



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE BIHAR MODEL

Assembly resolution against NRC by JD(U)-BJP government brings a welcome touch of moderation, shows a way

ON TUESDAY, EVEN as communal violence sparked by the new, discriminatory citizenship law raged in parts of the national capital, Bihar took an important step in the right direction. Its assembly unanimously passed a resolution against the proposed National Register of Citizens and for a National Population Register in its 2010 format — that is, an NPR which does not include questions that have stoked fears of it being a first step to the NRC. With this resolution, Bihar became the first NDA-ruled state to come out against the NRC. To be sure, Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself had, in a rally in December, sought to distance his government from the proposal of a nation-wide NRC, which, in tandem with the CAA, has been sharpening anxieties, especially among the Muslim minority. Even so, the fact that Nitish Kumar helmed an unambiguous move that puts his government in the company of states like West Bengal and Kerala on the citizenship issue — even though Nitish continues to support the CAA — and that the state BJP acquiesced and participated in it, is significant. Bihar may even have suggested to India a possible way out of an implacable controversy.

It may well be that hardheaded realpolitik lay at the bottom of the Bihar resolution on Tuesday, not lofty principle or heartfelt anguish at the evident damage being wreaked by the CAA-NRC issue on the country's social fabric. For Nitish, this may well be an apt moment to prod and stake out a bargaining position with partner BJP — the countdown has begun for assembly elections later this year in Bihar and, after successive defeats in Jharkhand and Delhi, and underwhelming showings in Haryana and Maharashtra, the BJP looks more vulnerable in the states than it has in a long time. The NRC issue also presents Nitish an opportunity to gesture to a Muslim vote that is significant in terms of its numbers and is being wooed by rival parties. On its part, the BJP may have been outsmarted or overtaken by Nitish, or it may have fallen in with his plans because it calculates that, having lost the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, it cannot afford to alienate another important ally in a crucial state. Whatever be the reason, and whatever the motives of the players, however, the Bihar resolution is very welcome. At a time when the citizenship debate has become the trigger and pretext for communal polarisation and violence, and precious lives have been lost, it brings a reassuring touch of moderation.

The BJP must build on this moment in the state. It must invoke the PM's statement in December, and now the Bihar assembly resolution, to walk back from the spectre of a nationwide NRC, and to reach out to a minority community that is feeling fearful and insecure. In this volatile moment, it is imperative that the Centre takes its cue from Bihar.

RIGHT TO DUE PROCESS

By denying legal representation in sedition cases, bar associations in Karnataka obstruct justice

UNDER THE RULE of law, no citizen can be denied the right to consult and to be defended by a legal practitioner of her choice. Therefore, by labelling those accused of sedition as "anti-national" and denying them the right to legal representation, bar associations in Karnataka's Hubli and Mysuru stand accused of disregarding due process. First, the state slaps cases of sedition for flimsy reasons that would not stand the scrutiny of law and arrests individuals. Then, lawyers deal a body blow to possibilities of justice by preventing any lawyer from representing them in court. Apart from disallowing local lawyers to take up cases, bar associations have physically assaulted lawyers who have travelled to smaller cities to file applications seeking bail.

The cab-rank rule or the common practice of law that forbids a lawyer from refusing any brief based on personal opinions or biases is codified in the rules framed by the Bar Council of India. The Standards of Professional Conduct and Etiquette bind a lawyer to accept "any brief in the Courts or Tribunals or before any other authorities in or before which he proposes to practise at a fee consistent with his standing at the Bar and the nature of the case." An advocate has to justify the special circumstances for refusing a particular brief. "Every person, however wicked, depraved, vile, degenerate, perverted, loathsome, execrable, vicious or repulsive he may be regarded by society has a right to be defended in a court of law and correspondingly it is the duty of the lawyer to defend him," Justice Markandey Katju wrote in a 2010 judgement of the Supreme Court. In *A S Mohammed Rafi vs State Of Tamil Nadu*, the court called the resolution passed by the Coimbatore Bar Council to not represent certain accused "wholly illegal and against all traditions of the Bar."

This week, Supreme Court judge Deepak Gupta reiterated that resolutions that forbid legal representation amount to obstruction of justice. A strong message from the legal community — both courts and eminent practitioners — is needed to ensure that such actions are not normalised. In 2016, lawyers who assaulted Kanhaiya Kumar and journalists in the Patiala House Court complex, barely a kilometre away from the Supreme Court, went scot-free despite the top court's intervention. Fortunately, this time, the Karnataka High Court has intervened to ensure that the rights of accused are protected. It has rightly summoned office-bearers of the Hubli Bar Association for passing resolutions defying their professional codes and flouting Supreme Court judgements.

RESET AND REPEAT

Whether or not Ivanka Trump intended to be a hero of sustainable fashion, her dress sent an important message

WAS IVANKA TRUMP making a statement about sustainable fashion when she repeated an outfit on her recent India visit? The floral print Proenza Schouler dress that she wore on her first day in India was one that she had previously worn on a visit to Argentina in September last year. It made her only the latest celebrity to repeat an outfit, a list that includes the Duchesses of Cambridge and Sussex and former US First Lady Michelle Obama. Clearly, wearing the same dress again — and again — is no longer a fashion faux pas.

Whether or not Trump intended to become the latest hero of sustainable fashion, the message telegraphed by her dress is important. Multiple studies have shown that the fashion industry is one of the top contributors to environmental damage. Processing units, which use toxic chemicals, are amongst the worst polluters of water sources. Fashion is also notoriously thirsty. A kilo of cotton, for example, guzzles an average of 10,000 to 20,000 litres of water. And then there's the waste problem. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, "fast fashion" has contributed to textile waste growing by over 800 per cent since the 1960s. Much of this is synthetic textile waste and, to rewrite fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent, fashion fades, but fashion waste is eternal.

In fact, data on fashion's carbon footprint should be enough to scare consumers into questioning how their trendy — and cheap — outfits are produced and how they're disposed. To put things in perspective, about one load of polyester, made using fossil fuel, releases roughly 7,000,000 microplastic fibres with each wash; these are among the microplastics that have been found even in the Mariana Trench. Compared to finding that last season's rayon jumpsuit ended up in the belly of a deep sea-dwelling fish, surely repeating an outfit a few times is a lesser horror.

Spectacle and substance



NAVTEJ SARNA

President Trump's visit had the right optics. Attention must now turn to India-US priority areas

IN PROTOCOLLORE, it is said that there is no perfume sweeter than the one that emanates from a departing VIP aircraft. The truth of this must have been very evident to Indian diplomats when US President Donald Trump's Air Force 1 took off on Tuesday night and they could unhook their bandgala collars. A US president's visit, with huge logistic and security demands, is a difficult one at any time; that of a president like Trump, given his penchant for unpredictability and the disruptive tweet, even more so. Added to that was the challenge of a massive outstation public event and the involvement of multiple agencies. Even as the unfortunate violence in Delhi divided global media attention, the visit itself went according to script: Trump stayed exceptionally close to message, consciously eschewing controversy. As one insider remarked, "the only surprise was that there was no surprise".

