

SHORT TAKES

ODISHA ASSEMBLY ADJOURNED AMID OPPN PROTEST

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 15

Storm in Odisha Legislative Assembly refuses to die down. The House was on Saturday adjourned at least thrice as the Opposition members insisted Speaker Dr Surjya Narayan Patro to reconsider his ruling with regard to a ban on the media coverage on the Congress lawmakers from rushing to the well of the House.

On Friday, the Speaker had banned opposition Congress members from rushing to the well. The lawmakers had trooped to the well protesting absence of top government officials in the Officers' gallery; they said it was disrespectful and disregard to the entire legislature.

"Now, why the State Assembly stands paralysed? In fact, storm brewed on Friday over absence of officers in Official gallery," said Congress leader Taraprasad Bahinipati.

"As per rules, I pointed to the Speaker about the absence of officers in official gallery. I tried to draw Speaker's attention to the violation of House rules. But Speaker gave a ruling that put an embargo on media coverage of the furore at the floor of the House at that hour," Bahinipati said.

GENDER VS FAITH CASE IN SC FROM MONDAY

PARMOD KUMAR | DC NEW DELHI, FEB. 15

A nine-judge constitution bench will commence hearing on the issues relating to gender justice and essential religious practices from Monday (Feb. 17) that is slated to last for three weeks.

The primary issue before the court is the right of women under Article 14 (equality before law) and the essential religious practices under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution.

The issues to be adjudicated by the constitution bench are rooted in challenge to the prohibition on the entry of women in the age of 10 to 50 years in Lord Ayyappa's temple, bar on the entry of Muslim women in mosque, and that of the Parsi woman in the temple of fire after they marry outside the community.

Another discriminatory practice under challenge is the practice of female genital mutilation in the Dawoodi Bohra community.

The court has framed seven questions to be adjudicated in the course of the hearing that includes examining what is the scope and ambit of right to freedom of religion under Article 25 of the Constitution and what is the inter-play between the right of persons under Article 25 and right of religious denomination under Article 26 of the constitution. The nine-judge constitution bench would be headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde.

KERALA POLICE VIOLATING NORMS: OPPN

DC CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 15

Leader of the opposition in Kerala Assembly Ramesh Chennithala on Saturday stepped up the attack against the LDF government alleging that a gang of thieves was controlling the police department.

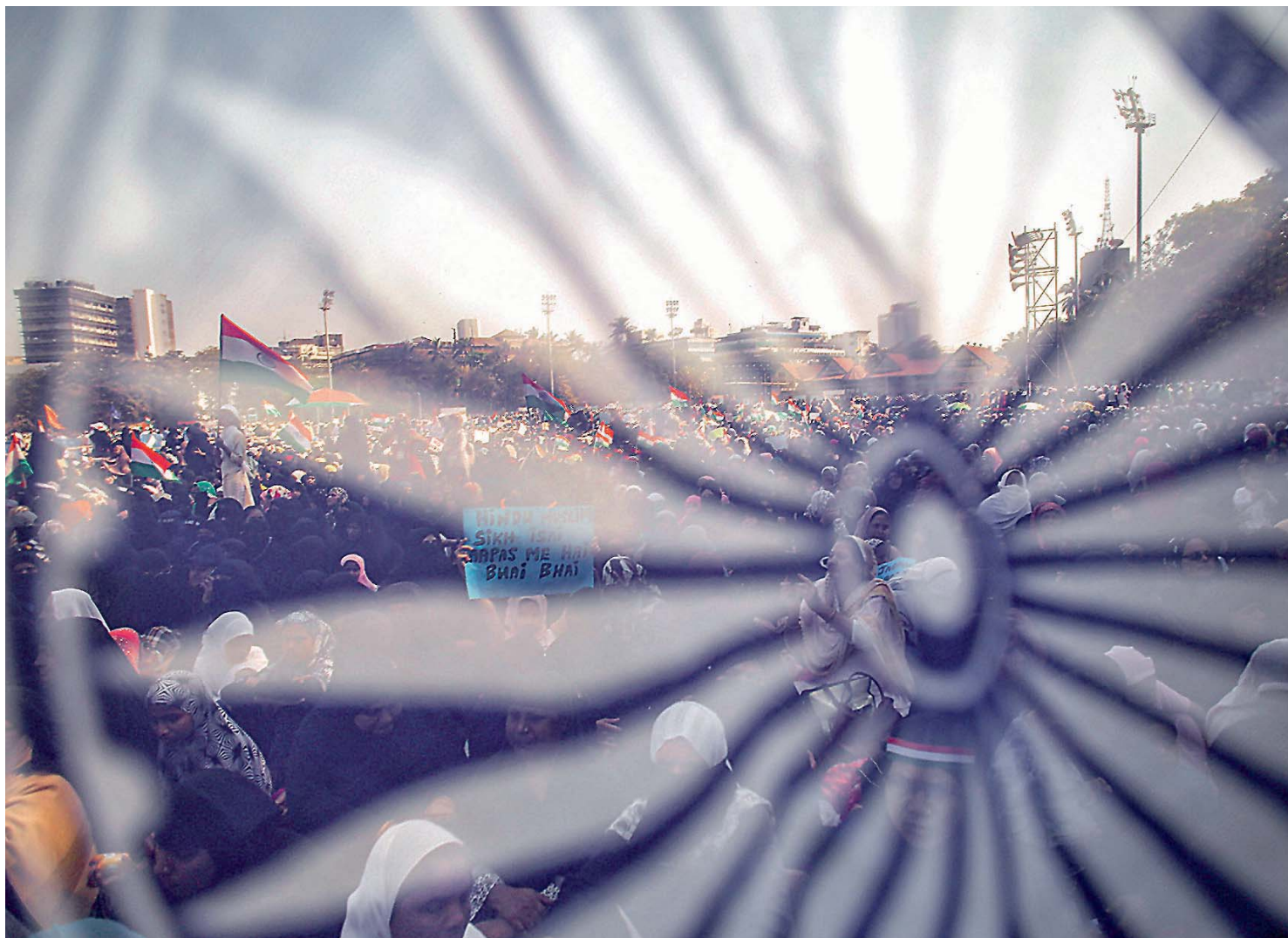
At a press conference, Chennithala said central funds were being utilised without adhering to the norms. The state police chief was violating set procedures for purchase.

The opposition leader refuted the CPM charge that rifles and cartridges of armed police went missing during his tenure as home minister. "They are making these allegations to divert the attention from major irregularities," he said.

Chennithala alleged that chief secretary Tom Jose had violated all norms by using the vehicle purchased with the funds of police department. Both the chief secretary and state police chief seem to be hand in glove in such irregularities.

BJP leader and union minister of state for external affairs V Muraliedhran alleged that the irregularities in the police department were taking place with the full knowledge of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan who also holds the home portfolio.

We stand together



Thousands of people, including a large number of women, on Saturday gave a call against the CAA-NRC-NPR regime at Mumbai's Azad Maidan amid recitation of Urdu poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz's popular poem 'Hum Dekhenge' and slogans against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

— PTI

India warns Turkey: Don't interfere in internal affairs

Warning comes after Erdogan compared situation in J&K to Gallipoli battle

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 15

A day after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan compared situation in Jammu-Kashmir to Gallipoli battle, and talked about oppression in the Union Territory, the Indian government issued a strong statement asking him to not interfere in its internal affairs and "develop proper understanding of the facts."

Reacting sharply to Erdogan's comments and rejecting his remarks on Jammu-Kashmir India said the biggest threat to the region is due to terrorism emanating from Pakistan. Kashmir had also figured in Turkey-Pakistan Joint Declaration.

"India rejects all references to Jammu & Kashmir, which is an integral and inalienable part of India. We call upon the Turkish leadership to not interfere in India's internal affairs and develop proper understanding of the facts, including the grave threat posed by terrorism emanating from Pakistan to India and the region," Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said on Saturday.

Erdogan during his address at Pakistan's Parliament on Friday had compared "the struggle of Kashmiri people with that

of fight by Turkish people against foreign domination during the World War I". In his speech, Erdogan mentioned Kashmir several times and went on to say that the Kashmir issue can be resolved "not through conflict or oppression but on the basis of justice and fairness."

"Events that happened a hundred years ago in Çanakkale in Turkey are being repeated in Indian occupied Kashmir and Turkey will continue to raise its voice against the oppression," he said adding, "Turkey will continue to stand by justice, peace and dialogue in the resolution of the Kashmir issue...Today, the issue of Kashmir is as close to us as it is to you (Pakistanis)," while reiterating Turkey's support for Kashmiris.

Erdogan had also said, "No distance can build a wall between the hearts of believers. If there is torture against any believers in the world, it's our duty to help them... Our Kashmiri brothers and sisters have suffered from inconveniences for decades and these sufferings have become graver due to unilateral steps taken in recent times."

A strong ally of Pakistan, India-Turkey relations have taken a dip due to its repeated statements on Kashmir. Last

Jaishankar: India will settle Kashmir issue

Munich, Feb. 15: In a firm repartee, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar told a senior US Senator that India will "settle" the Kashmir issue on its own when the American lawmaker brought up the issue during an interaction at the Munich Security Conference. Referring to the Kashmir issue during a panel discussion, Senator Lindsey Graham said the best way to sell democracy will be to settle the Kashmir issue in a democratic way.

"In India, you are moving forward, you got your problems like we do at home, but you've chosen the democratic path. When it comes to Kashmir, I don't know how it ends, but let's make sure that two democracies will end it differently. If you can prove that concept here, then I think

that's probably the best way to sell democracy," the Republican leader said. To this, Jaishankar promptly responded, "Do not worry, Senator: One democracy will settle it and you know which one." During the discussion Jaishankar also said that the United Nations is far less credible than it has been in history and "something" should be done about it.

"The United Nations is far less credible than it has been in history, which is not entirely surprising because when you think about it, there are not too many things which are 75 years old and still as good as they were. Clearly there is something that needs to be done there." The Munich Security Conference, being held here is the world's leading forum for debate on international security policy. — PTI

General Assembly. Pakistan is trying to ramp up support among Islamic nations on Kashmir issue on which Turkey and Malaysia have vocally backed it.

GOOGLE MAPS MARK KASHMIR'S BORDER DISPUTED

Washington, Feb. 15: Google Maps has redrawn the world's borders which look different depending upon where the user is viewing them from, with the popular search engine showing Kashmir's outlines as a dotted line acknowledging "dispute" when it is seen from outside India.

According to reports, "the borders on Google's online maps display Kashmir as fully under Indian control. Elsewhere, users see the region's snaking outlines as a dotted line, acknowledging the dispute."

A company spokesperson said, "Google has a consistent and global policy to depict disputed regions and features fairly. This does not endorse or affirm the position taken by any side. We're committed to providing our users with the richest, most up-to-date and accurate maps possible. We do border updates based on data from our providers as new or more accurate data becomes available from authoritative sources or geopolitical conditions change." — PTI

Will not hesitate to hit roads: Scindia

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, FEB. 15

Differences between Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath and AICC general secretary Jyotiraditya Scindia on Saturday reached a flash point with the former pooh-poohing the latter's threat to hit the road against his government over unfulfilled manifesto promises. A visibly upset Nath reacted sharply to Scindia's threat, saying, "To utar jayen (let him hit the roads)."

He was talking to reporters in Delhi while emerging out of a coordination committee meeting of Congress convened in his official residence in the national capital.

Sources said Scindia left the meeting in a huff following a reported tiff with Nath over the issue of unfulfilled manifesto

promises, leaving the latter fuming.

AICC general secretary in-charge of MP Deepak Babaria who attended the meeting however tried to downplay the incident saying that Scindia walked out of the meeting in the middle owing to his pressing engagements.

A couple of days ago, Scindia while addressing a public meeting in Tikamgarh district under Bundelkhand region in MP, took potshots at the Chief Minister for not being able to fulfill the manifesto promises so far.

"I will not hesitate to hit the roads against the state government if it failed to fulfill the manifesto promises", he had said while regretting non-fulfillment of key manifesto promise to regularise the ad hoc lecturers of government colleges in the state.

FAST RUNNER

Srinivas Gowda sprints 145 metres in a mere 13.62 seconds

'Kambala' jockey hailed as Usain Bolt

GURURAJA PANIYADI | DC with agency inputs MANGALURU, FEB. 15

'Kambala' (traditional buffalo race in coastal Karnataka) jockey, whose running exploits has evoked a social media frenzy comparing him to multiple Olympic gold medalist Usain Bolt — whose 100m world record is 9.58 seconds, has also caught the eye of Union youth affairs and sports minister Kiren Rijiju.

Rijiju on Saturday asked the top SAI coaches to conduct a trial of the 28-year-old Kambala jockey Gowda after video clips of him running a distance of 100 metres in just 9.55 seconds have surfaced. Gowda, a construction worker from Moodabidri, took just 13.62 seconds to run a distance of 145m, covering the first 100m in 9.55 seconds, at Kambala

in Aikala village near Mangaluru.

The minister also invited the youth to Sports Authority of India facility for felicitation on Tuesday. "I'll call Karnataka's Srinivasa Gowda for trials by top SAI coaches. There's lack of knowledge in masses about the standards of Olympics especially in athletics where ultimate human strength & endurance are surpassed. I'll ensure that no talents in India are left out untested," Rijiju wrote on his twitter handle on Saturday.

Sports Authority of India (SAI) later said on Twitter, "We have reached out to #SrinivasaGowda and booked his train ticket. He will be in SAI's Bangalore center on Monday where our coaches will assess him. We hope to identify and nurture more talents with inputs from all sports

IF I GET a pair of buffalos that can run faster, then I want to run faster than this

SRINIVAS GOWDA, Kambala jockey

enthusiasts," the SAI wrote.

Srinivas Gowda has set a record of his own in this Kambala season by winning 32 medals in 11 events. "Winning 11 medals in itself is something great, but this youth has created a record. In some events, he has won three medals in three different categories too. As the crown of his achievement he has now covered the Kambala field in record time. He is a great dedicated Kambala jockey," lauds Gunapal Kadamba, founder of Kambala Academy.

Meanwhile, Srinivas Gowda seems optimistic

TN erupts over lathicharge on anti-CAA activists

DC CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI, FEB. 15

Protests erupted in several parts of Tamil Nadu, a day after the Chennai police lathicharged anti-CAA protesters at Washermanpet here on Friday night, leaving several people including police injured.

Shops remained closed in the Washermanpet area as more than 1,000 people gathered to stage a sit-in condemning the police action against anti-CAA protesters.

The violence led to massive protests in at least 10 major towns in the state. Traders in Coonoor shut shops to protest against alleged police atrocities on anti-CAA protesters in Chennai. There were reports of protests in Tiruchendur also. Over 1,000 people carried out a protest outside a post office in Kumbakonam district, while another protest took place at Melapalayam in Nellore. The protesters staged a road roko on Chidambaram-Trichy Highway to condemn the violence while over 500 people were demonstrating in Ramanathapuram district.

Protests erupted in other parts of the state including Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari, Tiruvallur, Virudhunagar and Madurai.

