65 U.S. Civil War to legalise racial segregation and disenfranchise person of colour citizens. Biden said it was unclear what, if anything, the White House could do to address the law but added that the Justice Department was "taking a look."

— Reuters

Apophis to not pose  
threat to earth: Nasa

Washington, March 27: Nasa has given Earth the all clear on the chances of an asteroid called Apophis hitting our planet any time in the next century, having worried space scientists for over 15 years.

The 340-metre (1,100ft) chunk of space rock hit the headlines in 2004 after its discovery led to some worrying forecasts about its orbit. It became a "poster child for hazardous asteroids", according to one Nasa expert.

It was supposed to come frighteningly close in 2029 and again in 2036. Nasa ruled out any chance of a strike during those two close approaches a while ago, but a potential 2068 collision still loomed.

But new telescope observations mean that collision has



This animation depicts the orbital trajectory of asteroid 99942 Apophis as it zooms safely past Earth. — NASA

been ruled out and Apophis has been officially taken off the US space agency's asteroid "risk list".

Davide Farnocchia of Nasa's center for near-Earth object studies, said in a statement: "A 2068 impact is not in the realm of possibility any more, and our calculations

don't show any impact risk for at least the next 100 years."

Scientists were able to refine Apophis' orbit around the sun thanks to radar observations earlier this month, when the asteroid passed within 17m km (10.6m miles).

— AP/ Agencies



INDIAN TOP 10  
BESTSELLERS

## NON-FICTION

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

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

3 **THE CODE BREAKER**  
Walter Isaacson  
Simon & Schuster, ₹899

4 **ALL ROADS LEAD NORTH — NEPAL'S TURN TO CHINA**  
Amish Raj Mulmi  
Context Westland, ₹799

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

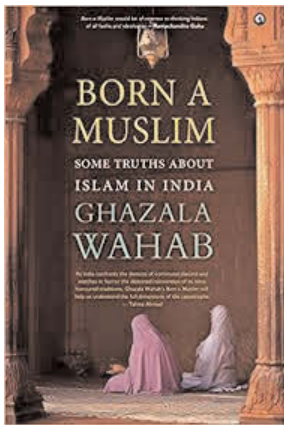
6 **INDUS BASIN UNINTERRUPTED**  
Uttam Kumar Sinha  
Penguin Vintage, ₹799

7 **ROYAL AND REBELS: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SIKH EMPIRE**  
Priya Atwal  
HarperCollins, ₹799

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

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

10 **THE MYSTERY OF THE PARSEE LAWYER**  
Shrabani Basu  
Bloomsbury, ₹699



## FICTION

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

2 **MURDER AT THE MUSHAIRA**  
Raza Mir  
Aleph, ₹799

3 **THE BEGUM AND THE DASTAN**  
Tarana Husain Khan  
Tranquebar, ₹499

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

5 **TAKEDOWN**  
Brad Thor  
Emily Bestler Books—  
Atria, ₹599

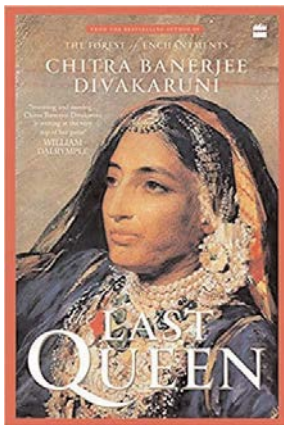
6 **SHUGGIE BAIN**  
Douglas Stuart  
Picador, ₹499

7 **JUNGENAMA: A STORY OF THE SUNDARBAN**  
Amitav Ghosh  
HarperCollins, ₹699

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

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

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



Bahrison, New Delhi

# A well-researched but uncritical portrait of Bollywood's 'first lady'



Partha Chatterjee

review

Kishwar Desai's biography of Devika Rani, often called the First Lady of Indian cinema, is interestingly titled, *The Longest Kiss*. The reimagined illustration on the cover replicating a publicity still from her first film, *Karma* (1933), directed by J.L. Freer Hunt, with Himanshu Rai, her husband, and of her kissing him most freely sets the tone for the book. It is a thoroughly researched, conscientiously written biography. It is clear from the start that Desai is battling most vigorously for Devika Rani. Himanshu Rai in Hindi films, like the prince from Gouripore, Assam, P.C. Barua did in Bengali productions, attempted to wed social issues with his own understanding of film craft that could sometime lead to art. Both were from the Indian elite and got interested in cinema when abroad. It was in England that he met Devika. She was educated there because her father Manmathanath Chaudhuri, a Bengali aristocrat by birth and a doctor by profession, had the vision to have his three children Nikhil, Devika and Mahim educated abroad, meaning England. Devika's mother came from the Tagore clan, highly educated Bengali landowners