Cynics are apt to downplay such visits as "all optics, low on substance". But high-level visits are not always about big agreements, particularly when relationships have matured and things are generally ticking along. "Optics" also serve their purpose: Leaders are human beings and appreciate a warm welcome, a large turnout, courtesy shown to their family, the effort that goes into a special event. Trump's personality lends itself eminently to such gestures. As he said during the Namaste Trump rally: "From this day on, India will always hold a very special place in our hearts."

With a successful visit under the belt, attention must now turn to the substance. At least four priority areas stand out.

First, the divisive issue of trade. We did well to ensure that the absence of even a limited trade deal did not upset the visit. To that extent, trade issues have, at least for now, been boxed into the larger framework. But make no mistake: Trade remains crucial for Trump. In his press conference, he returned to his pet peeves — India's high tariffs and Harley Davidson. These issues need to be finessed once and for all with a quick limited

agreement and initial work should be launched for a more comprehensive deal.

Clarity on our policies on data localisation, e-commerce and digital payment platforms is important. The right balance between protection and global engagement, critical for foreign investment, needs to be arrived at. Indian corporates need not be chary, as is their wont, of talking up their investment and job numbers in the US. This, along with the expanding energy relationship, can become important counters in the trade relationship. An additional caveat on the energy relationship: Recent focus has almost all been on hydrocarbons, and now coal. While this is fine in Trump's regime, and will please his backers, our focus on renewables needs to be back on the table, both for our commitment to climate change and to hedge against adverse Democratic comment.

Clearly, President Trump, while condemning radical Islamic terrorism is couching his pressure on Pakistan in positive terms, no doubt with an eye on the forthcoming Afghan deal for which Pakistan's support is essential. India, while being prepared for some backsliding on Pakistan, would have to guard its interests in Afghanistan during the intra-Afghan talks so that all the democratic gains of the last two decades are not lost in America's rush to cut a deal with the Taliban and depart.

Second, the defence and security relationship. President Trump made a strong pitch for American arms industry, offering to provide the best and most lethal of American weaponry to India; he was clearly satisfied with the \$3 billion helicopter deal. While India needs sophisticated defence technology, several aspects need to be ironed out. India as a major defence partner cannot only be a buyer, nor just a junior partner in the Indo-Pacific. Transfer of technology and co-production aspects need to be addressed squarely, including with a view to making India a production hub for South, South-east Asia and Africa. Building on the STA (1) status, further legislative adjustments, including the amendment of The Arms Export Control Act, need to be carried out to give more predictability and reliability to supplies. The Defence Trade and Technology Initiative needs to focus on platforms and systems most relevant to our strategic convergences. It is also a good time to drive home the point that India will continue to have defence relationships with other powers. The US establishment needs to recognise this so that we do not have the somewhat bizarre situation

of a major defence partner living under the threat of sanctions for purchasing Russian equipment.

Third, terrorism and Pakistan. The strongly worded Joint Statement condemns cross-border terrorism and calls on Pakistan to ensure that no territory under its control is used to launch terrorist attacks, and to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of such attacks — including 26/11 Mumbai and Pathankot. But though joint statements are issued in the names of the leaders, these are rarely seen by them. Hence, the salience attached to Trump's own statements on Pakistan, which appear more forgiving.

In Ahmedabad, Trump called his relationship with Pakistan "a very good one" and said that the US is "working in a very positive way with Pakistan" on terrorism; in his press conference he said "I have a very good relationship with the Prime Minister Khan. Very good."; at the joint press appearance he said "The US is also productively working with Pakistan to confront terrorists who operate on its soil". Clearly, President Trump, while condemning radical Islamic terrorism is couching his pressure on Pakistan in positive terms, no doubt with an eye on the forthcoming Afghan deal for which Pakistan's support is essential. India, while being prepared for some backsliding on Pakistan, would have to guard its interests in Afghanistan during the intra-Afghan talks so that all the democratic gains of the last two decades are not lost in America's rush to cut a deal with the Taliban and depart.

Finally, after the hype of the Trump spectacle, some grunt work will need to be done with the Democrats, and also with the liberal US media, to ensure that the bipartisan consensus on India is restored and the visit is not perceived as an electoral backing of Trump. From now to November can be a long time in US politics and the Democrats still control the House.

The writer is former Ambassador of India to the US, UK and Israel



SURANJALI TANDON

NO GAINS FOR TAXPAYERS

Budget proposals on tax slabs and dispute resolution are unlikely to gain traction

AHEAD OF THE Union budget, taxpayers had anticipated a wide range of measures that they hoped would stoke demand. These ranged from lower tax rates to a more even tax structure on income from various sources. As the former was less feasible given the fiscal constraints, the budget proposals focused on simplification and providing ease to the taxpayer.

The recalibration of personal income tax slabs was suggested as a step towards simplification. However, its uptake is contingent on the preference for new slabs. Switching over to the new slab rates is not beneficial to an individual currently claiming full exemptions or with incomes comprising largely of capital gains. It is possible, however, that individuals do not claim such exemptions or deductions. An analysis of data published by Central Board of Direct Taxes suggests that for the assessment year 2018-19, if individuals do switch over to the new regime, it may translate to a 1 per cent improvement in tax collections, rather than a loss. It can be inferred that this option may be exercised by few individuals, if at all, since the potential gains from foregoing exemptions and the intended simplification is expected to be limited.

A common concern among taxpayers is protracted disputes. To reduce litigation, a new scheme has been proposed. My work on transfer pricing disputes reveals that 39 per cent of the cases made a reference to a similar case in the previous year. This underscores the importance of precedence. In such cases, settlement is not a superior option as the waiver of the penalty and interest does

not offer any advantage against a decision that would impact future assessment. Further, the success rate of the tax department is 27 per cent at the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT) and the Supreme Court and 12 per cent in appeals filed in high courts. Given the odds of success, an assessee may thus be tempted to pursue litigation. Thus taxpayers may choose to settle for the waiver of interest and penalty in cases where it is one time and does not set a precedent for future transactions.

The other significant change is in taxation of dividends. The dividend distribution tax is a unique levy on distributed profits and is payable by the distributing company. The shortcoming of such tax is that foreign investors can't claim credit. Further, in an effort to make the tax progressive, an additional dividend tax of 10 per cent was introduced for domestic investors receiving dividend in excess of Rs 10 lakh. Changes in DDT were accompanied by a decline in dividend pay-out — the proportion of profits paid as dividends declined from 30 per cent in early 2000s to 22 per cent in 2019 (BSE 500 companies). It is expected that the reversion to the classical system may improve dividends payouts. However, this will benefit individual taxpayers with incomes below Rs 5 lakh as the slab rate applicable is less than the existing rate.