In the state capital, OMR, ECR Roads were fully blocked late on Friday night after the locals and various political parties took to the streets after the news of the police lathicharge spread.

People in Washermanpet continued their protest till afternoon on Saturday. However, they dispersed after Deputy Commissioner Dhinakaran promised them that the department will take necessary action against police personnel involved in the lathicharge.

The protesters from various outfits had gathered for agitation in the area on Friday. They protested against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the impending National Register of Citizens (NRC) near Lalagunda street in old Washermanpet. As protesters continued to agitate well into the night without paying heed to the police appeal, cops resorted to lathicharge.

RSS man chosen as BJP MP chief

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, FEB. 15

VISHNU DUTT SHARMA has replaced Rakesh Singh, said to be trusted lieutenant of Union home minister Amit Shah

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Saturday chose Khajuraho MP Vishnu Dutt Sharma, who has closely been associated with Rashtriya Swamsevaka Sangh (RSS), to head the party in Madhya Pradesh. The development which has taken the party here by surprise comes amid growing concerns in BJP here over pro-Hindu pitch by Chief Minister Kamal Nath.

Sharma (49), a former Akhila Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad leader, has replaced Rakesh Singh, said to be trusted lieutenant of Union home minister Amit Shah, in the party post. Singh, who represented Jabapur seat in Lok Sabha, had last month organised a mammoth rally in support of the Citizenship Amendment Act in Jabalpur which was addressed by Shah.

The outgoing state BJP president had often been at loggerhead with senior leaders of the party in MP, particularly former chief minister and BJP national vice-president Shivraj Singh Chouhan over party affairs.

Besides, the party had fared poorly in Mahakoshal region in MP, considered his bastion, in the last Assembly elections, leading BJP to miss the chance of retaining power in the state for fourth time in a row. Sharma, a postgraduate

in agriculture science, has been preferred over other aspirants for the party post such as Chouhan and former minister Narottam Mishra, 'at the behest of the RSS leadership,' a Central party leader told this newspaper requesting not to be quoted.

Sources said Chouhan had even lobbied hard to get one of his loyalists and former ministers Bhupendra Singh and Lal Singh Arya, appointed for the post. By appointing Sharma, a Brahmin, as new president of MP unit of the party, the Central BJP leadership has hinted at possibility of replacing the BJP legislature party leader in the state Gopal Bhargava, who is also a Brahmin, with a leader from other backward class (OBC), a senior BJP leader here indicated.

OBC comprised around 55 percent of total population of MP. The Chief Minister has turned to soft Hindutva by announcing to establish 3,000 cow shelters and develop Ram Gaman Path, the mythical route in north MP believed to have been traversed by Lord Ram, his wife Sita and his sibling Laxman during his self-exile period, apparently to hijack BJP's Hindutva plank.

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Nilofar Suhrawardy

Off the beaten track

Jungle drama and the Indian 'animal farm'

Have you noticed the increasing use of animal terminology in political communication? Recently, I overheard a group of men talking, almost furtively, about dogs barking, a person claiming that a strong leader could make even donkeys do the work he desired and so forth. Well, yes, dogs do bark, particularly when they become suspicious of their owners facing threat and donkey's work is embodied by their carrying their masters' burden. With all due respect that these animals command, whether dogs or donkeys, I am fairly disturbed by political jargon suddenly taking this turn. Why bring in animals into any political race? It is difficult to say that political communication of this nature is suggestive of it going down. Simply because it would be suggestive of insulting the animals, dogs, donkeys and others being made "political" use of. No offence is intended to any creed or breed of living beings. Not because dogs are considered one's best friend and donkeys tireless workers but simply because politicking and such communication (viz. usage of animal terminology) bears little or no linkage to facts. Even stray dogs unite and bark together during nights when they sense disturbance from outsiders in their territory.

Something is seriously wrong somewhere. This is also suggested by hype raised about the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)'s hostel fees being Rs 10 and this "information" spreading literally like wildfire. Choosing not to rely on my own memory, I did a rudimentary survey of those who had been in JNU hostel from around the mid-1980s to later. Just the room fee was 10 times more than ₹10. If the mess and other charges are included, it multiplies further. Of course, it is possible, that there was a phase when hostel and other fees of educational institutions were together less than ₹10. That may have been the pre-Independence era when a monthly salary of ₹100 was considered equivalent to what one lakh rupees is nowadays, which is a multiplication of 100 by 1,000. JNU was founded in 1969.

Obviously, the amount — of ₹10 as JNU hostel fees — was deliberately picked up to convince people of the need to hike the same. Nowadays, nobody considers ₹10 as appropriate for labour, even for the smallest tasks. When need be, "news" can be manipulated to any degree without due consideration of it being anywhere near reality. Money talks in politics more "convincingly" than probably any other language. This is also suggested by attempts being made to defuse the negative impact of inflation. We all know that onion prices have succeeded in toppling governments many times. Of late, the attempt is being made to use the inflation problem linked with onion in a new manner. At least, this is what this scribe learned from "sources" appearing to be fairly well-versed on this issue.



The sit-in at Delhi's Shaheen Bagh — G.N. JHA

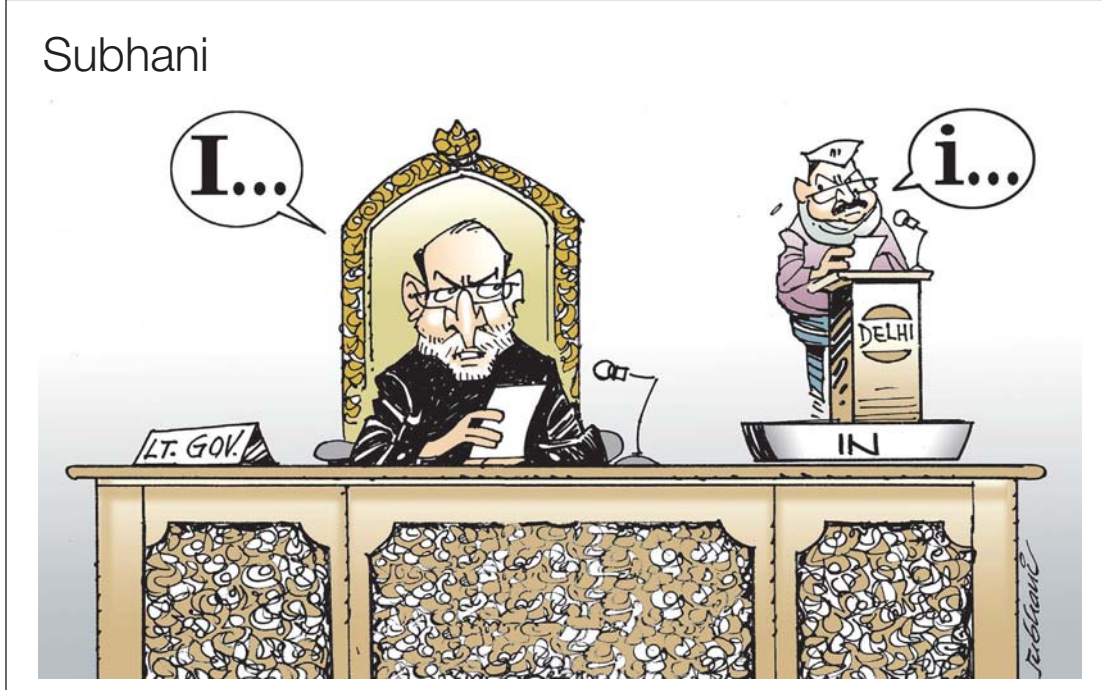
In their opinion, onions are being used to prepare nuclear bombs for targeting India's permanent enemy. What a "logic" — deflating an inflationary impact by using once again the much tusted Pak-card. Onions do bring tears to the eyes but circulation of "reports" that they are being used to make bombs for nothing else but targeting one particular neighbour and hence their prices being high does explain one fact. Certain leaders are working overtime to manufacture readymade answers to whatever problems people may be affected by. Please note, the greater their distance is from providing solutions, the stronger is their drive to prepare such answers.

Howsoever assertive Prime Minister Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah may appear to be about their stand on the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the National Population Register (NPR), they have not been spared diplomatic criticism. With respect to the government's attempt at countering diplomatic charges by describing the CAA as an internal matter, not all are willing to accept this logic. After all, it is the question of giving citizenship to certain minorities being oppressed in a few neighbouring countries and taking action against those who cannot prove their citizenship as per dictates decided by authorities.

Well, it is clearly astonishing that the alleged "xx-inch-you-know-what" is being turned against ladies assembled at Shaheen Bagh. One may be wrong, but political jargons through various means are strongly suggestive of this. Of course, this is not a joke. But, with the Pak-card having lost its former appeal, attempts are being made to use the "xx-inch-card" elsewhere. Also, prospects of it having any impact by turning it against Congress leaders are as good as dead. So Shaheen Bagh has been picked up. Some consideration should have been given to not displaying such political punches against ladies assembled there, particularly those who have crossed 70 or 80 and are in their 90s. Greater importance has apparently been given to using the much practised anti-Muslim card here.

A limited impact of these punches is marked by the anti-CAA-NRC-NPR protests showing no signs of dying down. A possible linkage between this and trying a new card cannot be ruled out. This refers to firing incidents that have taken place recently targeting protesters. The individuals firing shots have been reportedly described as "mentally unstable"? Where did they get their "weapons" from? If they are "mentally unstable", why were they given pistols? Oh dear, what a jungle drama present-day politics is taking the shape of. Seriously speaking, perhaps the "onion-card" and these firing incidents do explain the usage of animal terminology in certain quarters. But electoral results are not always decided by dogs barking or donkeys braying!

The writer is a journalist with specialisation in communication studies and nuclear diplomacy. She is also the author of several books.



Telangana needs a new women's commission



Sujatha Surepally

No More Mansplaining

I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress its women have achieved," said Dr B.R. Ambedkar, concerned as he was about women's condition in our society and the systemic oppression she faced. Perhaps, this should have been the prime action plan for political parties as well as governments.

If one takes Dr Ambedkar's observations seriously, the first question that comes to mind is: are we progressing? Do our development indices show that as a nation we have grown? Should people and not financial wealth be placed at the heart of development? The fact is that women continue to face deep misogyny and sex bias in our society where their independence and outspokenness are feared and despised. And many still believe discussing women's issues will adversely affect our "culture" and the family.

The Telangana government today is tom-tomming Kaleshwaram, a multi-purpose irrigation project on the Godavari. What many do not know is how the project displaced families whose land was acquired to build the dams. Of these families, the women — who could no longer cultivate their own land nor, bound by custom and the expectation to keep members together and continue to tend to them, migrate, as their men did, to other jobs and places — were the worst-hit.

More than half of the female population in the state actively participates in the electoral process. But are they to be seen as a vote bank only?

Telangana has a long

As I write this piece, comes the news of murder of 19-year-old Mutta Radhika in her house in Karimnagar, a 'smart city'. The same day, too, a disgusting drama of sleaze and blackmail got exposed in Sircilla district.

college. But why had their hostel been picked by the perpetrators? The answer is that, for ages, SC/ST women's hostels have been neglected in terms of amenities and enforcement of regulations.

A team of various women, dalit and bahujan organisations, including Dalit Women's Collective, Women & Transgender Joint Action Committee, made a visit to this hostel. It was found that the Telangana police's SHE teams had shied away from taking up the case. They had taken the young women to a Sakhi women's centre instead. It was Sakhi that had immediately got an FIR registered under the Pocho Act.

One of the victims informed us that Vijayamma, the cook appointed by the food contractor, T. Devaiah, was helping him approach the girls. Predictably, hostel warden G. Bhudevi claimed she was unaware of the incident. In any case, she was not required to be at the place of her employment and she rarely visited. There were no security guards in the congested lanes where the hostel appeared to have been purposefully located and the cameras in the vicinity were in a state of disrepair. Our fact-finding team also came to know that the food contractor belongs to the ruling party. The question is, will heads roll post this expose?

A few years back, when two adivasi girls, Bhumika and Priyanka, disappeared in Warangal district, we

came to know of it only when their bones were carried by stray dogs into the village. Not a single person has been arrested. Their horrific deaths have receded from public memory perhaps because the media appears unmoved by them, quite unlike in the cases of "Nirbhaya" and "Disha".

That women are a forgotten entity in the state's politics and governance is reflected in the fact that there is no functional commission for women in a state where crimes against women are rising day by day. The last chairperson of the state women's commission, Tripurana Venkataratnam, demitted office in July 2018. While the Telangana government takes credit for Kalyana Laxmi, a scheme under which financial assistance is given to poor to marry daughters and thus perpetuate the evil of dowry, would not this money be put to better use in the form of free and compulsory education to all women in a safe environment? A full-fledged women's commission can not only investigate breach of rights but can also give concrete suggestions to the government in this respect. It can look into policy matters and set up guidelines as well. It can work on instituting constitutional safeguards and protection mechanisms.

The issue of women is structural and complex. After Sircilla, we feel that the need for a fully-operational women's commission is more than ever as it can hold the state police and bureaucrats accountable. Will Telangana see such a body, revived and rejuvenated, populated by women who have a track record working on women's issues, on March 8, International Women's Day?

Sujatha Surepally is a professor of sociology at Satvahana University and a dalit and women's rights activist

LETTERS

NPR PROTESTS

I concur that some questions need to be removed from the NPR (NPR 'no entry' signs in old city, DC, Feb. 15). Many of us would not have the date and place of birth of our parents. It does not help authorities anyway. However, I fail to understand why people do not want to provide details like Aadhaar, mobile number, voter ID and driving licence as they might have given them to open bank accounts, obtain mobile phone connections, passports and visa, admit children in schools, apply for jobs, etc. I feel residents must reconsider their objections to NPR.

Oruganty Prasada Rao
Hyderabad

The Prime Minister has opined that some misunderstanding has led to people resisting the CAA, NPR and NRC and that is why people of Old City are opposing it. The PM needs to elaborate in a friendly manner on how these measures will help protect the citizens.

T.S.C. Mohan
Secunderabad

I fail to understand why people are protesting against the CAA, NPR and NRC. If we need to take a new mobile connection or download any app, we give out a lot of information. If a person is not doing anything illegal, sharing such information should not be a problem. If anyone is born here, has his or her parents and grandparents here, they should not fear losing citizenship.

Srinivasa Chary
Hyderabad

SHAMEFUL ACT

Stripping college girls to check if they were menstruating is barbaric and shameful (*Students made to strip in Gujarat college, DC, Feb. 15*). This is how the daughters of India are being ill-treated under religious pretexts. The practice of religious belief is personal. Nobody can force anybody. How can a menstruating woman, who is God's own creation, become unholy is a question that needs introspection.

G. Thirupathiah
Hyderabad

GOOD GESTURE

The AAP took a positive step by inviting Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the swearing-in ceremony of Chief Minister-designate Arvind Kejriwal. It clearly shows that he wants to maintain a good relationship with the Centre.

D. Manoj Kumar
Secunderabad

Email your letters to info@deccanmail.com, editor@deccanmail.com. You can also send them to Editor, Deccan Chronicle, 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad-500 003.