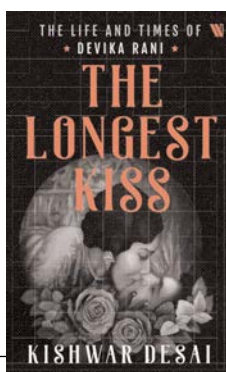
who reached their zenith through Rabindranath, great litterateur, artist and social thinker and founder of Santiniketan, a seemingly Utopian rural university. Desai's meticulous research into Devika Rani's life from her birth to death is commendable. Her reading of DR's personality on the whole is accurate despite the scarcely concealed admiration of a gushing fan but the uncritical appreciation of the films made at Bombay Talkies owned by Himanshu Rai, produced by him and starring his wife in the lead until 1943, today seems lazy, though in their time almost every film produced by Bombay Talkies was critically hailed and financially successful. The greatest box-office success attained by a Bombay Talkie film was *Kismet* directed by Gyan Mukherjee which held the record for being the biggest hit in the annals of Hindi cinema until Ramesh Sippy's *Sholay* came along in the mid-1970s.

The book deals quite openly with her fraught relationship with her husband, Himanshu Rai in the eyes of the world was Svengali to her Trilby, albeit a spoilt and beautiful one. It was believed, that like in the legend, Trilby loses her soul - stirring singing voice when Svengali goes away, Devika too would lose

all her creative talent following Himanshu's untimely death.

Devika, however, proved her critics wrong. She took over Bombay Talkies as owner-producer and made a grand success of it. The company did a number of films that were financially sound and critically appreciated. Among them were productions like *Kangan*, *Jhoola* (dir: Gyan Mukherjee), her protégé, Amiya Chakravarty's *Basant*, featuring a winning performance from Baby Mumtaz who would grow into Hindi cinema's most sought-after star-actress, the beautiful Madhubala.

She, a western educated liberal woman, was often forced for reasons of prevailing sense of propriety and business constraints as well her stake in Bombay Talkies which was as great as that of



THE LONGEST KISS: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF DEVIKA RANI

By KISHWAR DESAI  
Westland, ₹599



Devika Rani smoking off camera

her husband, to behave disingenuously. But her ingrained honesty invariably made her respond to the call of her own morality and the longings of her heart eventually. Himanshu Rai, it appears to the lay reader, was terrified of his much younger wife's beauty, sophisticated sexual allure and innate talent. Despite making her work relentlessly in running Bombay Talkies, act in its major productions and take an active interest in almost all aspects of production, he became deeply distressed at all the public attention his wife was getting. He would often beat and berate her. The net result was his constant need for what passed for psychiatric care in those days. Devika Rani, made of sterner stuff, not only survived his sudden death, but came out a much stronger person.

Devika found emotional, and dare one suggest, sexual, satisfaction when she met Svetoslav Roerich, the very talented painter son of the Russian master Nicholas Roerich, who painted the

Himalayas with sublime grace. Devika was threatened with dire consequences by the hypocritical male population, presumably mainly from Bombay. Somebody went to the extent of calling Svetoslav, the great love of her life and her soon-to-be husband a 'Russian Roast'!

She survived all the calamity to find happiness for a long time with Svetoslav; for a while in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, and then for a long time, perhaps much too long a time, in Bangalore. She received the Padma Shri and the Dada Saheb Phalke Award for her contribution to Indian cinema and Svetoslav the Padma Bhushan. In old age, having lost the strength in their legs and become immobile, they were held to ransom by the very people who were supposedly taking care of them. It was a sad, futile ending to a rich, eventful life.

Partha Chatterjee writes on cinema, music, literature and related cultural matters. He is also a filmmaker.

## CHRONICLED, THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY OF INDIA'S SHY, WRY JAZZ KING



Shailaja Khanna

review

Louiz Banks occupies a unique place as an Indian musician — equally celebrated as an innovative jazz artiste, playback musician for Hindi movies and composer. His journey, beginning in Calcutta, is a fascinating one. Ashis Ghatak's book is a labour of love, tracing his life meticulously, with reverence and thoroughness; his ability to accurately portray the unique musical ambience of Darjeeling, Calcutta and Bombay during the periods he covers is delightful.