In the international arena, India is determined to tax cross-border incomes. The addition of explanation 3A to the Income Tax Act reinforces India's commitment to taxing digital companies. The proposed amend-

ment clarifies that incomes related to advertisement, sale of data of a person residing in India and sale of goods and services based on the data of a person residing in India, may be attributed to a business with nexus in India. Further, to tax Indian citizens that are not taxable in any other jurisdiction, the Act will now deem such individuals as resident taxable in India. While the application of the law may be challenged giving rise to disputes, it is a step forward.

The finance minister also referred to introducing a citizen's charter that incorporates taxpayer's rights and obligations. International experience shows that charters have limited enforceability unless adopted in primary legislation. Introducing it to the statutes may, therefore, prove to be a positive initiative. However, the devil lies in the detail. Faith can be built through enforcement of the charter. However, the penal provisions must be well-thought out so as to avoid adding another contentious element.

The budget proposals aimed to provide simplicity, yet much remains to be done, given the lack of uniformity in taxation of incomes such as capital gains. The success of schemes proposed is contingent on the traction they gain. As for the revenue implications, the impact of these measures may in fact be limited. Loss expected from lower tax rates may be countered by gains from the settlement of cases, higher dividend taxes on top incomes, and the wider scope for taxing international incomes.

The writer is assistant professor at NIPFP



FEBRUARY 28, 1980, FORTY YEARS AGO

JAGJIVAN RESIGNS

JAGJIVAN RAM RESIGNED from the leadership of the Janata Parliamentary Party following the party chief, Chandra Shekhar's letter of censure of his recent "shifting of position" which was "unworthy of a person who shoulders responsibility of the leader of the parliamentary party". Ram said he had resigned to "help the party elect a new leader". He gave no reason in his letter to the deputy leader of the JPP, Madhu Dandavate. Ram's resignation was announced by the party chief during a meeting of the national executive, which was discussing the dual membership issue raised by him on Monday and by the Jana Sangh faction on Tuesday.

BIHAR KILLINGS

ALTHOUGH THERE HAS been no fresh trouble in Pipra village, where Monday night's tragedy took 14 lives, the situation is still tense despite the visit of VIPs, including the Union Home Minister Zail Singh and Bihar Governor AR Kidwai. Singh favoured the appointment of a special judge to dispose of the case. Fourteen Harijans, including women and children, were killed by local landholders, allegedly from the Kurmi community.

AFGHAN PLAN

THE SOVIET UNION appears to be inclined towards Lord Carrington's "neutralisation" plan for Afghanistan provided certain con-

ditions are met. The plan, still in its draft stage, has received the backing of nine European Community foreign ministers. US President Jimmy Carter has said that he would help guarantee a non-aligned government in Kabul if Russia withdrew its troops.

TITO IS GRAVE

THE LATEST MEDICAL bulletin on the state of the health of Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito referred to unspecified "bleeding". Doctors said the condition of their 87-year-old patient remained "grave". The doctors had said earlier that they were unable to cure the pneumonia which Tito contracted last week.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Dishonouring a pledge

Events in Delhi have taken a high toll. Apex court and government must act urgently to restore confidence, and to ensure that minority rights do not remain on paper



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

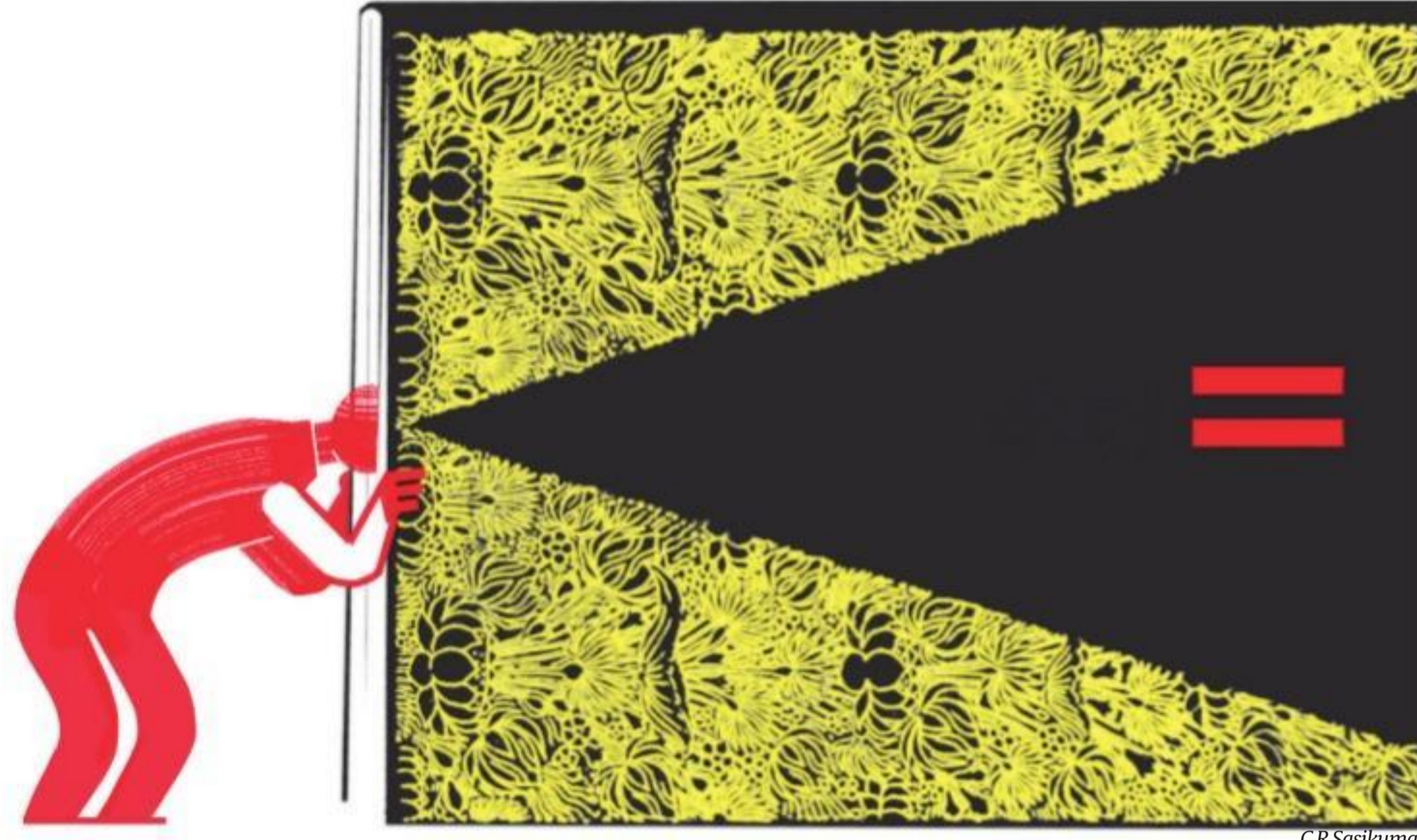
THE 32ND US president, Franklin D Roosevelt, once said, "No democracy can long survive which does not accept as fundamental to its very existence the recognition of the rights of minorities". More than 30 people have lost their lives in the violence in Delhi, houses have been torched and an entire market set on fire. But the visual that is likely to haunt people is of the desecration of the Badi Masjid in Ashok Nagar — it has evoked memories of the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992.