Morarji pleads for Prohibition

HYDERABAD, Feb. 15. Mr Morarji Desai said here tonight that people who were against Prohibition should not be voted to power.

Lifting of Prohibition, the Organisation Congress leader said, was "a most heinous act against the Congress because it is against the poor. It is against socialism in my view."

The former Deputy Prime Minister, who arrived here this afternoon was greeted with black flags.

Some missing in action

Awaiting defeat is not easy. Till the final 24 hours before the actual verdict, Union home minister and party supremo Amit Shah was confident that the BJP would get 41 Assembly seats in the national capital. Each leading exit pollster got a call where searching questions were asked. The BJP built a template of a "late surge" claiming that the exit polls were conducted before 3 pm on the polling day. But there were no long queues at most polling stations in Delhi at any point of time. When the results were announced, senior and vocal ministers went into hiding: Ravi Shankar Prasad, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Prakash Javadekar were missing. The likes of Sudhanshu Trivedi and Shah Nawaz Hussain valiantly tried to defend what was indefensible. Party insiders say it is a pattern of sorts. In good times, Mukhtar, Prasad and Javadekar are there to articulate the government

and party's stand, but in adverse circumstances, Trivedi and Hussain are left to do the honours.

Contrarian Sharmistha

Congress circles are intrigued over why Pranab Mukherjee's daughter Sharmistha decided to take on former finance minister and party bigwig P. Chidambaram. Her tweet questioning Chidambaram's sense of satisfaction over the Delhi verdict came well past midnight. A section of Congressmen wonder whether Sharmistha was aware of her father's track record in Bengal politics where the Congress turned from bad to worse when Pranabada was calling the shots in the party. Perhaps the former President was not even aware of what his daughter

was up to. **Cops in a tizzy**

Some BJP MPs had a difficult time during the Delhi Assembly polls. As per the high command's directive, many BJP MPs were asked to campaign in Delhi, distribute pamphlets and even stay put in the slums and rural Delhi areas. A former state unit chief took the directive seriously and went to a slum near R.K. Puram. Unfortunately for him, some hooligans were there claiming proximity to a political outfit. When the MP tried arguing, they turned physical and the matter went off hand. Both sides rushed to the nearest police station but the sleepy policemen could not believe that a parliamentarian was the aggrieved party. A call was made to a bigwig at an

How to put on a brave face amid defeat



By WAQYANAWIS

unearthly hour and after his intervention, the MP got some reprieve, as well as the upper hand.

A regard for 'Swamynomics'

Overheard in Parliament: There are only two persons with a PhD

in economics in the Rajya Sabha — one is Subramanian Swamy and the second Narendra Jadhav. A Cong MP was heard saying that he will move a point of order because every time the house is discussing financial matters, Subramanian Swamy is missing. Swamy is generating lot of interest in the BJP too. On the day of the Delhi voting, Swamy predicted AAP's victory due to the Union budget "googly"!

Bye, Shaheen Bagh?

Delhi elections are over and there dare signs of the Shaheen Bagh protests being called off. Arvind Kejriwal does not want to take the lead because he has nothing to offer the protesters while Union Home Minister Amit Shah has made it

clear that there will be no negotiation. Local Congress and AAP politicians are claiming to have little or no influence over protesters. All eyes are therefore on the Supreme Court. There is a near consensus that if the apex court asks Shaheen Bagh protesters to end their stir, the road linking south Delhi to Noida will be cleared.

Achchhe din!

In media circles in the national capital, there is a sense of anticipation. The Union government is reportedly planning to loosen its purse strings for advertisements, etc. Many major media houses have not been getting *sarkari* ads but now the government seems to be veering round to the view to let everyone get ads as per established conventions.

The writer is a keen observer of the goings-on in backrooms of power

Pride and prejudice in a percussion tradition



M.R. Venkatesh
review

It is like a wake-up call thirsting for fraternalism of the human spirit. *Sebastian & Sons* is not about any corporate history as its conjunctive title may initially suggest. It is much deeper; a brave new narrative towards an archaeology of the social and cultural roots of the mrdangam, the primary percussion instrument in the Carnatic music tradition in the South, as seen in its institutional setting in modern times.

Taking forward his deep reflections on caste discrimination in his earlier book, *A Southern Music: The Karnatik Story*, eminent classical vocalist, activist and thinker T.M. Krishna in this latest offering has brought hides and skins into focus, a vital backyard awaiting full integration, in a raw, yet aesthetic face-off between the mrdangam makers and players.

A work with multiple strands, it dovetails contemporary history, sociology, biographical notes, chemistry and physics, centred around the incredible, ultimate desire for tonality (pure "naada") from a rhythmic instrument that defines its being and cultural niche.

Besides T.M. Krishna, a somewhat compelling half-Chomsky in Carnatic music circles, where eternal reverence is the norm, raising fundamental issues on the creative act of thinking and doing itself, this book is also a critique of the brahminical way of life, informed by strict rules of *aachar*, which define distancing and ritualistic pollution.

Topping these is a stronger supervening layer, the individual professional standing of star percussionists, mostly from upper castes, their "intellectual pride" in leading and shaping a musical tradition, and anonymous groups of families at the bottom of the pyramid, the mrdangam makers from among the dalits, occupationally tied to the "dirty work" for centuries.

From the "Superstar" Palghat Mani Iyer, the iconic mrdangam

Taking forward his reflections on caste in his earlier book, *A Southern Music: The Karnatik Story*, Krishna has brought into focus a vital backyard awaiting full integration, in a raw, yet aesthetic faceoff between the mrdangam makers and players

maestro at the top, more so since Carnatic music performances moved out of the patronising princely state scions, *zamindars* and landlords of a feudal era, to the evolution of the *kutcheri* format in urban areas with the birth of institutions like the Music Academy in Madras in 1928, to the next-in-caste hierarchy and his main professional rival, Palani Subramania Pillai, there is a vast spectrum of cultural history and geography covered here.

Alongside, there is a long line of their distinguished successors, like Umayalpuram Sivaraman, T.V. Gopalakrishnan, Palghat Raghu, T.K. Murthy from Trivandrum who became M.S. Subbulakshmi's "most trusted percussionist" as the author puts it, the "formidable" Pudukkottai Dakshinamurthy Pillai, Trichy Sankaran, Karalkudi Mani and Vellore Ramabadrhan to name a few, to the less blessed in the caste gradation, like C.S. Murugabhoopathy and Thanjavur Upendran (who were from OBC castes like Servai, a sub-sect of the Thevar in the South, or even "lower" castes like the Isai Velalars), all the faces are pretty well-known.

But this narrative has shined the light for the first time in a path-breaking work on the complementing souls of these great artists, the unheard-of and the unsung mrdangam makers, dalit Christians based out of Thanjavur, the once cultural hub of the erstwhile Madras Presidency in Cauvery delta.

Krishna writes that while the "earliest mrdangam artists we know of and to whom we can trace the instrument is Narayanasvami Appa, a descendant of one of the families that migrated to Thanjavur when the Marathas were in power (1676 is when Ekoji became the first Maratha ruler of Thanjavur); he is considered the father of mrdangam-playing".

However, there already existed a mrdangam-playing tradition influenced by the *thavil*, "which continues to be the only percussion accompaniment for Nadaswara ensembles." But the older styles were happily, "deliberately" forgotten, by the mid-1950s when the "Maratha-influenced Thanjavur tradition became the Brahmin style, while the *Thavil* and *Sadir* (as Bharat Natyam was earlier known) inspired Pudukkottai tradition became associated with the Isai Velalar aesthetic", Krishna says.

Move a little further in the timeline, "the first mrdangam maker whose name appears in oral history is Arogam", chronicles Krishna, whose work is based on painstaking fieldwork and extensive interviews with both a range of artists and the instrument-makers over at least three generations, a huge scholarly effort spread over three-and-a-half years. Arogam was assisted by his son Sevittian (Sebastian) and from there a more definitive family tree of those from the "untouchable" caste who make mrdangams begins. Hence *Sebastian & Sons*, in which the author turns an empathetic ethnographer in documenting this history.

Sebastian was "nudged" by his Madurai-based cousin, Ratnam, that led to the "Thanjavur style" in mrdangam making, even as Sebastian's three sons, oldest S. Shengol, second S. Parlandu (Fernandes) and youngest S. Antony (known as "Shetty"), later emerge as craftsmen.

The internal debate over at what point of time the Hindu caste system became too oppres-

sive for these dalits and they "converted" to Christianity to enable their socio-economic mobility, lingers. Yet, what equally matters is their handi-craft of meticulously working with skins of buffaloes, cows and goats, which go to make the three layers of the mrdangam to get the best tone and resonance from these skins when affixed to two sides of a wooden shell that makes it a resonance column in a complex binding process. In fact, a top artiste like a Palghat Mani Iyer would demand that tonal quality, if only to pip his rival Palani Subramania Pillai at concerts, the author shows.

As Krishna walks and writes about this journey in a remarkably lucid style, a basic question that keeps popping up is this: Despite the benign paternalism of the mrdangam artiste towards the instrument-maker - Mani Iyer's and Parlandu's inter-dependency is again a classic example of both needing each other - it is the caste system legitimised "entrenched hierarchy of knowledge and skills" that relegates the mrdangam makers as inferior and dispensable. There is an in-built historical asymmetry in their relationship.

Besides questioning the dogmas of beef eating, Krishna takes us through sociologically absorbing lanes and by-lanes of how and why the mrdangam makers shifted to Madras from Thanjavur; the presence of other makers in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, Bengaluru and Kerala, the women in the hides business, skins of different types, processes of curing, the enigma of the sounds from the wood of the jackfruit tree used for making the outer shell and so on.

Caste dynamics also change over time, showing up this book as an outstanding work by a gifted musician. On hindsight, Kalakshetra misreading its intent in cancelling its auditorium-booking for the book launch came as a blessing in disguise!

An old woman finds purpose and laughter

Amma Bi, the sharp-tongued 65-year-old begum of the desolate Lal Haveli in Lucknow, is having a bit of a crisis. Every afternoon as the clock strikes three, there comes "the sound of footsteps, the rustling of leaves, a shadow outside the door." If only she wasn't alone, if only there was someone to catch that shadow, ruses the lonely and melancholic Amma Bi. But her son has flown the nest, her husband has passed and her house help Jumman is not one to stick around all day to keep her company. And so in the lively and evocative novella *Dopehri* with a regal, lyrical cover, actor Pankaj Kapur tell the story of loneliness and ageing, and of the joy of finding love, laughter and a sense of purpose again, in entirely unpredictable ways. It could have been grim, but its remarkably sunny and moving.

Kapur wrote this novella meant for film in 1992 in Hindustani. The book has been performed on stage as a one-act solo reading by Kapur across the world. I read the recently released English translation by editor Rahul Soni, and also heard recordings of Kapur reading excerpts from the original story. The transition from Hindustani to English is seamless and faithful, retaining the deeply acerbic sense of humour, striking visual richness and finely detailed web of nostalgia. The "noontime tale" sprang from a thought that came to him during a visit to a building in Dadar in Mumbai where his wife Supriya Pathak's mother lived, Kapur has said. Imagining how an old lady would react to the thud-thudding sounds produced by anyone walking on the old wooden staircase in those quiet, dingy quarters, Kapur had found the germ of an idea, and he finished writing the novella in four days. *Dopehri*, however, takes place in Lucknow, with a visibly strong sense of place and time, with Amma Bi's haveli as centerstage. Her days are sad and empty, with not much to occupy her but the comings and goings of Jumman and their little skirmishes, and daydreams consisting of visions that include her family, and herself riding in their shiny new 1936-model Austin dressed as a bride. The car now lies in the courtyard, abandoned and decaying, like Amma Bi herself. But when she imagines a ghost or two lurking in the haveli, baying for her blood, her close confidante Saxena Sahab insists she take in a female lodger. When the lovely, mysterious Sabiha walks into the haveli, Amma Bi is overjoyed - but she gets more than she bargained for. In under 100 pages, Kapur's story is crisp and absorbing, its comic lightness growing on you sneakily, with a neat, satisfying arc that feels timeless. If indeed this story makes it to screen - as Kapur has said it might, - *Dopehri*'s delightful imagery should come in handy. Within these pages, the time of day shifts as perceptibly as the power play between its chief characters. As the day wears on, their sense of ennui is overshadowed, in Kapur's imagination, by the physical elements surrounding them - the haveli's gate, Amma Bi's *paan* box, the Sun, the Moon - that turn into breathing, living things, watching over her in her deserted home. "In the winter morning, when a tonga stopped in front of Lal Haveli, the main gate saw its own Amma Bi alighting from it. Amma Bi touched the gate with such affection that its old bones came alive, and when she pushed it open with both hands, it shrieked as if from joy." On other occasions, "the big block made many successful attempts to wake her", "the night and desolation grinned", and "when the sound of the alarm spread out through Lal Haveli, its courtyard and veranda, its rooms and corridors all woke up after years of slumber". And the ghosts? Only the readers are made privy to the answer to this mystery, not Amma Bi. But she'll survive.



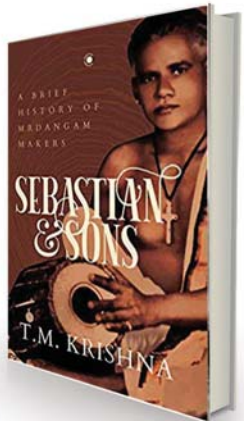
Neha Bhatt
review

DOPEHRI

By Pankaj Kapur
Harper Perennial, ₹299

Besides questioning the dogmas of beef eating, Krishna takes us through sociologically absorbing lanes and by-lanes of how and why the mrdangam makers shifted to Madras from Thanjavur; the presence of other makers in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, Bengaluru and Kerala, the women in the hides business, skins of different types, processes of curing, the enigma of the sounds from the wood of the jackfruit tree used for making the outer shell and so on. Caste dynamics also change over time, showing up this book as an outstanding work by a gifted musician. On hindsight, Kalakshetra misreading its intent in cancelling its auditorium-booking for the book launch came as a blessing in disguise!

Neha Bhatt is an independent journalist and book critic based in Delhi. She tweets @nehabh70 and @bookishbadish on insta



SEBASTIAN & SONS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF MRDANGAM MAKERS

By T.M. Krishna
Westland, ₹799

Is questioning women about their sex lives harassment?

Diana Hendry
review

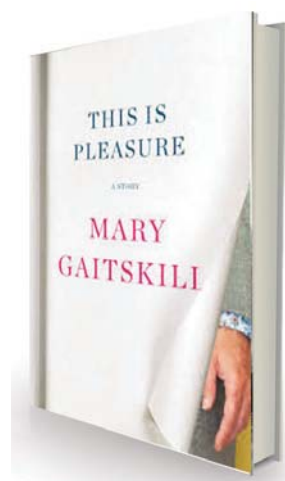
Alert to the combination of a controversial issue and a brilliant writer, *Serpent's Tail* have bought *This is Pleasure*, first published as a short story in the *New Yorker*, and issued it as a very short hardback novella - 15,000 words, large print, lipstick kisses on the cover. Already described by the *Guardian* as "an incendiary volume", the book is a response to, and questioning of, the #MeToo movement.