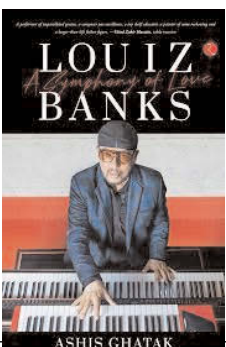
Born in 1941 in war-torn Calcutta, Dambur Bahadur Budaprithi was re-named "Louiz" to fit into the anglicised world of nightclubs for which his father trained him. His early years in Darjeeling where he was trained in Western classical music appear to have left a strong impression on the

shy introverted boy Louiz was; the book traces his journey from Darjeeling to Kathmandu until the greener pastures of Calcutta beckoned. Playing at the Golden Peacock, in the newly opened Hotel Hindustan International, Louiz came to be an integral part of the cosmopolitan nightlife of Calcutta. The uncertainty of the profession resulted in Louiz moving to Bombay to try his hand in the thriving world of film music.

Holding his own musically amongst Indian classical musicians too, Louiz Banks was an integral part of the world of playback film music. He worked mainly for R.D. Burman (Banks terms him the "Mozart of India"), Laxmikant Pyarelal, then Bappi Lahiri, till around the early 1990s. He also composed music for films, and later for theatre produc-

tions. In the same period, his love for jazz remained; he formed a jazz fusion band entitled Jazz Yatra Sestet. Quoting Louiz, "the new band gave me international exposure". This group was later renamed Sangam.

Though the band only lasted a few years, they toured Europe with about 60 concerts; a later, 1990s avatar was the band Silk (named after Shankar, Sivamani, Sridhar, India, Louiz and Karl Peters). In the 2000s,



A SYMPHONY OF LOVE — LOUIZ BANKS

By ASHIS GHATAK  
Rupa, ₹350

Banks joined the band Cross Currents; his has an admirable ability to remain relevant musically amongst a younger generation.

But perhaps the biggest success financially for Louiz Banks was in the world of advertisements, including the immortal "*Mile sur mera tumhara*". Banks' unique ability in this arena is verbalised thus: "Unlike many Indian classical maestros Louiz could project his music... he could mould his music into a variety of forms. He understood where the music was coming from, what he needed to change and what after effects it was going to have in terms of musical communication." He was also prolific; sometimes making five jingles a day, yet never being repetitive. On this, Louiz says "I learnt the ability to erase everything that I did and get on to the next project."

The book is written in an anecdotal breezy style; music aficionados will enjoy the trivia on RD Burman's love for chillies and chess, and Banks jamming with the great Dizzy Gillespie in Washington. Banks is portrayed as a simple, self-effac-

ing man with a wry sense of humour, with his feet firmly on the ground. His struggle is awe inspiring "I had to carry the piano and climb up and down three storeys in the morning and evening." Acclaimed by such diverse musicians as Ustad Zakir Hussain (incidentally, he has written a heartfelt foreword to the book) Shankar Mahadevan, and Braz Gonsalves, Louiz Banks straddled and ruled several different worlds with ease.

The book's ponderous attention to detail, and unusual use of words detract from the overall pleasure one derives from it. Referring to Zakir Hussain as Pandit not Ustad; mistakenly calling the band Shakti's violinist L. Srinivas instead of L. Shankar should have been avoided. But overall; these are tiny irritants; the book is a must read for anyone interested in India's non classical musical history from about the 1960s to date; the book is not confined to Louiz Banks' journey.

Shailaja Khanna writes on music, musicians and matters of music

## The beauty of the ampersand & other keyboard symbols



Tom Hodgkinson

review

This is such a great idea: a book with one short essay per punctuation mark or typographical symbol. Of course, our commas, ampersands and exclamation marks all come from somewhere; all were invented at some point or another and their stories are ever-changing. Computer coders, for example, have recently moved previously unsung but elegant marks such as the hashtag and the 'at' sign back to centre stage. Claire Cock-Starkey is a confident and likeable host and makes a witty crack about her own surname in her essay on the hyphen. She somehow elevates what could have been a nerdy primer into something grander; and at various moments the book becomes meditative, poetic, philosophical and funny, as well as scholarly.

There is much to enjoy: The strangely named and beautifully shaped ampersand, we're told, evolved from the Latin 'et'. It is strictly called a 'glyph', and Cock-Starkey reveals that in the 18th century it was honoured with the 27th place in the alphabet. As for its weird name, it derives from the phrase 'and per se and', used by poor 18th-century children when reciting the alphabet, *per se* meaning 'standing on its own'. It became an official word in 1837.

Many punctuation marks were invented by the ancient Greeks, evolved by the medievals and fixed by the early printers. The colon, for example, which means 'limb', was invented by Aristophanes of Byzantium — not the playwright, but a librarian. It originally looked like a full stop and was intended to mark a breathing space between sections of text for the purposes of reading out loud. The great seventh-century linguist Isidore of Seville then decided on a three dot system for different lengths of pause: low dot for short pause, middle dot for medium pause, high dot for long pause. A variety of competing ideas were used by different orders of monks in the Middle Ages and Cock-Starkey says it was Caxton who ended the chaos by coming up with the slash, colon and full stop.