The Supreme Court has condemned the Delhi Police for its lack of professionalism. The Delhi High Court has also observed that it could not permit a repeat of the genocide against the Sikhs in 1984. The Muslim community has accepted the SC's verdict on the Babri Masjid, even though it was flawed in more than one respect. Now, less than four months after the verdict, a mosque was vandalised in Delhi. In medieval times, Muslim rulers demolished temples. But there was no Constitution at that time.

The visionary framers of the Constitution were conscious of the insecurities of the minorities and, therefore, provided them the right to propagate and practise their religion freely, and assured protection to their places of worship. Mahatma Gandhi went to the extent of saying that the claim of a country to be civilised depends on the way it treats its minorities. Moving the resolution in the Constituent Assembly to set up an Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights and the Rights of Minorities, G B Pant said: "The satisfactory solution of questions pertaining to minorities will ensure the health, vitality and strength of the free State of India... Unless the minorities are fully satisfied, we cannot make progress; we cannot even maintain peace in an undisturbed manner."

The object of Articles 25 to 30 is to preserve the rights of religious and linguistic minorities. Yet, during campaigns in election after election in the past five years, Muslims have been painted as "anti-nationals" who threaten the majority community. References to the Pink Revolution during the run-up to the 2014 general election, the threat to deport all illegal Bangladeshi immigrants during the campaign for the Assam elections in 2016, describing them as "termites", and the slogan of "Goli maaro..." during the campaign for the Delhi Assembly elections are part of a systematic hate campaign. AIMIM leader Waris Pathan is also guilty of delivering a hate speech, though he has apologised and withdrawn his statement — unlike Anurag Thakur or Kapil Mishra.

On Tuesday, the Allahabad High Court had to stop a lower court in Varanasi from proceeding with a case filed in 1991 pertaining to the Gyanvapi mosque that was constructed after the demolition of Kashi Vishwanath temple by Aurangzeb in 1664. Even the SC's Babri judgment admitted that the Places of Worship Act, 1993 "preserves non-retrogression" as an essential feature of the country's secular values. The court observed: "The Places of Worship Act is intrinsically related to the obligations of a secular state. It reflects the commitment of India to the equality of all religions. Above all, the Places of Worship Act is an affir-



CR Sasikumar

mation of the solemn duty which was cast upon the state to preserve and protect the equality of faiths as an essential constitutional value, a norm which has the status of being a basic feature of the Constitution."

The Act provides for maintaining the religious character of all places of worship on August 15, 1947. The Court, therefore, observed that "the law speaks to our history and to the future of the nation. Historical wrongs cannot be remedied by the people taking the law in their own hands. In preserving the character of places of public worship, Parliament has mandated in no uncertain terms that history and its wrongs shall not be used as instruments to oppress the present and the future."

The SC also referred to an incident in December 22-23, 1949 when some Bairagis forcibly entered the Babri Masjid and idols of Lord Ram were surreptitiously installed under the mosque's central dome. It said that the installation of idols "led to the desecration of the mosque and the ouster of the Muslims otherwise than by the due process of law".

The apex court also took a strong view that the Babri Masjid was demolished despite the promises made to it by the then BJP Chief Minister Kalyan Singh. Interestingly, however, the SC has not yet punished Singh for contempt of court. Without mincing words, the five-judge bench headed by then Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi observed that "the destruction of the mosque and the obliteration of the Islamic structure was an egregious violation of the rule of law".

Two people accused of demolishing the Babri Masjid are now members of the new Ram Mandir trust. If this is not rewarding the mosque's demolition, what is? In fact, there has not been much progress on the criminal case pertaining to the destruction of the Babri Masjid despite the apex court's orders.

A fact that has not been much talked of is that the SC itself was repeatedly requested to stop the *kar seva* leading to the demolition of the Babri Masjid. It was informed about the weapons of demolition reaching Ayodhya in big numbers in the run-up to the mosque's demolition. But it seems to have made an error of judgement. In 2017, in *State of Gujarat v. I.R.C.G.*, the SC refused to ask the Gujarat government to pay compensation for the desecration and destruction of 567 religious places, including mosques, dargahs and khankahs during the 2002 riots, though the Gujarat High

By not hearing petitions on the constitutionality of the CAA, not taking cognisance of the inept handling by the Delhi Police of atrocities against the students, the apex court has overlooked the gravity of the situation. The SC had stayed the acceptance of the Mandal Commission's recommendation of reservation for OBC reservations because there had been protests by upper castes. A stay on the CAA would have ended the nationwide protests. Today, minorities are really living in fear.

Court had ordered the state government to get these religious places repaired or reimburse their owners/managers if they had already got them repaired. In this case, the two-judge bench headed by Justice Dipak Misra and Justice P C Pant ignored the view of a nine-judge bench in the privacy judgment that fundamental rights are to be read together, and not in silos. The two-judge bench also took the view that compensation can be given only when the right to life and personal liberty is violated — and not for the violation of other fundamental rights. As a matter of fact, compensation was sought for the failure of state to protect religious places.

The court also pointed out that Article 27 would be violated if a secular state contributed towards the repair of religious places. But it seems to have overlooked that under Article 290A, the state of Kerala provides Rs 46.5 lakh annually to the Travancore Devaswom Fund and Tamil Nadu gives Rs 13.5 lakh to the Devaswom fund for the "maintenance of Hindu temples". Several states spend huge amounts of money on religious places including temples, mosques, madrasas and churches.

By not hearing petitions on the constitutionality of the CAA, not taking cognisance of the inept handling by the Delhi Police of atrocities against the students, the apex court has overlooked the gravity of the situation. The SC had stayed the acceptance of the Mandal Commission's recommendation of reservation for OBCs because there had been protests by upper castes. A stay on the CAA would have ended the nationwide protests. Today, minorities are living in fear. The promises made to them in the Constitution in Articles 25 to 30 are broken with impunity. In the words of Justice H R Khanna, in the *Ahmedabad St Xavier's College* judgment (1974): "... these provisions enshrined a befitting pledge to the minorities... As long as the Constitution stands as it is today, no tampering with those rights can be countenanced. Any attempt to do so would be not only an act of breach of faith, it would be constitutionally impermissible..."

Let the apex court and government restore the confidence of the minorities so that these rights do not remain on paper.