Quin Saunders, the longtime head of a respected publishing imprint, is accused of harassment by the many women who work or write for him, is ultimately stripped of his career, boycotted and humiliated. He's the Harvey Weinstein of the publishing world - although the sex seems to be more verbal

than actual.

The story is told in two voices, that of Quin himself and his good friend Margot. She is of the same generation as Quin and early in their friendship slaps him down - a response that younger women don't, or won't, follow. Quin is an elegant, perceptive character. He "imbibes" people, particularly women, takes them to lunch, listens to their problems and interrogates them about their love lives. He picks people up, invites them to his parties and then drops them. His behaviour is (as Margot says) mildly sadistic. Are the women victims, or do they in some way conspire? At what point does intimacy turn into anger, flirtation into abuse?

Quin's persuasive self-defence is that: *most people are starved for perceptive questions, and the chance to discover their own thoughts. This is especially true of young women, who are expected to listen attentively to one dull, self-obsessed man after another.*



THIS IS PLEASURE
by Mary Gaitskill
Serpent's Tail, £7.99

It is, he believes, a question of 'going up to the line of acceptability and not crossing it'. But for some women cross it



Mary Gaitskill

he does. Margot struggles to defend him. At a low point in her life he had been supportive and kind.

For her the line is only crossed when he seems to make light of the story she tells him of being abused as a child.

Already there are those on the Good Read website who describe Quin as a creepy dude and the women as victims. But the suggestion that the #MeToo debate is moving into a more nuanced area is very much at the heart of this publication.

Mary Gaitskill is renowned for her writing on female sexuality and sado-masochism, and her prose here is perfectly poised. Reading *This is Pleasure* is like walking on a tightrope of questions that don't allow easy answers. In a *New Yorker* interview last year, Gaitskill's views appeared more explicit than in this story. While clearly on the side of women speaking out, she is also concerned about the current situation of men: 'I feel that masculinity is being demonised and sex is being demonised, that physical touch is viewed with inordinate suspicion.' And that, she says, 'seems dangerous to me, in a different way'. Dare one think of #MenToo?

By arrangement with the *Spectator*

Learning the brownie from Mumbai's 'Brownie Queen'

Kainaz M. Harchandrai & Tina M. Wykes

excerpt

How do I put into words my glorious relationship with this one product?

Brownies are so intertwined with my life that they are a part of me, my identity, my childhood, my youth and my entire adult life. I am sometimes introduced as 'Mumbai's Brownie Queen' on TV programmes or radio shows and I feel such privilege and gratitude to be associated with brownies in this way. My relationship with brownies spans every stage of my life... and my company is a brownie company in the eyes of our guests before it can even try to become anything else.

My brownie history is as much Mum's story as it is mine. It was nearly 25 years ago that Gulzar, a pregnant lady in our building, asked Mum to bake

her some brownies. She had lived in America and was craving them again when she was pregnant. Mum had never eaten a brownie, so at first, she brushed aside the request. After a few gentle reminders, she found a walnut brownie recipe in one of her cookbooks, baked her first batch and delivered them upstairs. Gulzar loved the brownies and ordered them many times after that. Mum started offering brownies to her other customers through her catering business and they loved it too. This was the beginning.

Around this time, Mum's friend Nirmal Sethia dropped by for a visit. He tried one of Mum's brownies, and said he enjoyed it. Sometime later, Nirmal uncle ordered a brownie at Cream Centre, a vegetari-

an restaurant at Chowpatty, and was appalled by what he served. He complained to the manager and told him about Mum's brownies, suggesting they contact her if they wanted to try the real thing. Mum got a call from Cream Centre the following day.

Cream Centre (then part of Blue Foods, a restaurant chain) is a vegetarian chain of restaurants, so Mum began experimenting with how to create a moist brownie without eggs. Soon, she was supplying brownies to Cream Centre, as well as New Yorker, New York New York, and Copper Chimney, which were all part of the Blue Foods Group. When Blue Foods began opening restaurants across India, they even transported Mum's brownies by train to cities including Chandigarh, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad. The brownies were so popular that at one point, a member of Mum's staff was offered a large amount of money to part with her recipe. When Mum found out, she marched into the office of

the person and said that she would stop supplying brownies immediately. An apology followed and assurances were given, and Mum continued to supply them with brownies for many years after that.

Mum delivered the brownies to the restaurants herself, and after I started driving, I shared that duty too. She had designed stainless steel racks that enabled us to deliver 20-odd trays at a time. The individual trays of brownies, held separately but on top of each other, were mounted onto a slotted rack and carried with a metal rod-like handle at the top. When Blue Foods started transporting Mum's brownies to other cities, we had to deliver them to Sion Bus Depot and Victoria Terminus station (now Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus). It was impossible to find parking at these locations, and we were constantly harassed by parking enforcement. One day, Mum had quite enough. She visited their office and set out her demands. She needed to

THE WALNUT BROWNIE

Ingredients
Salted Butter 125 grams
All purpose flour 50 grams
Caster Sugar 175 grams
Cocoa Powder 30 grams
Vanilla Essence/Extract 1/2 teaspoon
Eggs 2 large
Chopped Walnuts 50 grams

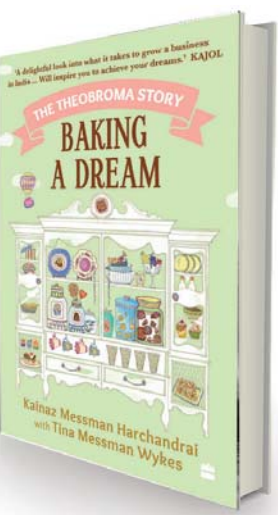
Method
■ Heat oven to 165°C.
■ Grease and line a 6-inch square baking tin.
■ Whisk together butter and sugar till pale, light and fluffy.
■ Add eggs, one at a time, and continue whisking. Ensure first egg is fully incorporated before adding the second egg.
■ Add vanilla.
■ Sieve flour and cocoa together and fold into egg-butter-sugar mixture.
■ Fold 25 grams chopped walnuts into the batter.
■ Pour batter into the prepared baking tin.
■ Sprinkle remaining 25 grams walnuts on top of the batter.
■ Bake in a preheated oven at 165°C for 15 to 20 minutes. Please check after 15 minutes: the cake tester should come out with a little batter clinging onto it, but the batter should not be uncooked. Please do not over bake, or the brownie will become dry and crumbly.



ies, and she always paid on time. We were never troubled by them after that.

I'm often asked what is the secret to baking the best brownie ever. The key is in the baking, not the making. The world is full of brownie recipes and most are very good. The skill is in getting the timing and temperature right and baking it correctly. The difference between a moist, gooey brownie and a dry, crumbly one can be just a few minutes of baking time or a few degrees in temperature. Often, people think that making a brownie is much like a cake. But if you want a nice, gooey brownie, approach it as if you're baking a cookie. The centre of your brownie should be molten, and under-baked by a few minutes as it will continue to cook after it comes out of the oven.

Excerpted from *Baking a Dream: The Theobroma Story* with permission from the publisher, HarperCollins India



BAKING A DREAM: THE THEOBROMA STORY

By Kainaz M. Harchandrai, with Tina M. Wykes
HarperCollins, ₹599

stop at these locations for less than 10 minutes every day, and wanted to avoid the daily stress and hassle. She offered a monthly arrangement and brown-

OUR CRITIC'S RATING Outstanding ★★★★★ | Great ★★★★ | Good ★★★ | Okay ★★ | Poor ★ | Truly Terrible TT

Kal, Imtiaz Ali's films were irritating, Aaj it is insufferable

SUPARNA SHARMA

Kal, a girl in a blue skirt and a boy in khaki pants.
Aaj, a girl in shorts and a boy with questionable hygiene.

Kal, girl asking boy why he's chasing her.
Aaj, girl asking boy why he didn't sleep with her.

Kal, boy says, "Okay, I will stop chasing you".
Aaj, boy says, "You are special".

Kal, girl responded, "Did I ask you not to chase me?"
Aaj, girl says, "Whatevrrrrr".

Kal, boy is Veer (Kartik Aaryan), girl is Leena (Aarushi Sharma) in Udaipur, circa 1990
Aaj, boy is Raghu (Kartik Aaryan), girl is Zoe (Sara Ali Khan) in Delhi 2020

Kal, Leena was a student in a convent school.
Aaj, Zoe has career plans of running an event management company.

Kal, Veer was studying to be a doctor.
Aaj, Raghu is a computer programmer.

Kal, Leena did kathak.
Aaj, Zoe does zumba.

Kal, Leena wore salwar-kameez with dupatta.
Aaj, Zoe wears small, trendy clothes and high heels.

Kal, Leena stood in balcony stealing furtive glances.
Aaj, Zoe has tequila shots in a pub.

Kal, Leena had a plait and was very scared of her mother.
Aaj, Zoe's hair is streaked and she shouts at her mother.

Aaj, a love guru, a philosopher-guide (Randeep Hooda) runs Mazi (past), a coffee shop cum co-working space that has a bar and booze.

He has a *kal*, and a room upstairs to make out with random girls.
Zoe works out of Mazi, and soon Raghu follows her with his laptop.
Whenever we are in *aaj* with love guru, we go to his *kal* for some love lessons.

Kal, Veer loved Leena, she loved him.
Aaj, Raghu loves Zoe, and she loves him.

Kal, Veer and Leena had a thing — whenever they met, she would suddenly, quickly kiss him.
Aaj, Zoe and Raghu make out and then she lies on top of him.
Kal, he had issues, complexes.
Aaj, she has issues, complexes.

Kal, Veer hurt Leena, but hurt himself as well.
Aaj, Zoe hurts Raghu, but hurts herself as well.

Kal, parson, tarson, narson, in fact for barson, Imtiaz Ali has been making the same film, over and over — *Jab We Met* (2007), *Love Aaj Kal* (2009), *Rockstar* (2011), *Cocktail* (2010), *Highway* (2014), *Tamasha* (2015), *Jab Harry Met Sejal* (2017). *Aaj*, he has made the same film, again.

Kal, parson, tarson, narson, his heroes and heroines found themselves through love, else they felt lost-lost, sad-sad.

Aaj, his hero and heroine find themselves through love, and without it they feel lost-lost, sad-sad.

Kal, parson, tarson, narson, Imtiaz Ali's films were about the redemptive power of love.
Aaj, his film is about the redemptive power of love.

Kal, his heroines were child-babes.
Aaj, his heroine is a child-babe, one at least.

Kal, Imtiaz Ali was besotted with boys and girls with tiny IQs.
Aaj, he is still obsessed with a boys and girls with tiny IQs.

Kal, I thought Imtiaz Ali would grow up after having made the same film over and over.
Aaj, it is clear t h a t

Love Aaj Kal (U/A) 141 min
CAST: Kartik Aaryan, Sara Ali Khan, Aarushi Sharma, Randeep Hooda, Simone Singh
DIRECTOR: Imtiaz Ali
RATING: ★

Imtiaz Ali doesn't want to grow up and will keep making the same film over and over, and then again.

Kal, Imtiaz Ali knew how to write and had at least a semblance of a story.
Aaj, he has lost that skill as well, and instead of a story has only expository dialogue.

Love Aaj Kal 2020 has no story whatsoever and so most of the time is spent talking about love, how love feels, what love does, instead of showing it to us.

Imagine a road trip movie where instead of an actual road trip, the lead pair take turns to sit with an uncle at a coffee shop while he tells them about a road trip he once went on. But, rather than talk about interesting, fun stuff, the story he narrates goes like this: "I checked out a car, then I took it for a spin. It got a flat, I changed tyre. Again there was a puncture. Mileage wasn't good. The gear stick was wobbly, the wipers were not moving smoothly. When I put the window down, the breeze was nice, but her hair got tangled. She was not happy."

If you were planning a movie for your Valentine's date, I'd say cleaning public latrines in the service of Swachhchh Bharat would be more fun than watching Love Aaj Kal.

Now imagine that the girl who comes to listen to cafe-wale uncle, walks in and out hyperventilating, like, all of the time.

Leena of *kal* barely talks. But Zoe of 2020 more than makes up for that Leena, and all the Leenas born and brought up in the three decades between them.

Zoe's character is created out of Imtiaz Ali's issues and complexes about women and love. Thus, she has a huffy demeanour, throws tantrums, has only exaggerated, petulant responses and speaks all the time while gesturing frantically. Yet, the instructions to the cameraman were to crouch in front of her and stare up with a grin and a throbbing heart, like a duffer in love.

At one point, after we return from a flashback to *aaj*, Zoe says to cafe uncle, "Life, haan!"
The banality is just staggering.
Zoe's character is so idiotic that she has a hissy fit before taking all life-altering decisions, all of which are based entirely on what someone else has said or experienced.

Usually, Randeep Hooda is good, but in *Love Aaj Kal* he is inept and quite unbearable. Sara Ali Khan is not just bad, she is terrible, as if she has regressed as an actor since *Kedarnath* (2018).
After

suffering her dizzy gestures and chatter for a while, she actually started grating on my nerves.

Kartik Aaryan and Aarushi Sharma barely have dialogue, in *kal* and *aaj*, and yet they try to hold the film with some attempt at acting. But neither love nor their acting can save this meandering, dull banality.

Though I enjoyed *Jab We Met*, and liked *Highway* to some extent, I have never been a fan of Imtiaz Ali and his worldview. But now, after *Love Aaj Kal*, I have developed deep contempt for his baby doll heroines who act out and throw tantrums all the time, and his indulgent, moronic filmmaking.

Somewhere in the middle of *Love Aaj Kal* sits a stand-up comic routine by one Justice Chaudhary who says that because the male members of cattle at his home are not into monogamy and don't wear any clothes, he too has decided to discard both, monogamy and clothes.

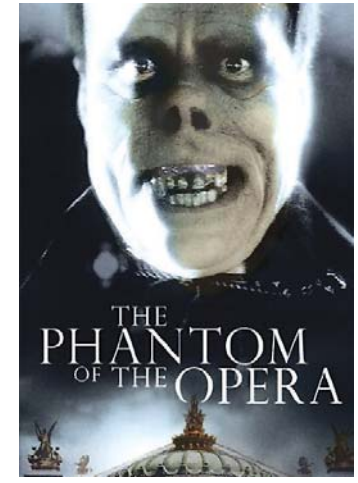
If you figure what that was about, do drop a line.

Else, please implore the mighty producers of Bollywood who will pour in money for yet another banal *bakwas*, to sponsor some therapy sessions for Imtiaz Ali and help him grow up a little. And if they feel that ship has sailed, then the therapy could at least help him create female characters that don't that have the IQ, emotions and mannerisms of eight-year-old girls.

Imtiaz Ali has a very uneasy relationship with grown women and that is visible in the way he has created the character of Zoe's mother, who has an opinion on like. Played by Simone Singh, this mommy wears her hair and expression like Mrs Addam from Addams Family and may have well arrived to the sets of *Love Aaj Kal* on a broom with a black conical hat.