The semi-colon is a funny fellow. It was invented by a Venetian printer called Aldus Manutius in 1494 for editions of Dante and Erasmus. He adapted it from a bit of musical notation called the *punctus versus*, and it was Ben Jonson who really made sure it stuck by including it in his 1640 style guide, *The English Grammar*. In the 18th and 19th centuries writers went mad for it and in 1837 two rival French legal experts fought a duel over its use: one favoured the semicolon to end a certain passage, the other a colon. The semicolon supporter was wounded in the arm by the apologist for the colon. Today I still find it an impressive piece of punctuation and young people would be well advised to use it in emails in order to impress their bosses.

The author has made great efforts to bring things up to date and has unearthed fascinating stories about the guy at Twitter who brought back the hashtag, and the inner workings of the committees which set emojis. However, she occasionally falls into the trap of writing about contemporary fads in order to appear with-it, and thus dignifies a mere craze. For example, the use of multiple brackets as hugs or the triple bracket as a sign of anti-anti-Semitism are surely already dead.

Some sections are sad. Take, for example, the sorry tale of the interrobang. This mark is actually quite a good idea. It's a cross between an exclamation mark and a question mark and was invented in 1962 by an ad man called Martin K. Speckter. It was doing well and in 1968 even made it on to some Remington typewriters, a true sign of success. But in the 1970s it faded away, and though we're told it's still used in computer programming, it looks likely that the 'plethora of emojis at our fingertips', as the author puts it, will consign this potentially useful glyph to obscurity.

For a book about keyboard symbols, it's a real shame that the marks themselves are horribly reproduced in a washed-out grey colour. But it's a lovely read, full of fun and fascinating facts; a book to be kept by the bedside and consulted on a regular basis.

By arrangement with the Spectator

## Cleverly imagined and deftly told, Sylvia wears pain lightly



Aditi Sriram

review

Maithreyi Karnoor is unafraid of tragedy. From the opening pages of her debut novel *Sylvia: Distant Avuncular Ends*, the reader is confronted with accidents, deaths, estrangement and amputations. Yet, Karnoor's style is light. Life is tough, she seems to be saying underneath a parade of plotlines, but don't try to make sense of it all; that would only produce a fantastical, cyclical, run-on story.

*Sylvia* is Karnoor's illus-

tration of this philosophy. Divided into two parts, the novel introduces several characters, all uniquely damaged, trying to make their way through the world. Together, they take on the shape of a strange, multi-headed beast.

Part I is a novella about a man who moves to Goa after having grown up in Tanzania and the UK. Ethnically Goan, he has returned to his ancestral soil as a foreigner. It is only when he finds a baobab tree in a village in south Goa

does he feel comfortable enough to buy a house nearby. Incidentally, he becomes known in the village as "Bhaubaab," a fellow Goan brother "bhau" and an elder, "baab". (Baobab and bhaubaab; this is just one example of Karnoor's experiments with wordplay throughout the book.)

Bhaubaab and his neighbour Lakshmi become friends. Bhaubaab also ends up hosting his niece, Sylvia, in his new home. She is the daughter of his long-estranged brother, and a total stranger to him. Karnoor's narration shifts easily between Bhaubaab, Lakshmi and Sylvia, and each one is honest about their troubles. The resulting novella is equal parts haunting and hopeful, funny and fatal, nostalgic and forward-looking. The final scene is wrenching,

but sweet, too. In this way, the sixty-odd pages fly by.

Part II is double the length of Part I, but sliced into shorter chapters. Tragedy persists like a sun-

rise: routine, but vivid enough to make you stop and stare. A mother commits suicide after having her baby; a hapless girl is possessed by a mutton-devouring spirit; another is assaulted by a truck driver; another writes apologetic poetry about her abusive husband. One of these is Sylvia, but Karnoor does not make it obvious. Unlike Part I, Sylvia's life advances haphazardly in this section, always amidst a crowd of characters who are tangentially connected to her. In fact, readers meet Bhaubaab only fleetingly in Part II, and Lakshmi never again.