The writer is vice chancellor, NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad. Views expressed are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Global community must have the courage to call out the Indian state for its bigotry." — DAWN

Disenchantment in Paris

Decline in Emmanuel Macron's popularity, his protracted battle over pensions in France, are a cautionary tale on perils of personality-driven politics



KAPIL KOMIREDDI

PROTEST, LIKE CRUELTY to animals, is an essential aspect of French national life. Yet last December seemed intolerable even for a people accustomed to the theatre of disruption. Emmanuel Macron's decision to overhaul France's pension system brought half a million enraged citizens on to the streets. Christmas became a casualty of nationwide strikes. Trains halted. Trucks piled with produce and goods sat still on clogged highways. Parisian restaurants overflowing with a surplus of supplies for the festive season scrambled for staff and diners. Office-goers took expensive taxi rides to work or walked for hours. Macron, two years ago the great hope of Europe, sealed himself in the Elysees Palace as the most potent domestic challenge to his presidency intensified beyond its gates. Édouard Philippe, his prime minister, told parliament that the government was not going to back down. Its determination to revamp pensions, Philippe declared, was "total".

Macron's winnowing band of admirers claim to be flabbergasted by the president's decision, after being bruised by the *Gilets Jaunes* uprising triggered by soaring fuel prices, to expend his shrunken political capital on something as combustible as pensions. But it's far from surprising that he elected to have a showdown with France's formidable unions in pursuit of a cause that exhausted his predecessors. The race to reform is animated by a triad of Macronian fixations. The first is vanity: He wants to succeed where others failed. The second is the financier's obsession with balancing the books: A deficit of about 3 billion Euros which he wants to plug. The third is the president's messianic belief that he alone can impart discipline to what he calls a nation of "slackers".

The disparities in the pension system created an opening for Macron to brand his move as a fight for fairness. French workers and employers make mandatory "pay as you go" contributions towards retirement plans managed, for the most part, jointly by representatives of both parties. There are private options on offer, but they do not grant workers a say in the management of their contributions. The system, having grown intractably complicated over seven decades, now has 42 pension programmes. Some, allowing early retirement, are more generous than others. Employees of France's state-owned railway company SNCF, for instance, are able to retire between the ages of 52 and 57. Macron cast them as the chief villains in his campaign to replace the existing regime with a points-based system which will raise the age of retirement.

The man who won office in 2017 by rhapsodising about hope resorted to inciting mass resentments and pitting workers against each other. Having given a generous

cut to the richest families in France in his inaugural budget — and made up for loss of revenues with spending cuts — he scoffed at the "privileges" of the French working class. From Asia to Europe, the tragedy of labour unions and workers' movements is the ease with which they have crumbled under the burden of such tactics. The French, to their credit, resisted. Macron's plan to foster division among workers did not work.

The fact that the unions have not alienated the general public despite their incessant striking may be the result partly of the suspicion Macron evokes. A millionaire former investment banker, he appreciates the minutiae of the financial system. And he exhibits a kind of exasperation that comes naturally to people who believe they have figured everything out.

Macron's opponent, Marine Le Pen, was a big part of the reason he looked like a fount of hope in 2017. But strip away the slick rhetoric and ignore the extremely useful foil supplied by Le Pen, and Macron is, at his core, a technocratic fiscal conservative with a penchant for showmanship who became an unlikely beneficiary of a peculiar moment in history. The young people who marched under the standard of Macron's *En Marche* knew what the movement was not: It was not right wing and it was not left wing. What it actually was nobody knew.

After the election, the *hautueur* of the high-achiever, powered into office by platitudes, mutated into hubris. His presidency hasn't halted the rise of France's far-right. If anything, it has accelerated the disillusionment of the French electorate. To Le Pen, Macron is the last gasp of a dying old order. She has rebranded her party — environmentalism is now a key plank of National Rally — and the obliteration of the old parties by Macron has removed the conventional obstacles to her ascent. Left-wing voters who could always be counted on to vote for right-of-centre candidates in order to keep out the far-right, now orphaned, are ripe targets for Le Pen.

A quarter of a century ago, similar protests seized France. Alan Juppé, the prime minister at the time, was set on pushing through reforms to pensions. He had the support of his boss, president Jacques Chirac, who refused to backtrack and announced he had not been "elected to organise the decline of France". It was Chirac's mentor, Charles Pasqua, who tempered his hot-headed protégé. "The government tells our people that the only objective is to fight against deficits and debt," Pasqua said. "But you cannot run this country as you would run a board of directors. The French need dreams, they need hope, and they need passion." Chirac had the wisdom to withdraw. Macron, an interloper in politics, cannot bring himself to do that. Despite minor concessions by the government in recent weeks, Macron's MPs are deserting him in the National Assembly. Even his prime minister has floated a campaign to be elected mayor of the northern port city of Le Havre — an insurance policy that bespeaks the perils of investing hope in personality.

Komireddi is the author of *Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India*



BHUPENDER YADAV

The guilty of Delhi

Opposition has stoked fears and passions, and tried to misguide the people

THE LAST FEW days have been tumultuous for the residents of Delhi, with violence breaking out in parts of the city. It is sad that instead of dousing the fire that it started for political gains, the opposition is busy stoking it further and blaming the BJP in a clear bid to misguide people.

The theory that the Congress and other opposition parties are trying to push is that it is the BJP which instigated violence because it is a communal, anti-Muslim party. This is the same theory that the Congress has been pushing for decades. It is still at it because the party has nothing new to offer. Post-Independence, the Congress has existed by feeding on the insecurities of religious and sectarian communities. This is not part of the BJP's ethos, which stands committed to "sabka saath, sabka vikas and sabka vishwas", coined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

It is important for the BJP to puncture holes in the theory that the opposition is pushing, not for political one-upmanship but to differentiate fact from fiction.

The timing of the spurt in violence itself is indicative of who stands to gain from it. The clashes began on Sunday night, just hours before US President Donald Trump was to land in India. It served the Congress well to try and embarrass the government on the global stage.

Opposition leaders, who have a vested interest in keeping Delhi on the boil, have gone to town referring to the speeches made by some BJP leaders as "provocative". None of these people care to take into account that those speeches have been condemned at the highest level of the party, with Home Minister Amit Shah himself speaking out against them. Blaming "provocation" for what is unfolding in Delhi is a clever diversionary tactic. The violence seems to be well-orchestrated with ample crude bombs, handguns and stones being stocked. The preparations to disturb Delhi's peace had been underway for months.

The people who armed the rioters are the same people who have been misguiding the masses to protest in Shaheen Bagh since mid-December. The government's handling of the Shaheen Bagh protest was so deft that the opposition found itself outsmarted. The opposition also instigated protests in Muslim majority areas in the name of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).

The CAA was passed by Parliament. Opposing it is tantamount to opposing the democratic values on which India was built. The violence we are seeing in Delhi is a result of the fear being spread among Indian minorities. The opposition must answer: Who is spreading this fear? How have the security

forces, deployed to restore peace, come under attack in these "peaceful" protests? How has public property been destroyed? To call the protests Gandhian is a disservice to Gandhi himself. The opposition must know that when security forces in a country come under attack it leads to despair and then drives the society towards anarchy.