Love Aaj Kal isn't just an annoying, irritating film, it also moves at a glacial pace. At some point after interval, I tried to fixate my eyes on the head of the man sitting in front. Watching his hair grow was less excruciating than watching Imtiaz Ali's tantrum-throwing child-babe.
If you were planning a movie for your Valentine's date, I'd say cleaning public latrines in the service of Swachhchh Bharat would be more fun than watching this film.

Roger Ebert's Great Movies



THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
Released in 1925
Review written on December 19, 2004

It has always been a question whether *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) is a great film, or only a great spectacle. Carl Sandburg, one of the original reviewers, underwent a change of heart between his first *Chicago Daily News* review (he waited for the Phantom's unmasking "terribly fascinated, aching with suspense") and a reconsideration written a month later ("strictly among the novelties of the season"). It was not, he added on the level of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* or *Greed*, mentioning two of the greatest films of all time.

He was right about that, and could have added the greatest of all silent horror films, Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), whose vampire may have influenced Lon Chaney's performance as the Phantom. But as an exercise in lurid sensationalism, straining against technical limitations in its eagerness to overwhelm, the first of the many Phantom films has a creepy, undeniable power.

The story is simply told — too simply, perhaps, so that all of the adaptations, including the famous Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, have been much ado about relatively little. In the cellars of the Paris Opera House lives a disfigured masked man who becomes obsessed with the young singer Christine. He commands the management to give her leading roles, and when they refuse, he exacts a terrible revenge, causing a great chandelier to crash down on the audience.

Christine's lover, a pallid nonentity, is little competition for her fascination with the Phantom, until she realises with horror that the creature wants her to dwell in his mad subterranean world. She unmasks him, is repelled by his hideous disfigurement, flees to the surface and her lover, and is followed by a Phantom seeking violent revenge. There is no room for psychological subtlety here.

It is the idea of the Phantom, really, that fascinates us: the idea of a cruelly mistreated man going mad in self-imposed exile in the very cellars, dungeons and torture chambers where he was, apparently, disfigured in the first place. His obsession with Christine reflects his desire to win back some joy from a world that has mistreated him. Leroux and his adapters have placed this sad creature in a bizarre subterranean space that has inspired generations of set designers.

There are five levels of cellars beneath the opera, one descending beneath another in an expressionist series of staircases, ramps, trapdoors, and a Styxian river that the Phantom crosses in a gondola. The Phantom has furnished his lair with grotesque fittings: He sleeps in a coffin and provides a bed for Christine in the shape of a whale boat. Remote controls give him warnings when anyone approaches and allow him to roast or drown his enemies.

To Christine, he offers wealth, luxury and opera stardom, and she is in no peril "as long as you do not touch the mask" — oh, and she must love him, or at least allow him to possess her (although his precise sexual plans are left undefined). Perhaps warned by the fate of the hero in her current production of *Faust*, she refuses this bargain, although for an engaged woman, she allows herself to be dangerously tempted.

After taking over the leading role from an ominously ill prima donna, she follows a mysterious voice, opens a secret door behind the mirror in her dressing room, descends through forbidding cellars, is taken semi-conscious by horseback and gondola deeper into the labyrinth and sees the coffin where he sleeps. At this point, her sudden cry of "You — you are the Phantom!" inspired me to write in my notes: "Duh!"

Her lover, the Viscount Raoul de Chagny, is likewise not a swift study. After the Phantom has presumably claimed dozens of victims with the falling chandelier and threatened Christine with death if she sees him again, Raoul agrees to meet her at the Masked Ball. This is held in the Opera House on the very next night, with the chandelier miraculously repaired and no mourning period, apparently, for the dozens of crushed and maimed. Christine tells Raoul the Phantom will murder them if they are seen together, but then, when a gaunt and spectral figure in red stalks imperiously into the grand hall, Raoul unmasks himself, which is, if you ask me, asking for trouble.

The Phantom's unmasking was one of the most famous moments in silent film. He is seated at his organ. "Now, when he is intent on the music," Sandburg wrote, "she comes closer, closer, her fingers steal towards the ribbon that fastens the mask. Her fingers give one final twitch — and there you are!" There you are, all right, as Chaney, "the Man of 1,000 Faces" and a master of makeup, unveils a defacement more grotesque than in any later version, his mouth a gaping cavern, his nose a void, his eyes widely staring: "Feast your eyes, glut your soul, on my accursed ugliness!"

The other famous scene involves the falling chandelier, which became the centrepiece of the Webber musical and functions the same way in Joel Schumacher's 2004 film version. In the original film, it is curiously underplayed; it falls in impressive majesty, to be sure, but its results are hard to measure. Surely there are mangled bodies beneath it, but the movie stays its distance and then hurries on. Much more impressive is the Masked Ball sequence and its sequel on the roof of the opera house. The filmmakers (director Rupert Julien, replaced by Edward Sedgwick and assisted by Chaney) use primitive colour techniques to saturate the ball with brilliant scarlets and less obtrusive greens. Many scenes throughout the film are tinted, which was common enough in silent days.

The Phantom of the Opera is not a great film if you are concerned with art and subtlety, depth and message; *Nosferatu* is a world beyond it. But in its fevered melodrama and images of cadaverous romance, it finds a kind of show-biz majesty. And it has two elements of genius: It creates beneath the opera one of the most grotesque places in the cinema, and Chaney's performance transforms an absurd character into a haunting one.

Even Vijay Deverakonda can't save this film!

World Famous Lover

CAST: Vijay Deverakonda, Aishwarya Rajesh, Raashi Khanna, Catherine Tresa, Izabelle, Priyadarshi, Chakrapani.
DIRECTOR: Kranthi Madhav
RATING: ★★

SURESH KAVIRAYANI | DC

Vijay Deverakonda's films are closely tracked for his choice of stories. And so it is with *World Famous Lover*, touted to be an intense romantic love story that is directed by Kranthi Madhav. The film, backed by senior producer K.S. Rama Rao, has four leading ladies romancing Vijay.

Gautam (Vijay Deverakonda) and Yamini (Raashi Khanna) are in a live-in relationship. Gautam quits his job and decides to write a book but faces a severe case of the writer's block. Yamini feels ignored and breaks up. Gautam then starts writing a love story about Seenayya, a coal miner. Gautam sees himself in Seenayya. In this story, he attracted towards his new boss Smitha (Catherine) and neglects his wife Suvarna (Aishwarya Rajesh). He writes another story where he is a business executive in Paris and falls in love with a woman pilot (Izabelle). He compares his life with the stories.

Kranthi Madhav made his mark with his first two films, *Onamalu* and *Malli Malli Idi Rani Roju*, which were critically acclaimed. In *World Famous Lover*, he attempts to tell the story of a writer's anger, emotional turmoil and struggle. The writer puzzles over the story of his life and the stories he is writing.
While this sounds good, Kranthi Madhav doesn't quite manage to project it on screen. The first half is okay, but it all goes downhill



when the film moves to Paris. Also, there is a visible emotional disconnect between the first pair, Vijay and Raashi Khanna. The director portrays the protagonist as very good person but when his girlfriend wants to break up he behaves like Arjun Reddy.
The Seenayya episode which involves Vijay and Aishwarya Rajesh is the highlight of the film

and the characters are lively. And then there is the second half which drags interminably.

When it comes to performances, Vijay Deverakonda once again shows why he is considered one of the most talented actors around — and he does it three times over with different characters and different looks. There is no doubt that he lives any role given to him,

but sadly there is not much in *World Famous Lover* that he can do.

Aishwarya Rajesh is the clear winner among the four leading ladies. Her stunning performance brings the entire episode featuring her alive. She fits the role of the miner's wife perfectly. Raashi Khanna mostly appears sad but she is good. Catherine Tresa as the

woman boss is impressive. Izabelle is just okay. The cinematography is good and Gopi Sundar's music is average.

World Famous Lover is a boring lover and director Kranthi Madhav fails to lift the film. Vijay Deverakonda and Aishwarya Rajesh are the only highlights. Quite a few things are missing, especially the emotional connect.

IN BRIEF

Macron hits out at Russia

Munich: French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday warned that Russia would continue to try to “destabilise” Western democracies by interfering in elections, social media manipulation and other acts of cyber warfare. Moscow would carry out its work “either through private actors, directly through its agencies, or through proxies”, Macron said at the Munich Security Conference. Russia has been accused of interfering in a string of elections, most notably the 2016 vote that put US President Donald Trump in the White House and Britain’s Brexit referendum.

Eight killed in Mexico shooting

Mexico City: The bodies of eight slain men were found in southern Michoacan state on Friday, the same day President Andrs Manuel Lpez Obrador visited the state to celebrate the opening of another National Guard installation there. Authorities said the shooting deaths happened in Huetamo, roughly 250 miles (400 kilometers) southeast of Jiquilpan, where the president celebrated the guard’s new deployment on Valentine’s Day. The men had all been shot with high-powered weapons, official said. A stolen SUV was also found at the scene.

40 killed in central Mali attack

Bamako: Forty people, including nine soldiers, have been killed in a spate of attacks in central Mali, authorities said Friday, with most of the deaths caused by inter-ethnic violence in the deeply troubled region. Thirty-one people were killed in an attack overnight in Ogossagou, a village mainly inhabited by Fulani people where 160 died last March in a massacre blamed on Dogon militiamen, the government said, raising the death toll. About 30 gunmen carried out the new attack, village chief Aly Ousmane Barry said.

1 dead, 40 injured in Berlin shooting

Berlin: One person has been killed and four others were injured in a shooting on late Friday outside a Berlin event venue, German authorities said Saturday. A spokeswoman for Berlin prosecutors said one or more people opened fire outside the Tempodrom, located near Potsdamer Platz in the center of the city, before fleeing the scene. A 42-year-old man was killed, spokeswoman Mona Lorenz told The Associated Press. Four others were injured, some seriously. Lorenz couldn’t confirm whether the injuries resulted from gunfire. Investigators don’t have any indication yet about what motivated the shooting but it doesn’t appear to be terrorism-related, Lorenz said. The incident took place on a square in front of the Tempodrom as a Turkish comedy night was being staged inside.

US CELEBRITY LAWYER AVENATTI FOUND GUILTY

New York, Feb. 15: The celebrity lawyer who represented Stormy Daniels, the porn actress who sued US President Donald Trump, was found guilty of extortion in a Manhattan federal court. The conviction marks an incredible fall from grace for California lawyer Michael Avenatti, who at one point presented himself as a major adversary to Trump. Avenatti was found guilty by a jury of charges related to his attempt to extort millions of dollars from the sports apparel giant Nike. His present situation is a far cry from the dizzy heights of February 2018 to March 2019 when he was the lawyer for Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford. He became a household name during her legal battles with Trump over hush money she received for an alleged tryst with the then-real estate developer in 2006. Reveling in his role as an outspoken critic of the president and darling of America’s left, Avenatti appeared frequently on camera and on social media, raising suspicions that he harbored political ambitions — perhaps even for the White House.

Pompeo: US hasn’t quit global role

US Secretary of State announced that US would finance energy projects in East EU

Munich, Feb. 15: US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday rejected European pessimism about Washington’s retreat from the global stage, saying the death of the transatlantic bond is “grossly overexaggerated”. “The West is winning and we’re winning together,” Pompeo said at the Munich Security Conference. The annual gathering of world leaders, generals and diplomats to discuss security challenges has

been dominated by fears of diminishing Western influence in the face of a more assertive China and Russia. Pompeo spoke a day after German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier suggested the United States rejected “even the idea of an international community” and was acting “at the expense of neighbours and partners”. “Those statements don’t reflect reality. I’m happy to report that the death of the transatlantic alliance is grossly

POMPEO SAID Washington played a key role in keeping Europe safe by reinforcing NATO’s eastern flank on the border with Russia, and had led a multinational effort to defeat the Islamic State jihadist group. “Is this an America that ‘rejects the international community?’” he asked. “The free West has a brighter future than illiberal alternatives.” He also warned of the threats posed by Russia’s territorial ambitions, China’s military buildup in the South China Sea and Iran’s “campaigns of ter-

ror” through proxy conflicts in the Middle East. In a nod to concerns about European reliance on Russian natural gas, Pompeo also announced that the US would finance energy projects in eastern EU countries. “The United States — through our International Development Finance Corporation, and with the support of the US Congress — intends to provide up to USD 1 billion in financing to the Central and Eastern European

countries of the Three Seas Initiative,” Pompeo told the conference. “Our aim is to galvanise private sector investment in their energy sectors.” The pledge comes amid fierce US opposition to Russia’s Nord Stream 2 pipeline, set to double the country’s gas shipments to Germany. Washington believes the pipeline will give Russia too much influence over security and economic issues in western Europe. — AFP

INDIAN COUPLE HELD FOR MONEY LAUNDERING

Toronto, Feb. 15: An Indian-origin couple has been arrested for allegedly running an overseas telephone scam in which crooks posing as tax officials duped people around ₹90.68 crore, a media report said on Saturday. Brampton-based Gurinderpreet Dhaliwal, 37, and his wife Inderpreet Dhaliwal, 36, were arrested here on Saturday and charged with fraud and money-laundering, while an arrest warrant has been issued against their alleged partner Shantanu Manik, 26, who is believed to be in India, City News website, a Canada-based news portal, reported. Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) said that the fraudsters were targeting Canadians since 2014 by calling and identifying themselves as representatives from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) or RCMP, the report said. “The scammers then tell the person on the phone that they owe back taxes, and threaten them if they don’t pay the money back,” the paper reported. The RCMP said that between 2014 and 2019, Canadians lost over 16.8 million (₹90.8 crore) Canadian dollars to the scam and it has resulted in people being very suspicious when the CRA contacts them through legitimate ways. The RCMP said their investigation into the scam uncovered money mules operating in Canada. These mules would be ordered to courier proceeds from the scam to a specific name and address, or drop point, which led investigators to the Dhaliwal couple, RCMP’s Inspector Jim Ogden said. “We have disrupted the necessary flow of money from Canada to India which will have a big impact on the operation and the bottom line of the scammers,” Ogden said. —PTI

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE (RCMP) said that the fraudsters were targeting Canadians since 2014 by calling and identifying themselves as representatives from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) or RCMP

Costume carnival



Revellers wearing masks and period costumes take part in the Venice Carnival at St. Mark’s Campanile on Saturday. — AFP

Pak officials raid Nawaz Sharif’s properties, mother flies to London

Lahore, Feb. 15: Pakistan anti-corruption officials raided the properties of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Lahore on Saturday to collect evidence in a money laundering case, even as his mother left for London to be with her son ahead of his cardiac treatment. An accountability court here has already exempted the 69-year-old Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo from appearing before it in the money laundering case on medical grounds and adjourned the hearing till February 28. “Nawaz Sharif’s mother Shamim Bibi left for London to be with her son while he undergoes heart treatment,” PML-N spokesperson Marriyum Aurangzeb tweeted on Saturday. Aurangzeb said Bibi had been advised not to travel because of her age, 90, and illnesses but she expressed her wish to be present during her son’s treat-