The result is a mosaic, colourful but cluttered. While the shorter chapters delve into a range of character psyches, it's not clear why Part II has been arranged this way. Reading

these stories feels like viewing a series of unrelated Polaroid photos: just as one visual starts to come into focus, the next photograph is presented, still not fully developed. The brief references to Sylvia make the reader feel like we should be keeping track of all the connections that Karnoor is setting up, which becomes distracting. Will they help us understand the novel better? Is there a twist lying in wait, like the snake in Bhaubaab's shed? Karnoor doesn't provide any answers directly, but all of her characters allude to a life that is unfortunate and unknown. In the words of one character, trying to describe his wife's state of mind "is just a way of putting labels on things that cannot be known — as paying obeisance to the end of human knowledge: defining from the outside

the dark, mysterious spaces of human minds that cannot be breached" (161).

But *Sylvia* is entrenched in a physical world, and not just a psychic one. The Goan settler subculture she describes is real and authentic; her WhatsApp group scenes are witty; and her urban-turned-farmer characters are appropriately fly-and-sweat-riddled. These vignettes *almost* compensate for Sylvia lurking in the shadows of the second half of the book. Almost, because Karnoor has the talent to have retained her onstage to narrate this fantastical, cyclical, run-on story.

Aditi Sriram teaches writing at Ashoka University and has authored *Beyond the Boulevards: A Short Biography of Pondicherry*



SYLVIA: DISTANT AVUNCULAR ENDS

By MAITHREYI KARNOOR  
Westland, ₹499



## SHORT TAKES

## Maiden I-League title for Kerala

**Kolkata:** Gokulam Kerala FC on Saturday clinched their maiden I-League title in spectacular fashion as they came back from a goal down to beat TRAU 4-1 in the final match of the season here.

Bidyashagar Singh's 23rd minute strike did little to stop the Gokulam juggernaut as goals by Sharif Mohamed (69th), Emil Benny (74th), Dennis Antwi (77th) and Mohammad Rashid (90+6) handed them the trophy.

With Churchill Brothers winning 3-2 against Punjab FC in the day's other match held simultaneously at another venue here, Gokulam shared points (29) with the Goan side but were crowned champions on head-to-head record.

In the two matches the two sides had played in the season, Churchill had won 3-2 once while Gokulam had emerged 3-0 victorious in the other.

— PTI

## Verstappen takes Bahrain GP pole

**Sakhir:** Red Bull's Max Verstappen took a superb pole position for the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix on Saturday and will start the race immediately ahead of Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton.

Verstappen earned his fourth career pole to deny Hamilton his 99th, edging out the world champion by .39 seconds on his final attempt.

Hamilton's teammate Valtteri Bottas was .59 behind Verstappen in third, while Charles Leclerc qualified in an encouraging fourth for Ferrari. Verstappen clinched the season-ending Abu Dhabi last December from pole and now goes for the 11th win of his career. Hamilton seeks a record-extending 96th win. Verstappen led the first part of qualifying, known as Q1, ahead of AlphaTauri's 20-year-old Japanese driver Yuki Tsunoda. Both cars use Honda engines and the Japanese manufacturer is in its final season. — AP

## Medvedev, Osaka through in Miami

**Miami:** Daniil Medvedev celebrated his rise to second in the world with a seamless entry into the Miami Open on Friday, trouncing Taiwan's Lu Yen-Hsun in less than an hour.

Russia's Medvedev needed just 56 minutes to subdue Lu 6-2, 6-2, firing nine aces with just one double fault as he advanced to a third-round meeting with Australian Alexei Popyrin, a 6-4, 6-2, winner over 30th-seeded American Reilly Opelka.

Women's world No. 2 Naomi Osaka, seeded second behind top-ranked Australian Ashleigh Barty, had a tougher time, but conquered her nerves in her first match since winning the Australian Open to beat Aussie Ajla Tomljanovic 7-6 (7/3), 6-4.

Men's third seed Alexander Zverev, ranked seventh in the world, became the biggest upset victim so far in the prestigious ATP Masters and WTA hardcourt tournament, falling 1-6, 6-3, 6-1 to 83rd-ranked Finn Emil Ruusuvuori. — AFP

## 'MVP' Harden hits 44 to spark Nets

**Washington:** James Harden delivered game highs of 44 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists Friday to power the Brooklyn Nets over Detroit 113-111 while Boston ended Milwaukee's eight-game NBA win streak. Harden missed Wednesday's loss at Utah with neck soreness but returned with a vengeance at Detroit, hitting 14-of-30 from the floor, 4-of-11 3-pointers, and 12-of-14 free throws. It was Harden's highest-scoring performance since joining the Nets from Houston, helping Brooklyn improve to 31-15. — AFP

## Live on TV

## CRICKET

**India vs England:** Third ODI from 1.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

## FOOTBALL

**European Qualifiers for 2022 World Cup:** Kazakhstan vs France from 6.30 pm on Sony Ten 2

## FORMULA ONE

**Bahrain Grand Prix:** Race from 8.25 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

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## DECODING DECIDER

India, England look to end series on high in winner-takes-all game

**Pune, March 27:** Indian cricket team may like to revisit its 50-over template while picking up pieces from the Friday carnage with an aim to complete a hat-trick of series wins against England in the third and final ODI here on Sunday.