The fact that the protests were not about the CAA from day one is reflected in the fact that no Muslim refugees have been part of these agitations. Asked to explain how the citizenship law was anti-Muslim, the opposition was seen fumbling for answers. So, they tried to stoke passions at protest sites by raking in issues of the clashes at JNU, lynchings, triple talaq, Ram Temple and Kashmir in their speeches. All the speeches had one central theme — the Modi government is against Muslims and so, people must organise against the government. The government has clarified on umpteen occasions that the CAA is not against any community, that it only aims to protect the persecuted minorities in neighbouring countries, and that there is no plan in the offing for a countrywide National Register of Citizens.

Unable to accept the fact that the plot set in Shaheen Bagh to destabilise the central government is a dud, the opposition chose Trump's visit as the time to strike and then

shift the blame on the BJP.

The charges against the BJP would have been laughable if lives were not involved. It is time for the opposition to realise that political power is not an end in itself. In politics we seek power to serve people. This applies to both incumbent governments and those in opposition. To try and misguide people, to seek votes through fear-mongering, comes at a price. In Delhi, this price has over 30 lives, including that of police constable Ratan Lal, who has left behind an eight-year-old son.

The government is working round-the-clock to ensure that normalcy returns. The home minister has held meetings with Delhi's Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajaj and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and senior Delhi Police officials. National Security Adviser Ajit Doval is traversing the city's troubled zones and taking stock of the situation. The BJP will live by its commitment to douse the fire started by its rivals.

In a democracy, anger and protests are legitimate. Violence and anti-national activities are not. It is the BJP's sincere hope that in the face of the rising death toll, the opposition will help the government in restoring order and stop spreading unfounded fears.

The writer is a Rajya Sabha MP and BJP National General Secretary

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MATTER OF IMPUNITY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, '27 too many' (IE, February 27). The violence in Delhi is an unfortunate result of the impunity enjoyed by some insensitive political leaders. The hate speeches during the Delhi polls have proved to be prelude for inciting violence in the city. On the one hand, citizens are charged with sedition for exercising their constitutional right to dissent while on the other, leaders are in the spotlight for delivering hate speeches.

Nirmal D Kapadia, Gandhinagar

SHIFTING BLAME

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Secular hypocrisies' (IE, February 27). The author has attempted to shift the blame for protests and violence on secular intellectuals. He has overlooked the upsurge in "identity politics", which has changed the political discourse throughout the world. As a result, minorities feel unsafe in most countries.

Vasant Nalawade, Satara

CHINA RESPONDS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A force for global good' (IE, February 20). It referred to Taiwan as a "country", advocated "Taiwan independence" and tried to sow discord between China and the international community. Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory. This is recognised by UN resolutions and constitutes the universal consensus of

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301.

the international community. The Chinese government has adopted the policy of peaceful reunification and gradually evolved the concept of "one country, two systems". No one cares more about the health and well-being of our compatriots in Taiwan than China's central government does. After the COVID-19 outbreak, the National Health Commission notified the Taiwan region in a prompt manner. Requested by relevant authorities in Taiwan, experts from the Taiwan region went to Wuhan to inspect on prevention and control, medical treatment and pathogen detection, and had discussions with experts in the mainland.

Ji Rong, Spokesperson of the Embassy of China in India



BRITAIN

LONDON STREET NAMED AFTER FREDDIE MERCURY

A street in south-west London has been named Freddie Mercury Close in memory of the Indian-origin singer-songwriter who lived in the area with his family. Mercury, the lead vocalist of the band Queen, was born Farrokh Bulsara in Zanzibar before his Indian Parsi family moved to the UK to live at Gladstone Avenue in Feltham.

TOP OF THE WORLD



Rian Johnson is the director of the recent film *Knives Out*

USA
Filmmaker says Apple doesn't want movie villains shown using iPhone

Los Angeles: Filmmaker Rian Johnson said tech giant Apple has mandated that villains in films cannot be shown using its flagship product, the iPhone. In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, Johnson discussed a scene from his recent movie *Knives Out*. In the scene, all the members of a family have iPhones, barring one character who is revealed to be the killer in the film's climax. Johnson said, "Apple, they let you use iPhones in movies, but, and this is very pivotal, if you're ever watching a mystery movie, bad guys cannot have iPhones on camera."

ASIA
China to send 'duck army' to help Pakistan fight locusts

Beijing: China is planning to dispatch a 100,000-strong army of ducks to help Pakistan combat a massive locust infestation, a local newspaper reported Thursday. The legion of lotus-eating waterfowl will be sent from the eastern province of Zhejiang following the earlier dispatch of a team of Chinese experts to Pakistan to advise on a response to the infestation that is being called the worst in 20 years. China deployed ducks, whose natural diet includes insects, to fight a similar infestation in Xinjiang two decades ago.

ISRAEL
Ex-housekeeper sues wife of PM Netanyahu

Jerusalem: A former housekeeper at Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's official residence is suing the leader's wife Sara for pain and suffering allegedly caused during her employment there, the housekeeper's attorney said Thursday. Ophir Shimson says his client is demanding \$190,000 in damages for the abuse from Sara Netanyahu. He said the woman worked at the residence for five months until last November, when she was injured from a fall caused by what he described as Sara Netanyahu's tyrannical demands.

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK: CASES REPORTED IN 47 COUNTRIES

Saudi cuts access to holy sites, Japan shuts all schools as global alarm rises

Pak shuts all educational institutions in Sindh & Balochistan, suspends Iran flights

AP & PTI BANGKOK, FEBRUARY 27

SAUDI ARABIA cut travel to Islam's holiest sites, South Korea toughened penalties for those breaking quarantines and airports across Latin America looked for signs of sick passengers Thursday as a new virus troubled a mushrooming swath of the globe.

With the illness pushing its way into a sixth continent and 47 countries, and the number of sick and dead rising, the crisis gave way to political and diplomatic rows, concern that bordered on panic in some quarters, and a sense that no part of the world was immune to the disease's spread.

As growing parts of Europe and the Middle East saw infections and a first case was found in South America, air routes were halted and border control toughened. But for an illness transmitted so easily, with its tentacles reaching into so many parts of the world, leaders puzzled over how to keep the virus from proliferating.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called for schools across the country to close for weeks, a decision that impacted 12.8 million students.

"The most important thing is to prevent infections," said Norinobu Sawada, vice principal of Koizumi primary school, "so there aren't many other options." In South Korea, the hardest-



South Korean soldiers spray disinfectant on a street in Daegu on Thursday. AP

hit country outside China, four Busan markets known for colourful silks and a dizzying array of other wares were shuttered while the country's military sent hundreds of its doctors and soldiers to aid in treatment and quarantines.

Pakistan's Sindh and Balochistan provinces closed all educational institutions after the first two cases of novel coronavirus were reported in the country. It also suspended all flights to Iran, where 26 people have died and 245 cases of the virus has been reported.