SHARIF EXEMPTED FROM APPEARING IN COURT

Lahore, Feb. 15: An accountability court here has exempted Pakistan’s former prime minister Nawaz Sharif from appearing before it in a money laundering case on medical grounds and adjourned the hearing till February 28 in the matter, according to media reports on Saturday. The 69-year-old Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo is undergoing treatment in London for coronary artery disease. Sharif appealed to the court to extend exemption from personal appearance in proceedings against him

charges. The accountability bureau has accused Sharif of being a direct beneficiary of Chaudhry Sugar Mills and his daughter, Maryam, who was arrested in connection with the case in August along with her cousin Yousuf Abbas, of holding over 12 million shares in the sugar mills. The three-time premier is undergoing treatment in London for coronary artery disease. Sharif was on November 4 last year granted bail on humanitarian grounds by the Lahore High Court in the case. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has accused Sharif of being a direct beneficiary of Chaudhry Sugar Mills and his daughter, Maryam, who was arrested in connection with the case in August along with her cousin Yousuf Abbas, of holding over 12 million shares in the sugar mills. —PTI

China, Vatican hold first meet

Beijing, Feb. 15: The foreign ministers of China and the Vatican have met in the first such high-level encounter between the sides, which do not have diplomatic ties, Beijing’s state media said Saturday. The talks between China’s Wang Yi and Archbishop Paul Gallagher in Munich, Germany, on Friday come as relations between the two sides steadily improve following a landmark agreement on the appointment of bishops in 2018. “Today is the first meeting between the Chinese and Vatican foreign ministers,” Wang said, according to the People’s Daily, the Communist Party mouthpiece. “This is a continuation of the exchanges between China and the Vatican for a period of time. It will open up more space for the future exchanges between the two sides,” he said. Wang called the 2018 agreement “groundbreaking”, adding that it “has achieved positive results”. Wang and Gallagher, who met during the Munich Security Conference, also discussed China’s efforts to contain the new coronavirus epidemic, which has killed more than 1,500 and infected some 66,000 in the country. In a statement, the Vatican said the talks were “cordial” and that contacts between the two sides had seen “positive developments”. Wang and Gallagher “highlighted the importance” of the 2018 deal and reiterated the willingness to continue “the institutional dialogue at the bilateral level to promote the life of the Catholic Church and the good of the Chinese people”. The People’s Republic of China broke relations with the Vatican in 1951. The Vatican is the only European diplomatic ally

WANG AND GALLAGHER, who met during the Munich Security Conference, also discussed China’s efforts to contain the new coronavirus epidemic, which has killed more than 1,500 and infected some 66,000 in the country. **POPE FRANCIS** has recognised seven clergy appointed by China as part of the deal, despite fears the accord would be used by Beijing to further crack down on worshippers outside the official church of self-ruled Taiwan, which is viewed by China as a breakaway province awaiting reunification. China’s roughly 12 million Catholics have for decades been split between a government-run association, whose clergy were chosen by the atheist Communist Party, and an unofficial underground church loyal to the Vatican. But under the terms of the deal agreed in September 2018, both Beijing and the Vatican now have a say in appointing Catholic bishops. The first bishop to be ordained under the deal was Yao Shun of the diocese of Ulanqab in northern Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in August last year. The law in China requires priests and bishops to register and align with the country’s official church. But the Vatican said at the time that the bishop, who it named as Antonio Yao Shun, had also “received the Papal Mandate” at the ordination. Pope Francis has recognised seven clergy appointed by China as part of the deal, despite fears the accord would be used by Beijing to further crack down on worshippers outside the official church. — AFP

OPPOSING IDEAS Synod suggested to allow married men to become priests

Pope Francis sides with traditionalists

Vatican City, Feb. 15: In quashing the idea of married priests in the Amazon, Pope Francis has appeased traditionalists while disappointing progressives who had hoped for a historic turning point in the Catholic church. In his “apostolic exhortation” on the Amazon basin published Wednesday, Francis slammed the door on a progressive proposal offered by the region’s bishops during a synod on the region in October. The synod had suggested that the way to solve a shortage of priests in the remote and inaccessible area was to allow married indigenous men to become priests. Without even mentioning that proposal, Francis instead argued for more missionary priests in the

Amazon and for women and lay people to take on larger roles, falling short of another synod idea to ordain women as deacons in the region. The Argentine pontiff’s thoughts, coming after months of speculation and hand-wringing within the Vatican, were welcomed by some, including a vocal opponent of Francis, German Cardinal Gerhard Mueller. For five years Mueller was in charge of church dogma, holding the key Vatican post of Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith until 2017 — when he was not reappointed by Francis. Mueller saluted the document’s potential for “reducing internal Church factions.” Conservatives within the Church

lacked the audacity that has marked the papacy of the first Jesuit pope. Francis’ document marked a “failure in the reforming impulse of the pontificate,” according to longtime Vatican analyst Marco Politi. The pope, “abruptly slowed down” by a strong and multifaceted opposition, also disappointed those local Amazon bishops whom he had called on to offer up new ideas to help guide the Church, Politi said. “Francis finds himself more alone today, having caused disillusionment among a notable mass of his supporters,” Politi said. Key among them are Catholic feminist organisations, some of whom have been fighting for

women’s access to the priesthood. In his text, Francis cited the contributions of women and argued that their roles be increased, but dismissed the idea of their ordination. Women’s Ordination Worldwide (WOW) said Francis had “dropped the ball” for women within the Church. “Francis has opted to perpetuate the shameful elitist men’s club that, as he so brazenly points out in the document, is held up by the second class status of women who do most of the work with none of the recognition,” the group said in a statement. Meanwhile, Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes, a proponent of priestly marriage, sees the question as still open. — AFP



TAKING TO Twitter, he claimed to be the number one on Facebook, citing a remark of Mark Zuckerberg

IN BRIEF

Mother and baby discharged

Beijing: A 67-day-old baby and her mother, who suffered from the novel coronavirus, were on Saturday discharged from a hospital in China's Guizhou province after being successfully treated, health authorities said. The baby, surnamed Jiang, was brought to central China's Hubei province, the epicentre of the coronavirus epidemic, by her parents on January 16 to spend the Spring Festival holiday. However, Jiang's parents were confirmed infected with the new virus after returning to Guizhou on January 25, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. The baby too developed symptoms of runny nose and cough and later tested positive on February 2 following which they were admitted to the hospital.

Cambodia lauded for docking ship

Sihanoukville: The cruise ship that was allowed to dock in Cambodia after being turned away at five other ports by authorities fearful of the spread of the deadly new virus from China disembarked passengers for a second day on Saturday so they can fly home. After being stranded at sea for two weeks, the MS Westerdam was allowed by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen to dock for what he said were humanitarian reasons. The Cambodian leader's decision won praise from President Donald Trump, who tweeted: "Thank you to the beautiful country of Cambodia for accepting the @CarnivalCruise ship Westerdam into your port. The United States will remember your courtesy!"

Questions tangle control efforts

Washington: Reports one day suggest the respiratory outbreak in China might be slowing, the next brings word of thousands more cases. Even the experts have whiplash in trying to determine if the epidemic is getting worse, or if a backlog of the sick is finally getting counted. Continuing questions about the new virus are complicating health authorities' efforts to curtail its spread around the world. And the United States is taking the first steps to check that cases masquerading as the flu won't be missed, another safeguard on top of travel restrictions and quarantines. How fast is it growing? There's some confusion about that. China's tally reached more than 66,000 cases Saturday, a huge increase from earlier in the week. Why? Chinese health authorities say they changed how they are counting. Instead of waiting for a virus test to confirm someone's diagnosis, they're now counting patients on the basis of their symptoms and lung X-rays. But, the WHO isn't sure that's a good idea.

BEIJING CRAFTS NARRATIVE ON VIRUS OUTBREAK

Beijing, Feb. 15: China's government is purging unpopular local officials and commandeering heroic stories of doctors on the frontline as it tries to shield itself from public rage over the handling of the deadly coronavirus epidemic. Images of doctors and nurses in masks and full protective suits, leaving their families behind to care for patients, have dominated the airwaves. Government censors, meanwhile, have made rare exceptions to allow for criticism online — but mostly when directed at local officials accused of negligence in central Hubei province and its capital Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak. One comment that was allowed to circulate on the Twitter-like Weibo platform declared that "scores should be settled against all the officials in Wuhan after the crisis", which has claimed more than 1,500 lives and infected some 66,000 people. An investigation into health inspectors in neighbouring Hunan province who had leaked residents' personal information also became a trending search on the platform. On Thursday, the political chiefs of Hubei and Wuhan were sacked and replaced with Xi loyalists with security backgrounds. The province's top two health officials were also fired. Senior Beijing law enforcement official Chen Yixin was appointed to manage local efforts against the virus.

China resorts to traditional drugs

Use of these medicines is significant as the virus has no standardised cure

Beijing, Feb 15: China has applied Traditional Chinese Medicine in treating more than half of the confirmed patients of novel coronavirus infection in the country's Hubei province, which is the epicentre of the epidemic, a senior health official said on Saturday. The toll in China's novel coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic has climbed to 1,523 with 143 new fatalities reported mostly from the worst-affected Hubei province while the confirmed cases jumped to over 66,000.

"Since the beginning of the outbreak, the government has attached importance to both Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and Western medicine by mobilising the strongest scientific research and medical forces in both fields to treat the patients," Wang Hesheng, deputy head of China's National Health Commission, said.

Wang said that TCM has been applied in treating more than half of the confirmed patients of novel coronavirus infection in the country's Hubei province. The announcement about the use of TCM for COVID-19 patients is significant as the virus has no standardised cure yet. TCM universities and hospitals across the country have sent 2,220 medical workers to Hubei to help combat the epidemic, Wang said.

The Chinese government has also approved field trials for experimental US antiviral drug, Remdesivir to treat coronavirus patients. "TCM has also been used in the prevention and control of COVID-19 at the community level," Wang said. He emphasised that China is trying to improve the cure rate of patients by coordinating the resources of traditional Chinese and Western medicine.

"By coordinating the resources of traditional Chinese and Western medicine, we strive to improve the cure rate and reduce fatalities by the greatest possible amount to effectively safeguard the safety and health of the people," Wang said. Jiao Yahui, also a senior official at the National Health Commission, said that the combination of traditional and western medicines have shown supportive results. "For severe and critical-



A girl wearing a face mask plays on her scooter at a park in Beijing on Saturday.

— AFP

SINCE WE beginning of the outbreak, the government has attached importance to both Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western medicine by mobilising the strongest scientific research and medical forces in both fields to treat the patients.

WANG HESHENG, deputy head of China's National Health Commission

ly ill patients, antiviral treatment, together with treatment combining traditional Chinese and Western medicine and supportive treatments, such as the use of ventilator, blood plasma from recovered patients and extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO), have shown effect," Jiao said. — PTI

Outbreak spooks Asian places of worship

Manila, Feb. 15: In a popular Catholic church in the Philippines, nearly half of the pews were empty for Sunday Mass.

The few hundred worshippers who showed up were asked to refrain from shaking others' hands or holding them during prayers to prevent the spread of the virus that started in China. In Hong Kong, Cardinal John Hon Tong, wearing a mask, announced the suspension of public masses for two weeks and urged churchgoers to instead watch them online. Buddhist temples, churches and mosques have been ordered closed since January 29 in mainland China, where the new coronavirus strain was first detected in central Wuhan, under an order to avoid

"collective religious activities".

The restrictions and dwindling crowds in religiously diverse places of worship underscore the extent of the scare over the outbreak that has permeated many aspects of life in the hard-hit Asian region. In Japan, where Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines are tourist destinations, a sharp decline in the number of foreign visitors has been a palpable setback. At normally popular Suzumushi, or Crickets, temple, a sign read: Due to the impact of the COVID-19, no waiting expected, using the name given to it by the World Health Organisation.

"We assimilate with parishioners and many other people. We know that the

talk of the town is really this virus and it's obvious that many are scared, said the Rev. Siegfred Arellano, a priest at the Binondo church in the Philippine capital's Chinatown.

Attendance at masses, Arellano said "has really dropped". After consulting health experts, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines announced steps late last month to fight the virus. Churchgoers were advised to avoid hand contact and receive the Eucharist, which symbolises the body of Jesus Christ, in the hand instead of the mouth.

They said holy water should be replaced more often in church stoups and a protective cloth installed on the grills separating priests and worshippers in

confessional boxes.

In Hong Kong, Tong initially approved precautions that included a choice for churchgoers to watch Sunday mass online. Those who opted to go to churches were asked to wear masks and told that singing is suspended, except for short hymns like Alleluia. The new virus is spread through respiratory droplets, according to health officials. He later announced the two-week suspension of masses, saying the move was crucial to suppressing the outbreak and asked Hong Kong's 400,000-strong Catholic community not to panic.

Crowds also have thinned at Bangkok's popular Wat Pho, a centuries-old Buddhist temple complex known for its giant reclin-

ing Buddha. The temple is normally visited by thousands of tourists, many of them Chinese, during the peak travel season from December to February, but large numbers of visitors as well as locals have stayed away since the outbreak began, said Phra Maha Udom Panyapho, a monk in charge of tourism at the temple. A Protestant church in Seoul shut its doors and switched entirely to online worship services after one of its followers tested positive for the virus on January 30.

Other Protestant churches in South Korea have sprayed their halls and rooms with disinfectant, cancelled children's Bible school programmes and asked followers to minimize socialising. — AFP

Cash quarantined to stop spread 67 more test +ve on ship

Beijing, Feb 15: Stepping up efforts to contain the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in the country, China has begun to quarantine large quantity of bank notes in the affected areas and temporarily store some of it in warehouses to ensure that the disease does not spread through cash, a Chinese official said on Saturday. Fourteen-day quarantine has become a norm among people people showing symptoms of COVID-19 in China and many parts of the world since the virus started spreading.

Experts have been asking people to frequently wash hands and face besides wearing masks as basic measure to prevent its spread. The toll in the epidemic climbed to 1,523 with 143 new fatalities reported mostly from the worst-affected Hubei province, while the confirmed cases jumped to over 66,000, Chinese health officials said on Saturday.

Fan Yifei, vice-governor of the People's Bank of China, said money supply in the country would be ensured, with four billion yuan (\$572 million) in new bank notes already allocated to Hubei province, the epicentre of the virus, before the Spring Festival holiday. Fan said the cen-

Tokyo, Feb. 13: Another 67 people have tested positive for the coronavirus on the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan, Health Minister Katsunobu Kato said on Saturday.

The United States said earlier on Saturday it would send an aircraft to Japan to bring back US passengers on the quarantined Diamond Princess, where the most coronavirus infections outside China have occurred.

Japan on Friday began allowing elderly passengers who test negative for the new coronavirus to leave a quarantined cruise ship and finish their isolation in government-designated lodging. Japan's government has given passengers aged 80 or older in poor health or confined to windowless

inner cabins on the Diamond Princess the chance to move from the ship to accommodation on land. But only those who test negative for the virus that has so far infected over 200 people on board the ship have the option to move.