On batting belters that's been on offer at the Gahunje Stadium, England hit an astounding 20 sixes in a 337-run chase which became a cakewalk, thanks to inpet bowling from spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Krunal Pandya.

Never before has captain Virat Kohli missed Ravindra Jadeja as much as he would have on Friday when Jonny Bairstow and Ben Stokes took the mickey out of India's left-arm wrist and orthodox spinners.

In the bowling department, Kuldeep scripted an unwanted record when he conceded 8 sixes, most by an Indian bowler. He leaked 84 runs in the second game after giving 64 runs in the first. And, so did Krunal Pandya, who gave 72 runs in six overs with an embarrassing average of 12 per over.

So, in all probability, the duo could be replaced by leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal and Washington Sundar, who can also chip in with the bat, if needed.

From team's perspective, it would be impossible to ignore Yuzvendra Chahal's inclusion in the playing XI even though the Haryana leg-spinners hasn't been in the best of forms.

Pandya senior would still make it to the team because of his batting skills but the apology of left-arm spin has certainly ensured that he won't be considered as a long term option.

In terms of batting, a total of 337 is certainly not bad by any standards but perhaps India can now look to have strategic shift in terms of innings building process.

The Men In Blue are the only team that always believes in accelerating in the last 15 overs, a template that was set by their illustrious former captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

It has worked on most occasions but of late, England with a world title has shown the world that attacking up front on batting tracks is the way forward.

— PTI



India captain Virat Kohli (left) congratulates England's Jonny Bairstow after the second ODI at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Friday. — AFP

## Jonny to stick to his fearless shots

**Pune, March 27:** The reigning world champions would continue to stick to their aggressive and fearless brand of cricket, opening batsman Jonny Bairstow said after the tourists chased down 337 in just 43.3 overs to set up a series decider here on Sunday.

The opening batsman followed up 94 from 66 balls in the first match with 124 from 112 as England plundered 20 sixes to make the stiff chase a complete mismatch. "To be honest, I think it's just happening that way. There hasn't been a conversation saying we must hit more sixes," Bairstow said after Friday's series-levelling second ODI.

Bairstow smashed seven sixes, while Ben Stokes hit cleared the ropes 10 times before falling for 99. Opener

## ARCHER TO UNDERGO RIGHT HAND SURGERY ON MONDAY

**Pune, March 27:** Injured England speedster Jofra Archer, who has already been ruled out of the Indian Premier League, will undergo a surgery on his right hand on Monday.

Archer played in two Test matches and five T20 Internationals against India before returning home a few days ago after the completion of the shortest format. "England fast bowler Jofra Archer will undergo a procedure to his right hand following a scan and subsequent Consultant review since he returned to the UK on Tuesday," the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said on Saturday.

"He has also had a further injection for the right elbow injury that had seen him declared unfit for selection for the current ODI series versus India."

"The procedure on Jofra's hand will take place on March 29 so he can recover during the planned break following his elbow injection." — PTI

Jason Roy (55) and debutant Liam Livingstone (27 not out) also added to India's misery as they conceded 20 sixes in total

— the joint most by them in an ODI. They had conceded a similar 20 sixes against South Africa in 2015.

"If you look at where the game is going around the world, whether that be in T20, or 50-over cricket, the most boundaries generally wins the game. And if you're hitting boundaries that are going for six rather than four, then the numbers are going to stack up slightly more."

"There's 20 today — now, that's an extraordinary number in one game... If we can keep hitting boundaries, keep putting bowlers under pressure, they know if they miss their lengths, then that potentially could go for six."

The reigning world champions are however aware of their high-risk approach, having lost the series-opener by 66 runs despite Bairstow and Roy getting the team off to a similarly spectacular start. — PTI

## Sidhu, Tejaswani shoot mixed gold

**New Delhi, March 27:** India's Vijayveer Sidhu and Tejaswani claimed the gold medal in the 25m rapid fire pistol mixed team event to extend the country's dominant run in the ISSF World Cup here on Saturday.

In an all-Indian gold medal match, Sidhu and Tejaswani comfortably beat the duo of Gurpreet Singh and Ashok Abhinnya Patil 9-1 at the Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range.