In Iran, the front line of Mideast infections, officials loosened rules barring the import of many foreign-made items to allow in sanitisers, face masks and other necessities, and removed overhead handles

on Tehran's subways to eliminate another source of germs. Peru put specialists on round-the-clock shifts at its biggest airport, Argentina took the temperature of some new arrivals and El Salvador added bans for travelers from Italy and South Korea.

The holy city of Mecca, which able-bodied Muslims are called to visit at least once in their lives, and the Prophet Muhammad's mosque in Medina were cut off to potentially millions of pilgrims, with Saudi Arabia making the extraordinary decision to stop the spread of the virus.

With the monarchy offering no firm date for the lifting of the restrictions, it posed the possibility of affecting those planning to make their hajj, a ritual beginning at the end of July this year.

VIRUS SLOWING DOWN IN CHINA

29 new deaths were reported in China on Thursday, the lowest daily figure since Jan 28

433 new cases reported in the country, up slightly from 406 Wednesday, but significantly lower than in previous weeks

2,744 total number of people killed by the virus in China, mostly in the central province of Hubei

New US case may be first from unknown origin

Los Angeles: A new coronavirus case in California could be the first in the US that has no known connection to travel abroad or another known case, a possible sign the virus is spreading in a US community, health officials said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported the case Wednesday.

California officials said the person is a resident of Solano County, northeast of San Francisco, and is getting medical care in Sacramento County. They said they have begun the process of tracking down people who the patient has been in contact with, a process known as contact tracing.

All of the 59 other cases in the US had travelled from abroad or had been in close contact with those who travelled. AP

Japan woman tests positive for virus after 'recovery'

Tokyo: A woman in Japan who contracted the new coronavirus and was released from hospital after recovering has tested positive again, officials said Thursday.

The case is the first time a patient apparently cleared of the virus has subsequently tested positive for it, an official in Osaka said.

The woman in her 40s was first confirmed as infected with the coronavirus on January 29.

She was working as a guide on a tour bus with tourists from Wuhan in January.

After being discharged from hospital she tested negative for the virus on February 6, although she still had a cough at the time.

She had no symptoms a week later, but returned to the doctor on Feb 21 complaining of a sore throat and chest pains. On Wednesday, she tested positive for the virus for a second time. PTI

Trump faces credibility test as he plays down threat

ASSOCIATED PRESS WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 27

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump faces a critical personal challenge in grappling with the new coronavirus outbreak: Asking Americans to believe him after he and some of his top advisers have contradicted federal scientists in playing down the threat.



Trump tasked Mike Pence with leading the US response to the outbreak

Keenly aware of the stakes not just for public health but also his credibility, Trump conducted a lengthy press conference evening aimed at reassuring everyone that he has the crisis well in hand.

But even as he encouraged Americans to be prepared for the virus' potential spread, he continued to minimise the risk, saying the outbreak "may get a lit-

tle bigger; it may not get bigger at all." And he continued to distance himself from the stated opinion of public health officials that it's inevitable the virus will spread within the US.

"I don't think it's inevitable," Trump said at the news conference, where he announced Vice President Mike Pence would lead the administration's response to the outbreak.

Imran Khan meets Qatar Emir ahead of signing of US-Taliban peace deal

SAJJAD HUSSAIN ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 27

PAKISTAN PRIME Minister Imran Khan met Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani in Doha on Thursday, just two days prior to the signing of a landmark peace deal between the US and the Taliban in the Gulf nation's capital to end the brutal war in Afghanistan.

Qatar's Energy Minister Saad Sheirda Al-Kaabi received Khan at the airport.

"Arrival at Daiwan-e-Amiri & Meeting with Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani," Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party said in a tweet accompanied by a short video of the meeting.

Earlier, the Pakistan Foreign Office said in a statement the focus of Khan's visit will be on "strengthening the bilateral co-operation and exchanging views on regional developments".

This is the second visit of Prime Minister Khan to Qatar after taking office in 2018.

The Emir of Qatar visited Pakistan in June 2019 and the trip resulted in strengthening the bilateral economic collaboration in diverse areas, the statement said.

Khan's visit comes as the US is set to sign a historic peace deal with the Taliban on Saturday provided that a week-long reduction in violence across Afghanistan holds.

The Taliban has also confirmed the plan to sign the peace deal that day.

Qatar has invited Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi to attend the peace deal signing ceremony in Doha.

US President Donald Trump said on Monday in India that the landmark Afghan peace deal had received "tremendous support".

Trump's remarks came after the US and the Afghan Taliban started a seven-day partial truce ahead of the possible peace deal to end more than 18-year-long war.

The long war has killed tens of thousands and Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world. PTI

Gunman kills 5 at US brewery, then kills himself

CARRIE ANTLINGER & GRETCHEN EHLKE MILWAUKEE, FEBRUARY 27

AN EMPLOYEE opened fire Wednesday at one of the nation's largest breweries in Milwaukee, killing five fellow workers before taking his own life, police said.

The assailant who attacked the Molson Coors complex was identified as a 51-year-old Milwaukee man who died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, police said.

"There were five individuals who went to work today, just like



Near the scene of the shooting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Reuters

everybody goes to work, and they thought they were going to go to work, finish their day and return

to their families... Tragically they never will," Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett said.



Turkey-backed rebel fighters fire a howitzer toward Syrian government's forces positions near the village of Neirab in Idlib province, Syria, on Thursday. AP

Turkey-backed opposition fighters in Syria retake key town from regime

BASSEM MROUE BEIRUT, FEBRUARY 27

TURKEY-BACKED SYRIAN opposition fighters on Thursday retook the strategic northwestern town of Saraqeb in Syria that was recently captured by government forces, and cut the highway linking the capital, Damascus, with the northern city of Aleppo days after the government reopened it for the first time since 2012.

The government's military campaign to recapture Idlib, the last opposition-held stronghold in the country, has triggered a humanitarian catastrophe and the war's largest single wave of displacement. According to the UN, almost 950,000 civilians have been displaced since early December, and more than 300 have been killed. Most have fled further north to safer areas near the Turkish border, overwhelming camps already crowded with refugees in cold winter weather.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitoring group, said the opposition fighters seized the town of Saraqeb after intense bombardment by Turkish troops. Turkey and Russia support opposite sides in Syria's brutal civil war, with Ankara backing the opposition and Moscow backing Assad.

From inside Saraqeb, activist Taher al-Omar said the town is now under opposition control. He

EXPLAINED
Blow to Assad's latest offensive

AFTER THE defeat of ISIS and the later withdrawal of US troops from the territory, Assad's Syrian government forces, backed by Russian airstrikes, launched an offensive to take back the rebel-held Idlib province. However, the rebels' retaking of the town of Saraqeb represents a major setback for the regime. This is because the town is at the junction of two major roads that link the Syrian capital Damascus and its second-largest city Aleppo, which is also the capital of Idlib. Losing control of Saraqeb significantly slows down the regime's push to retake Idlib.

posted a video with a fighter saying the government forces "ran away like rats." The Observatory said more than 60 fighters were killed on both sides since Wednesday, adding that later on Thursday, government forces launched a counteroffensive under the cover of Russian airstrikes to try retake the town. AP

Climate activists win appeal to block new runway at UK's Heathrow airport

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA LONDON, FEBRUARY 27

BRITAIN'S COURT of Appeal on Thursday ruled in favour of green campaigners who oppose the building of a third runway at London's Heathrow airport, Europe's busiest.