The first of them departed the massive cruise ship on Friday afternoon, travelling in buses with blacked out windows. — AFP

pitals and wet markets were being stored and bank notes and coins sanitised with UV light before they were released back into circulation. The movement of banknotes between major government institutions and enterprises has also been suspended. — PTI

AMERICANS TO BE EVACUATED FROM SHIP

Tokyo, Feb 15: The United States plans to evacuate Americans from the Diamond Princess cruise ship held at a Japanese port, the US embassy said Saturday. Washington will send a plane to Japan for the evacuation on Sunday, it said in a letter to US citizens on board, adding that evacuees will still be required to undergo a further quarantine of two weeks after their arrival in the US. It is not clear when it will depart Japan, but the letter said it will land at Travis Air Force Base, California. "Passengers will be screened for symptoms and we are working with our Japanese partners to ensure that any symptomatic passengers receive the required care in Japan if they cannot board the flight," the letter said. — AFP

KEEPING FIT Runner jogs equivalent of ultra-marathon while cooped indoors

Man runs marathon in apartment

Hong Kong, Feb 15: A fanatical runner jogged the equivalent of an ultra-marathon inside his small apartment as people in virus-hit China desperately try to keep fit while cooped up indoors.

The country is at the centre of an outbreak of coronavirus, leaving more than 1,500 dead and sparking global alarm, but it is also in the grip of a health drive because the government is aggressively encouraging people to exercise

to fight the disease. With much of the 1.4 billion population ordered indoors and gyms closed, people are competing to outdo each other in how many bottles of water they can lift, how many push-ups they can do with their children on their backs or how many flights of stairs they can scale in their tower blocks.

But Pan Shancu has easily won the unofficial gold medal, saying he jogged 66 kilometres (41 miles) in a

loop at home in six hours, 41 minutes. He has the data tracker that he says proves it, and the 44-year-old's feat and a video of him repeatedly circling furniture in his apartment went viral in China.

"I felt a little dizzy at first, but you get used to it after you circle many times," Pan told AFP by telephone from Hangzhou, near Shanghai. Running is like an addiction. If you don't run for a long time, you get itchy feet." — AFP



Pan Shancu jogging at home.

— AFP

SU DO K U

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3			8		4	6	5	
2			7	5				
8			1		3			
		7				3	9	
9	8						7	1
	3	2				6		
			5		2			6
				6	8			7
5	6	3		1				2

WHAT TO DO

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9. Every puzzle has only one correct solution.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

5	2	8	6	4	9	1	7	3
9	6	1	3	5	7	8	2	4
4	7	3	8	1	2	5	6	9
6	8	7	2	3	4	9	1	5
3	1	5	7	9	6	4	8	2
2	9	4	1	8	5	7	3	6
1	3	9	5	2	8	6	4	7
8	5	6	4	7	3	2	9	1
7	4	2	9	6	1	3	5	8

SU DO K U 2

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		7	5		9	3		
				2				
2			7		3			4
1		5	4		8	6		3
		9						1
3		4	6		7	5		9
5			9		6			1
			7					
		3	1		5	2		

Did you think the SU DO K U on the left was easy? Try this. Check the solution tomorrow. Tips available at www.sudoku-ks.com DC AGE SU DO KU FORUM: Discuss the SU DO K U puzzles printed and contribute mind teasers of your own at www.sudokex.com/forum

4	5	2	6	8	3	1	9	7
3	9	7	5	4	1	6	2	8
6	8	1	2	7	9	3	5	4
7	3	9	8	6	4	5	1	2
2	1	4	3	9	5	7	8	6
5	6	8	7	1	2	4	3	9
9	4	6	1	3	8	2	7	5
1	7	5	9	2	6	8	4	3
8	2	3	4	5	7	9	6	1

SHORT TAKES

BCCI gears up for Apex council meet

New Delhi: Finalising calendar for 2020-21 home season, appointment of ethics officer and release of funds to Indian Cricketers' Association (ICA) will be among the items on agenda at BCCI's second Apex Council meeting here on Sunday.

Justice D. K. Jain was appointed the BCCI's first-ever ombudsman in February last year on a one-year term and he also doubled up as its ethics officer, overseeing high-profile conflict of interest allegations against Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, VVS Laxman and Kapil Dev. It remains to be seen if Jain gets an extension or the Sourav Ganguly-led board goes for a fresh appointment.

Another significant item on the agenda of the nine-member Council is the release of funds to ICA, India's first-ever players' association formed as per recommendations of the Supreme Court-appointed Lodha panel. The ICA has been desperately seeking funds from the BCCI since the new dispensation came into power in October. No funding till now means the players' body is without an office and has not been able to meet regularly. In its first meeting in October, the ICA had prepared a tentative budget of ₹15-20 crore.

— PTI

Ishant clears test to join side in NZ

New Delhi: Senior India fast bowler Ishant Sharma on Saturday passed the fitness test at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru and will now join the team in New Zealand for the two-match Test series starting February 21.

"Yes, he (Ishant) has passed the fitness test and he will join the team in New Zealand," a BCCI source said on condition of anonymity. Ishant is expected to fly to Wellington for the first Test.

On January 21, Ishant — four short of becoming only the second Indian fast bowler after Kapil Dev to reach the landmark of 100 Tests — twisted his right ankle while playing for Delhi in a Ranji Trophy match against Vidarbha at the Feroz Shah Kotla here. An official from the Delhi and Districts Cricket Association, based upon an MRI scan, had said that the pacer had suffered a Grade 3 tear in his ankle, and been advised six weeks of rest and rehabilitation.

A BCCI source later said that Ishant will again do his MRI to ascertain the degree of tear and decide on his rehabilitation. Ishant was named in the New Zealand Test squad on February 4 subject to fitness clearance. The 31-year-old is an integral part of India's best-ever pace attack comprising Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammad Shami and Umesh Yadav.

— PTI

Kavya to lead city in one-day tourney

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, FEB. 15

A 16-member squad, led by V. M. Kavya will represent Hyderabad at the Senior Women's one-day tournament to be held from February 18 in Surat.

THE SQUAD: V. M. Kavya (captain), Anuradha Nayak (vice-captain), Mamtha Kanojia, S. K. Shrivanthi Naidu, Shravya G. K. (wicket-keeper), Rachna S. Kumar, B. Shrivani, Anitha K., Trisha G, Varsha Rajak, Yashashree, Lakshmi Prasanna, Pranathi Allapathi, Sai Lekha, Snigdha Sreedhar, Ramya D.

Support Staff: Vidyuth Jaisimha (head coach), Harsha Harinarayan (asst-coach), Anna Mariya (manager), Harsha Gangwal (physio) Gajanan Reddy (trainer).

Atharva, Kale notch up centuries

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, FEB. 15

Riding on Atharva Taide's 136 and M. R. Kale's 143, Vidarbha piled up a massive 320/2 in 81 overs on Day One of their Col. C. K. Nayudu match being played at the Gymkhana Ground in Hyderabad on Sunday.

Batting first, Hyderabad managed to put on 311 from their 93.4 overs. S. R. Dube snared 5/57 from the 22 overs that he bowled. Dube also threw down three maiden overs.

BRIEF SCORES (Day-1): Hyderabad 311 in 93.4 overs (S. R. Dube 5/57 — 22-3-57-5, P. R. Rekha 2/64, Souraj Rai 2/59) vs Vidarbha 320/2 in 81 overs (Atharva Taide 136 batting — 252b, M. R. Kale 143 batting — 186b), Ajay Dev Goud 2/62).



Mohammed Shami (centre) celebrates the fall of a wicket in their first warm-up test against New Zealand XI in Hamilton on Saturday. — BCCI

Bumrah, Shami let it rip

Mohammed, Jasprit share five wickets, NZ bowled out for 235

Hamilton, Feb. 15: Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami gave an exhibition of high-quality fast bowling on day two of India's warm-up encounter against New Zealand XI, sending a warning signal for the home team ahead of first Test in Wellington.

For the record, New Zealand were bowled out for 235 in 74.2 overs but Bumrah (2/18 in 11 overs) and Shami (3/17 in 10 overs) used the conditions well and in the process added miles to their legs ahead of the two World Cup Championship games.

Umesh Yadav (2/49 in 13 overs) and Navdeep Saini (2/58 in 15 overs) bowled more overs but weren't half as good as the two premier pacers who troubled the batsmen in all their spells. With the pitch easing out, Prithvi Shaw (29 batting off 19 balls) unleashed a series of cover drives including a six off a ramp shot while Mayank Agarwal (23 batting off 17 balls) got the maximum with a Nataraja Shot to finish the day at 53 for no loss.

For head coach Ravi Shastri, the basic idea was to check out how his pacers get into the groove and Bumrah and Shami hit the straps straight away in overcast conditions. While Umesh and Saini in their first spells bowled too full, Bumrah pitched deliveries on back of length generating disconcerting bounce. He bowled in three short spells while Shami bowled two spells.

The crafty Shami, after getting a hang that ball wasn't jaggling around too much despite cloud cover, concentrated on getting the ball to seam both ways. Bumrah got Will Young (2) with an angular delivery that straightened after pitching to get a nick that landed in Rishabh Pant's gloves.

The delivery that got right-hander Finn Allen (20) was one that pitched on back of a length and

Task cut out in Kiwi land

Hamilton, Feb. 15: It's clear that India's tour of New Zealand is not a romp in the park as the 5-0 clean sweep in the T20 series may have suggested. The 0-3 drubbing in the ODIs that followed was not just sweet revenge for the home team, but may have also tilted the psychological advantage away from India for the impending Test series.

Of course, limited-overs cricket is vastly different from that played over the five-day format, demanding different skillsets and mindset from players. But momentum plays a huge part in any sport, and India appear to have lost this. Or, to be fairer, New Zealand have regrouped swiftly and come back into the reckoning strongly.

Two days into the warm-up match against New Zealand XI showed that the task ahead in the Test series could be tough for India. On a typical Kiwi pitch, which offered pronounced seam movement and bounce for the fast bowlers, India's batting didn't look as formidable as its is reputed to be.

In the first innings, India scored 263. Even allowing for the fact that Virat Kohli was not in the playing XI, this was a modest score. That India managed to secure a lead of 28 runs (as I write this) redounds to the credit of the fast bowlers, all having some reward to show for their toil.

the batsman played for the bounce, deciding to shoulder arms. However, the ball nipped back and clipped the off-bail much to his dismay.

The second spell that Shami bowled post-lunch was the one that troubled



Ayaz Memon Over The Top

Nevertheless, over these two days highlighted the hardships that Indian could be facing in the two-back-to-back Tests that begin within a week. The warm-up match did not feature New Zealand's major players — Williamson, Taylor, Latham, Watling, Southee and particularly Boult and Wagner — which puts things in perspective.

Kohli's prime concern going into this match was to firm up the best combination for the Tests. With Rohit Sharma injured, an opening partner for Mayank Agarwal had to be found. Both youngster Prithvi Shaw and Shubham Gill are in the squad, and it appeared to be a toss-up between them, except that things didn't pan out so easily.

the New Zealand batsmen including senior international Jimmy Neesham, who was unable to counter the seam movement and extra bounce. Before that he removed the set Henry Cooper (40 off 68 balls) with a fullish delivery that

the batsman wanted to drive.

Once they had bowled enough overs, the duo didn't come out in the final session as they had done their job for the day. The final half an hour was entertaining as Scott

Kuggeliejn and Blair Tickner got some serious pasting from both Shaw and Mayank. — PTI

Shami hits out at Bumrah's critics

Hamilton, Feb. 15: "How can people forget Jasprit Bumrah's numerous match-winning performances just after a couple of indifferent ODI games?" asked a miffed Mohammed Shami on Saturday to counter the criticism levelled at his new-ball partner.

Bumrah went wicketless in all three of India's defeats against New Zealand with questions being raised over his performance. "I can understand we are discussing on a topic (after a certain length of time) not just after 2-4 games. Just because he hasn't performed in two games, you can't just ignore his ability to win matches," said Shami after the second day's play in the warm-up game against New Zealand XI.

"What Bumrah has achieved for India, how can you even forget that or for that matter ignore it? So if you think positively, then it's good for the player and his confidence also," Bumrah's senior partner said after taking an impressive 3 for 18 against New Zealand XI.

The veteran pacer didn't forget to take a dig at critics who he feels have a job to comment, forgetting that Bumrah is coming back from a stress fracture on his lower back. "As a sportsman, it's very different. From outside, it is very easy to nitpick as some have a job to comment and earn money. Every sportsman can get injured and one should try and look at the positives rather than harp on negatives. I also got injured in 2015 (knee surgery) but then bounced back," Shami said.

What baffles Shami is how people's perception changes if a player goes through a sudden slump in form. "People tend to think very differently and when you do not do well for a few games, their viewpoint

about your changes. So on our part, we shouldn't over-think."

Easily the most versatile bowler in the current line-up, Shami enjoys the mantle of an elder statesman who is ready to mentor the likes of Navdeep Saini. Asked about what kind of role experience plays, the Bengal speedster replied: "Experience matters as you then don't panic easily. You have faced different situations and know what to do. That is valuable."

"So when an experienced player is around and you bring a youngster, he matures quickly. So in our team, we guide our youngsters, joke and laugh with them, make them feel comfortable so that they don't feel that there is a distance between seniors and juniors."

He was all praise for Saini, who has been a find for India in white-ball cricket. "He is young, he has got talent, pace and height. So there are benefits. But yes, someone has to guide him and take him along the way. He needs support. He is bowling well but no one possesses experience straightaway. It comes with the passage of time. "Hopefully, it will come soon and we seniors are there to help him."

Having been the best Indian bowler on view during the second day of the warm-up game, Shami seemed happy with the kind of track that was on offer. "It was a bit green and the wicket was damp on the first day compared to the second day. Yesterday (First Day) morning, it was challenging and we wanted to take up that challenge. Today it was drier compared to yesterday, with cloud cover, the conditions became helpful."

"There was good bounce and carry, so felt good bowling on a track. These kinds of tracks are a rarity and since we have pacers of that calibre, we reaped its benefits." For someone with an enviable quality of hitting the seam with ease, Shami said that it was an art that he learnt through sheer hard work and passion.

"When you start working on something, you develop a passion that you have to achieve. I never thought that I will start developing a great seam position but when I realised that a good seam position can help, I just worked on it. "By God's grace, now I can do whatever I want with the seam. If you want to achieve something, passion is pre-requisite. You have to chase that," he added.

— PTI



Jasprit Bumrah

Just because he (Jasprit Bumrah) hasn't performed in two games, you can't just ignore his ability to win matches. What Bumrah has achieved for India, how can you even forget that or for that matter ignore it?

— MOHAMMED SHAMI Indian pacer

Middle-order can improve: Smriti

Dubai, Feb. 15: In-form opener Smriti Mandhana believes India's top four need to bat long to protect the inconsistent middle-order during the ICC Women's T20 World Cup beginning in Australia on February 21.

India's middle-order has been unpredictable and its repeated failures have hurt them. In the 2017 World Cup final, India had lost seven wickets for 28 runs to go down to England by nine runs, while in the recent tri-series final against Australia, they collapsed to 144 all out after being 115 for three at one stage while chasing 155.