In the Qualification 2, Gurpreet and Patil finished at the top with a total score of 370 while the team of 16-year-old Tejaswani and 18-year-old Sidhu aggregated 368.

On Friday, Sidhu won the individual silver medal in the 25 rapid fire pistol event ahead of Anish Bhanwala and Gurpreet.

However, the Indian pair of Kynan Chenai and Shreyasi Singh missed out on a podium finish as they settled for the fourth place in the trap mixed team final of the prestigious tournament.

The home team lost to Turkey's Safiye Saritürk and Yavuz Ilnam 35-38.

Kynan, who finished fourth in the individual men's trap on Friday, began badly but improved as the mixed final progressed, even as Shreyasi too missed a few shots

● In an all-Indian gold medal match, Sidhu and Tejaswani comfortably beat the duo of Gurpreet Singh and Ashok Abhinnya Patil 9-1.

while finding the target on other occasions.

The Indian duo shot 141 in the qualifications to qualify in the fourth place for the bronze medal match behind Saritürk and Ilnam (143), who made up for his partner's off-colour outing with his consistent showing.

The Italian team of Alessia Iezzi and Valerio Grazini topped the qualifications with 145 while the Slovakian pair of Zuzana Rehak Stefecekova and Adrian Drobny was second with 143.

In the final, Iezzi and Grazini prevailed over the Slovaks Stefecekova and Drobny 39-36 on the shot-gun range.

The medal-less outing in trap notwithstanding, a dominant India continued to lead the standings with 13 gold, eight silver and six bronze for a total of 27 podium finishes.

Three finals are lined up on the last competition day on Sunday — men's 25m rapid fire pistol team, trap team women and trap team men. — PTI



India's Vijayveer Sidhu (left) and Tejaswani pose after winning the 25m rapid fire pistol mixed team event at the ISSF World Cup in New Delhi on Saturday.

## Krishna-Vishnu in final, Saina out

**Paris, March 27:** Saina Nehwal bowed out in a straight games in the women's singles semifinals but unheralded duo of Krishna Prasad Garaga and Vishnu Vardhan Goud Panjala kept India in the title hunt by storming into men's doubles final at the Orleans Masters here on Saturday.

London Olympic bronze medalist Saina lost 17-21, 17-21 to Denmark's Line Christophersen in 28 minutes, while women's duo of Ashwini Ponnappa and N. Sikki Reddy also faltered 18-12, 9-21 to top seeded Thai pair of Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai at the semifinals.

However, Krishna and Vishnu cheered up the Indian camp with a 21-17, 21-17 win over English pair of Callum Hemming and Steven Stallwood in a 35 minute semifinal clash to reach their maiden final of a Super 100 event.

The Indian duo, playing

## ORLEANS | MASTERS

their first event together this year, will take on either Indonesian pair of Sabar Karyaman Gutama and Moh Reza Pahlevi Isfahani or fourth seeded English combination of Ben Lane and Sean Vandy in the title clash on Sunday.

Krishna and Vishnu had a slender 4-2 early on but the English pair soon jumped to a 11-8 lead at the break. However, the Indian pai soon caught up at 13-13 and marched on to seal the opening game.

In the second game, Krishna and Vishnu slowly moved ahead to a 11-7 advantage at the interval and even though their rivals narrowed down the gap to 15-17, the Indian duo ensured there was no hiccup.

Krishna, 21, is India's no. 1 ranked doubles player and used to pair up with Satwiksairaj Rankireddy in his junior days. — PTI

## Squash Challenger delayed after two Indians test +ve

DC CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI, MARCH 27

The opening leg of the HCL SRFI Indian squash Tour has been postponed after two players tested positive for Covid-19. The event, the first international challenger tournament since the onset of the pandemic, was scheduled to start at the Indian Squash Academy here on Saturday afternoon.

The two Indian players who tested positive — Abhishek Pradhan and Abhishek Agarwal — have been withdrawn from the draw and the start of the tournament has been delayed until

● The two Indian players who tested positive have been withdrawn from the draw and the start of the tournament has been delayed until Monday.

Monday. There will be another round of RT-PCR testing on Monday morning.

"If the next round of testing finds no positive Covid-19 tests, then the tournament will take place from March 29 to April 1, with both the second round and quarter-finals taking place on Tuesday, March 30," a

statement from the organisers said.

All players are in a bio-bubble at a city hotel and they have been told not to step out of the room until they receive a negative test result. The tournament has participants from Egypt, Russia, France, Canada and the USA. If it starts, the tournament will now be held behind closed doors. The Professional Squash Association which is in close contact with the Squash Rackets Federation of India has given players an option to withdraw from the tournament and also reimburse the cost for the extended stay.

## Tendulkar Covid +ve, in home quarantine

**New Delhi, March 27:** Legendary Sachin Tendulkar has tested positive for Covid-19 and is currently in home isolation.

The former India captain confirmed the news on his social media handle.

One of the biggest names to have tested positive for the virus in recent times, Tendulkar, however, informed that all his other family members have tested negative.

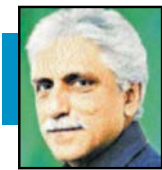
"I have been testing myself and taking all the recommended precautions to ensure Covid is kept at bay. However, I have tested positive today following mild symptoms," the 47-year-old wrote on his twitter handle.

"All others at home have



tested negative. I have quarantined myself at home and I am following all the necessary protocols as advised by my doctors. I want to thank all the healthcare professionals who are supporting me and many others across the country. Take care all of you," he further wrote in his official statement. — PTI

## Can 'improved' Indo-Pak ties pave way for bilateral sports?



Ayaz Memon  
Over The Top

A letter last week from Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeting his counterpart Imran Khan on Pakistan Day took the social media world by storm and sparked off widespread discussion as to what the implications of this could be.

While Indian government sources said such a letter was a routine event, there was speculation whether this in fact suggested a thaw in the frosty relations between the two countries, in light of other political-defence happenings that have taken place

recently. In early March, chief of Pakistan Army, General Qamar Ahmed Bajwa had made a statement that the two countries needed to lower hostilities, "bury the past and move forward".

This statement came about three weeks after a call for truce by the two countries on the border. After 5-6 years, there has been no cross-border firing at the Line of Control for more than a month.

Last week, after PM Modi's letter to PM Imran Khan went public, India's army chief General M.M. Naravane, while emphasising

that the structure for terrorist activities still remained in Pakistan which threat could not be undermined, seemed amenable to taking up the peace cause.

These developments seemed to find some kind of echo in sport relations between the two countries too. In early March, three weeks after the ceasefire, a seven-member equestrian team from Pakistan was given visa to participate in an international event, the Tent Pegging Federation World Cup Championship, in Noida.

It can be argued that Indian authorities didn't have much choice since the International Olympic Committee takes a dim view of countries hosting tournament bar athletes from other countries, but there was none of the usual drama which other-

wise precedes giving visas — or not — to sportspersons from Pakistan. This time, the procedural exercise was almost sublime.

Then last week, tennis's doubles pair of Rohan Bopanna and Aisamul Haq Qureshi, popularly known as 'Indo-Pak Express', reunited after almost seven years for an ATP 500 event at Acapulco.

Bopanna-Qureshi who reached the US Open doubles final in 2010, had last played together in 2014. Both of them saw the recent coming together as a one-off but reiterated the need for sport to remain above political tugs and pulls.

How much should be read into all this? Do these developments provide even an iota of hope that bilateral sports between India and Pakistan can be resumed? Remember,

Bopanna and Qureshi play as individuals and don't represent the country in ATP events, so the buck comes back to the governments and politicians of the two countries.

I'd say normalization of sporting relations between the two countries are extremely difficult at this stage, but going by the past, not impossible, if there is political will and breadth of vision on both sides.

Cricket remains the biggest issue given its popularity in the sub-continent, and the sentiments it raises among people on either side of the border, which can cause acute tension. But cricket also affords examples of how resumption of Indo-Pak sport is possible.

For instance, Indo-Pak cricket was suspended in 1961 and restarted only 17

years later, in 1978 when the Janata Government was in power. In 2004, five years after the Kargil conflict, the Atal Behari Vajpayee NDA government cleared the Indian team to tour Pakistan against all expectations. It turned out to be one of the great cricket series in the sport.

After the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, Pakistan came to India in 2012-13 for a white ball series. Since then, there has been a complete cessation of bilateral cricketing relations except playing in ICC tournaments.

There can be no compromise on terror, and PM Modi's letter to PM Imran Khan highlights this clearly. But it is important for governments and politicians to see sporting engagements more largeheartedly, and for the value that they can bring.

Where India and Pakistan have continued diplomatic relations — with the occasional blips — and business too, there has been wholesale grandstanding against resumption of sports. This is short-sighted.

Sport enables greater people-to-people understanding than opaque diplomacy and business. The argument in favour of Indo-Pak sport being revived is usually hinged on cricket. It shouldn't be so, though cricket is the big draw undoubtedly. It must extend to other disciplines — hockey, shooting, wrestling, boxing etc — to enable a wider range of discourse among the people of the two countries, which in turn can help normalizing relations in all spheres if that indeed is the aim of the two governments and armies.