"The middle order could definitely improve," said



Mandhana, who became the third Indian to reach 1,000 T20I runs at the 2018 Women's T20 World Cup. "There are some things we still have to figure out with our batting and we are trying hard to do that. The best way to support the middle order is for the top order to bat 20 overs. I think we need to try and bat long as a top four.

— PTI

Playing on Astro-turf helped, says Jaiswal

Mumbai, Feb. 15: Player of the U-19 World Cup, Yashasvi Jaiswal, says practising on astro-turf pitches before the tournament helped him excel on the bouncy tracks in South Africa.

Jaiswal was also the highest run-getter in the tournament with 400 runs in six innings, including an unbeaten hundred against Pakistan in the semifinal. "(His mentor) Jwala Sir had told me that you have to go and bag the player of the series award. We practiced a lot on how to play on bouncy tracks. We practiced on how to play short-balls and that helped me," Jaiswal said on Saturday.



"I was either playing or leaving short-balls. There is bounce on astro-turf wickets like how it is there, so I batted on astro-turf wickets and that worked," said the 18-year-

old, who dedicated his player of the series award to Jwala.

Jaiswal, who is seen as the next young gun to make it big, said during the tournament he also learnt how to bat under pressure. "It was a very good experience, to play in a different country, where the wickets were also different. And I enjoyed batting as I was batting for longer duration in the games as well as in the nets.

"I learnt a lot while playing and also learnt on how to deal with pressure, as pressure was there during most of the games," the left-handed opener said.

— PTI

Vidarbha earn brownie points

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, FEB. 15

Owing to their first innings lead of 61 runs, Vidarbha earned three points in their elite Ranji Trophy Group 'A' match against Hyderabad played at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad on Sunday.

Resuming their innings on 139, the hosts were bowled out for 244 in their second innings as A. S. Saraswate snared 7/121 from his 32.3 overs. A. Wakhare played second fiddle with his 2/70.

At stumps, the visitors were 116/3in 46 overs. Meanwhile, Andhra qualified for the quarter-

finals of the Ranji Trophy despite suffering a crushing eight-wicket defeat at the hands of table-toppers Gujarat in the final Group 'A' match.

BRIEF SCORES

In Hyderabad: Hyderabad 272 in 94.5 overs & 244 in 75.3 overs (K. Sumanth 65 n. o., Mohd Siraj 46, A. S. Saraswate 7/121 — 32.3-5-121-7, A. A. Wakhare 2/70) drew with Vidarbha 333 & 116/3 in 46 overs (Ganesh Satish 47 n. o., S. K. Wath 33 n. o.) **Points:** Vidarbha 3, Hyderabad 1.

In Nadiad: Andhra 177 & 272 in 113.4 overs (Karan Shinde 64, B. Sumanth 47, Axar Patel 7/92) vs Gujarat 406 & 31/2 in 9.5 overs.

SHORT TAKES

Gujrathi jumps to top spot in Prague

Prague: India's no. 2 player Vidit S. Gujrathi posted a win over Austrian GM Markus Ragger in the third round to jump to the top spot in the Masters category of the Prague Chess festival here. India had mixed luck on Friday when P. Harikrishna went down to the talented, young Alireza Firouzja in 40 moves in a Spanish opening game. The India no. 3 came up with some innovative play but the Iranian prodigy had the answers to notch up an impressive win. Vidit Gujrathi trumped Ragger in a Grünfeld game after 46 moves to continue his good run and secured a second win. Top-seeded Jan-Krzysztof Duda of Poland was held to a draw by Sam Shankland (USA). He is in joint second place with Nikita Vitiugov and world's top junior Alireza Firouzja. — PTI

Humpy in joint lead after draw

St Louis, USA: India's Koneru Humpy remained in joint lead with world champion Wenjun Ju with 4.5 points after a drawn game in the seventh round of the 2nd Cairns Cup here. Humpy, the world rapid chess champion, had to settle for a draw with American Irina Krush in the seventh round late on Friday. Dronavalli Harika, the other Indian in the fray, was held to a draw by another American Carissa Yip, who has bounced back strongly after four straight defeats with two wins and a drawn game. Humpy, the Indian no.1, took on Krush in a Nimzo-Indian game and could not force a result as the American held on in 52 moves. Harika with white pieces, was up against Yip who appeared to be regaining her form after a poor start and the two signed the peace treaty after 43 moves. — PTI

Joshna, Saurabh win Nationals

Chennai: There is no stopping Joshna Chinappa and Saurabh Ghosal, it seems. The country's squash aces reigned supreme in the 77th Senior National Championship at the ISA courts here, claiming their 18th and 13th titles respectively. Chinappa, the torch-bearer for Indian women's squash for close to two decades now, showed why she was the one to beat as the top-seeded Chennai player recovered brilliantly after losing the first game to post a 8-11, 11-6, 11-4, 11-7 win over Tanvi Khanna to underline her superiority. She had last year broken the record of 16 national titles held by Bhuvneshwari Kumar. — PTI

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No Euro trips for City

As EPL champs handed two-season European ban

Nyon (Switzerland), Feb. 15: Manchester City have been banned from European competitions for the next two seasons for "serious financial fair-play breaches". Uefa announced on Friday, with the verdict immediately contested by Pep Guardiola's English champions. City, who were also fined 30 million euros (\$32.5 million), announced they were appealing the suspension to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) "at the earliest opportunity".

"Manchester City is disappointed but not surprised by today's announcement by the Uefa Adjudicatory Chamber," the club said. "The... flawed and consistently leaked Uefa process he (the Uefa chief investigator) oversaw has meant that there was little doubt in the result that he would deliver..."

"Simply put, this is a case initiated by Uefa, prosecuted by Uefa and judged by Uefa. "With this prejudicial process now over, the club will pursue an impartial judgment as quickly as possible" at CAS.

Guardiola's City face Real Madrid in this season's Champions League last 16. Announcing the ban a Uefa statement declared: "The Adjudicatory Chamber has imposed disciplinary measures on Manchester City Football Club directing that it shall be excluded from participation in Uefa club competitions in the next two seasons (ie. the 2020/21 and 2021/22 seasons)."

European football's governing body said that City "failed to cooperate in the investigation". "The adjudicatory chamber, having considered all the evidence, has found that Manchester City Football Club committed serious breaches of the Uefa Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations by over-

stating its sponsorship revenue in its accounts and in the break-even information submitted to Uefa between 2012 and 2016," European football's governing body said.

City lost a previous appeal to CAS over Uefa's original decision to refer them to its adjudicatory chamber over the alleged FFP violations. "An appeal would not necessarily lift the suspension but the request can be made," Uefa said.

The investigation into City was based on leaked emails published last year by German magazine Der Spiegel as part of "Football Leaks". Guardiola's City outfit currently sit second in the Premier League table, meaning that the fourth Champions League slot available for English teams would likely go to the fifth-placed club this term.

Sheffield United, promoted to the top flight last year, sit in fifth. It is not the first time that Man City have fallen foul of FFP regulations. — AFP



Manchester City said they would appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport after being hit with a two-season ban from European competition on Friday. — AFP

Guardiola's men face chaos after ban, says former star

London, Feb. 15: Former Manchester City star Rodney Marsh fears the Premier League champions will be thrown into disarray by their shock two-year ban from Uefa competitions. City, currently second behind runaway Premier League leaders Liverpool, have said they will appeal against the punishment through the Court of Arbitration for Sport.



Pep Guardiola

But the damage to City on and off the field could be immeasurable if the ban is upheld. And ex-England forward Marsh, ranked as one of City's greats after his spell there in the 1970s, is concerned the club's Abu Dhabi-based owner Sheikh Mansour could walk away in that case.

"If this decision is upheld it would not surprise me in the meantime there will be speculation about Mansour and the futures of City manager Pep Guardiola and his star players." — AFP

City face an anxious wait to discover if their appeal is successful and in the meantime there will be speculation about Mansour and the futures of City manager Pep Guardiola and his star players. — AFP

BADMINTON ASIA | TEAM C'SHIPS

Indian shuttlers settle for bronze

Manila (Philippines), Feb. 15: Lakshya Sen's stunning win over Asian Games champion Jonatan Christie went in vain as the Indian men's badminton team went down fighting 2-3 to two-time defending champions Indonesia in the semifinals to settle for a bronze at the Asia Team Championships here on Saturday. World No. 31 Lakshya dished out a clinical performance to notch up a sensational 21-18, 22-20 win over world no. 7 Jonatan in the second singles to keep India in the hunt after B. Sai Praneeth retired following a 6-21 thrashing by Anthony Ginting in the opening game of the first singles. Doubles pair of M.R. Arjun and Dhruv Kapila then played their heart out before going down narrowly 10-21, 21-14, 21-23 to three-time world champions and second-ranked Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiawan as Indonesia made it 2-1. 2018 SaarLorLux Open champion Subhankar Dey then shocked World No.20

Indian men thus settled for their second bronze medal, having won the first one at the 2016 Hyderabad edition.

Shesar Hiren Rhustavito 21-17, 21-15 in the third singles as India once again drew level 2-2.

In the deciding second doubles, Chirag Shetty paired up with Lakshya but they were no match for the world no. 1 combination of Marcus Fernaldi Gideon and Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo, who took just 24 minutes to register a 21-6, 21-13 win and seal their place in the finals.

Indian men thus settled for their second bronze medal, having won the first one at the 2016 Hyderabad edition.

Earlier, the 18-year-old Lakshya, who had a stellar run in 2019 with five titles, showed his prowess during his straight-game win over Jonatan, who is one of the top medal contenders at the Olympic Games. — PTI

Russia set to lose 2014 gold medal

Salzburg (Austria), Feb. 15: Russia is set to lose a biathlon gold medal from the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics in a new doping case. The International Biathlon Union on Saturday announced a two-year ban for Evgeny Ustyugov, who was part of the gold medal-winning men's relay team six years ago, citing evidence he used the banned steroid oxandrolone around the time of the Olympics.



Evgeny Ustyugov

His results from the 2013-14 season have been disqualified, including the Olympic victory.

When confirmed by the International Olympic Committee, that will knock Russia off top spot in the Sochi medal table in terms of golds. The host nation would have 10 golds, against 11 for Norway, and 28 total medals, the joint-most along with the United States.

Germany is in line to inherit the relay gold, subject to IOC confirmation.

Ustyugov, who is also facing another anti-doping charge on another matter, denies any wrongdoing and suggested the IBU was unfairly targeting him with a series of investigations.

"I'm no longer surprised. An outrage is an outrage. Time will show who is right," he told the Russian state news agency Tass. — AFP

WOLVES, LEICESTER PLAY OUT GOALLESS DRAW

Wolverhampton, Feb. 15: Nuno Espirito Santo claimed football is in danger of becoming robotic after Wolves were controversially denied by VAR and Leicester's

Hamza Choudhury was sent off in a stormy 0-0 draw at Molineux on Friday. Santo's side thought they had taken the lead when Willy Boly headed

home in the first half, but VAR stepped in to chalk off the goal for the tightest of offside calls against Diogo Jota. Wolves were furious, but the officiating turned

in their favour after half-time as Leicester had a penalty appeal turned down before midfielder Choudhury was sent off for a second booking. — AFP

Walker Bhawna makes Tokyo cut

GANDHARV KAMALA | DC HYDERABAD, FEB. 15

How seldom has it happened that an unseeded competitor goes on to win the top prize, break the national record and make the cut for the Olympics at a national championship?

Bhawna Jat, all of 23, made the world sit up and take notice when she broke through the white ribbon at the finish line as the clock read 1:29:54 — well within the Olympics cut-off of 1:31:00 — in the women's 20km race walk event at the National Championships held in Ranchi on Saturday.

"I was competing with just one aim and that was to win. I ran with vengeance on my mind. I put all my hatred into the 20km race walk and channelled that revulsion into fuel for every step that I took on the course today (Saturday). I certainly wanted to prove my point and I am glad I was able to pull it off," Bhawna said in an exclusive interview with this newspaper after winning gold.

What pushed Bhawna to the brink, that she surpassed her personal best of 1:38:30s — set in October 2019 at the National Open Championships — by close to eight minutes and 40 seconds in less than four months? "I have been a Railways employee since 2016. After winning gold at the All



Bhawna Jat celebrates with her coach Gurmukh Sihag.

India Inter-Railway Athletics Championships in August 2019 in the 20,000m race walk, I was entitled to paid leave of 330 days which was meant to be used for training. But the Divisional Commercial Manager, Howrah, refused to sign my papers that entitled me to get leave of absence for my training. In fact, even a month before the All India Railways meet in August, I was asked to work the whole of July and my timings got affected,"

the Rajasthanian said. "If I had to do something big, I had to make sacrifices. For the National Championship too I had to make the big decision of taking a leave without pay for three months with the Railways. I could not have won or made the Olympics cut if I had not taken leave without pay. It's very difficult to compete without proper training," Bhawna said with a heavy heart. Bhawna, who started as a junior employee with a

salary of ₹21,000 with the Railways in 2016, is entitled to a salary of ₹40,000 after her promotion in 2018. But for the last three months she has not received her salary from the Railways as she was training for the national meet in Jaipur.

When this newspaper tried to get in touch with Mr Rajiv Ranjan, Senior DCM, Howrah, he refused to comment. Bhawna, who hails from a small town called Kabra in Rajasmand, Rajasthan, has a loan of ₹7 lakh on her head that she took for the medical treatment of her eldest brother Raju Kumar. With no salary being credited to her account since November, Bhawna had no choice but to borrow from her relatives for her training, diet, house rent in Jaipur and pay the EMIs against the loan she took for her brother's treatment.

Raju had been diagnosed with a mental disorder five years back. Bhawna's father Shankar Lal Jat is a farmer, her mother Nosar Devi is a housewife and her second elder brother Prakash Chand works as a tyre mechanic in a private firm. "Things were really difficult for me before the event. I had to scramble to make ends meet. But my coach Gurmukh Sihag kept me going. We used to train from 4 am at the ground. The winters in Jaipur are really harsh but it did not deter me from my goal," an emo-

tional Bhawna recalled.

For someone to become an athlete from Kabra is no joke. But how did race walk happen for Bhawna? "When I was 14, my school's PT teacher Hira Lal sir told me, 'If you do well in the race walk, you will land a good job'. Hira Lal sir was my first coach. What started as an excuse to get a job slowly became my passion. Once I started winning medals at the school nationals, junior nationals, junior federation games and inter-university games, I knew I could make it big in race walk," the student of Rajkiya Madhyamik School, Kabra, said.

"In my initial days, I competed barefoot. It was only after I started competing at the national level in 6K that I bought my first shoe," she added. For the Athletics Federation of India, which did not have a camp for women's race walkers last year due to sorry performances by them in various meets; Bhawna's performance has come as a bright spark. "Bhawna's performance in Ranchi is outstanding to say the least. It comes as a welcome surprise for us. Liu Hong's timing at the 2016 Rio Olympics was 1:28:35 seconds and Bhawna finished with 1:29:54. If she continues this way she could very well be a medal prospect for India at Japan," Adille Sumariwalla, the AFI president said.

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