The court said the UK government — which in 2018 approved the Heathrow extension — had failed to take into account its commitments to the Paris Agreement to limit climate warming.

The legal action against the approval was brought by various London councils, environmental groups including Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, and London Mayor Sadiq Khan. They lost at an original hearing in May.

In a summary, judge Keith Lindblom said the Conservative government under then-prime minister Theresa May gave no explanation of how it took into account the 2015 Paris accord — which seeks to cap climate warming to less than two degrees Celsius.

"The Paris Agreement ought to have been taken into account... and an explanation given as to how it was taken into account, but it was not," Lord Justice Lindblom said.

The judge added that the government did not oppose its declaration — and had not sought permission to appeal to London's Supreme Court.

In 2015 while he was London mayor, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised to "lie down in front of... bulldozers and stop the construction" of a third runway, citing environmental as well as aesthetic concerns.

Heathrow airport — which is owned by a consortium led by Spanish construction giant Ferrovial — declared it would appeal Thursday's ruling.

Trump campaign suing NYT over opinion piece

STEVE HOLLAND WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 27

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's re-election campaign said on Wednesday it was filing a libel suit accusing the *New York Times* of intentionally publishing a false opinion article that suggested Russia and the campaign had an over-arching deal in the 2016 US election.

In an escalation of the Republican president's long-running battle with the news media, campaign officials said the lawsuit was being filed in state court in New York.

Asked about the suit at a White House news conference later on Wednesday, Trump said the *New York Times* had "got a lot wrong over the last number of years."

Trump said he would let the

lawsuit "work its way through the courts. And there'll be more coming." He did not elaborate.

Separately, Trump assailed two other news organisations that he frequently criticises, the cable TV news channels CNN and MSNBC, accusing them of presenting the danger from the coronavirus in as bad a light as possible and upsetting financial markets.

A campaign statement said the

aim of the suit against the *Times*, among the most prominent American news organisations, was to hold the newspaper "accountable for intentionally publishing false statements against President Trump's campaign."

The lawsuit relates to a March 27, 2019, article written by Max Frankel, who served as executive editor of the *New York Times* from 1986 to 1994. REUTERS

placed by a lookalike.

These centred on the 67-year-old's apparent lack of signs of ageing, the disappearance of bags under his eyes and his seemingly worsening knowledge of German, which he learned when working as a Soviet agent in East Germany.

In 2015, Putin disappeared from public view for 10 days, unleashing a frenzy of speculation.

"It's boring without gossip," Putin said after reappearing.

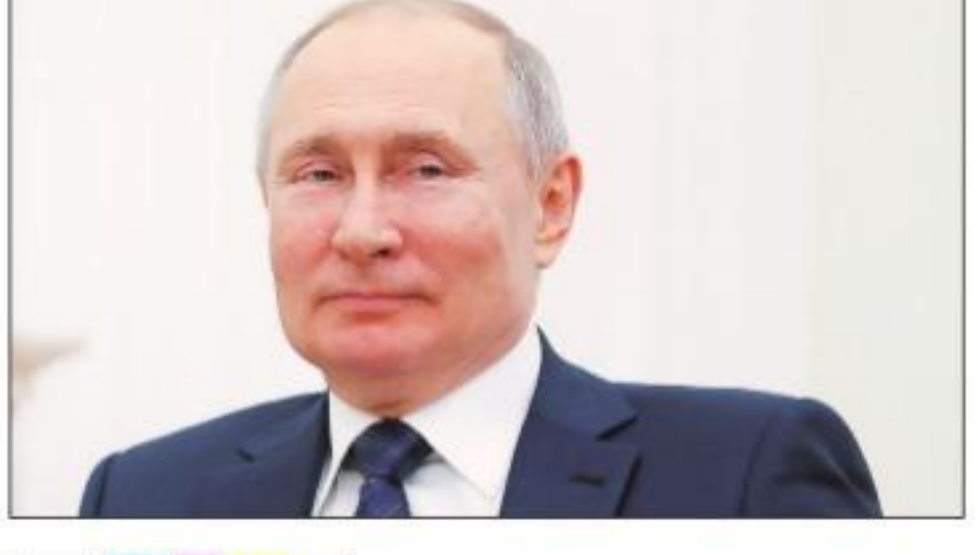
RUSSIAN PRESIDENT SAYS THERE WAS A SECRET PLAN FOR A BODY DOUBLE TO MAKE PUBLIC APPEARANCES

Insisting he is real, Putin says vetoed plan to use body double

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MOSCOW, FEBRUARY 27

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin on Thursday revealed there was a secret plan to use a double to make public appearances for him, while insisting he vetoed it — and that he is the real Putin.

Putin's comments showed that a conspiracy theory widespread on the internet that the Russian strongman has been impersonated over the years or even replaced by a lookalike is not entirely without basis.



"I refused to have doubles," Putin said. "It was during the hardest times of the fight against terrorism." Putin as prime minister and then president oversaw the second war against separatists in Chechnya from 1999 to 2000.

After Russian armed forces claimed victory, Islamist insurgent attacks became frequent in the North Caucasus while suicide bombers targeted Russia's main cities.

"Was that in the early 2000s?" asked interviewer Andrei Vandenko, who is doing a series of interviews with Putin to mark 20 years since he became president.

"Yes," said Putin. "The double would go where things were dodgy?" asked Vandenko.

"Well yes, go, put in appearances," Putin said.

Conspiracy theories have long circulated suggesting that Putin had died and been re-

placed by a lookalike.

These centred on the 67-year-old's apparent lack of signs of ageing, the disappearance of bags under his eyes and his seemingly worsening knowledge of German, which he learned when working as a Soviet agent in East Germany.

In 2015, Putin disappeared from public view for 10 days, unleashing a frenzy of speculation.

"It's boring without gossip," Putin said after reappearing.

15 ECONOMY

GOLD	RUPEE	OIL	SILVER
₹43,513	₹71.61	\$53.04	₹48,130

*Indian basket as on February 26, 2020

SENSEX: 39,745.66 ▼ 143.30 NIFTY: 11,633.30 ▼ 45.20 NIKKEI: 21,948.23 ▼ 477.96 HANG SENG: 26,778.62 ▲ 82.13 FTSE: 6,909.11 ▼ 133.36 DAX: 12,518.01 ▼ 256.87

*International market data till 1900 IST

SECTOR WATCH MOBILE DATA

'At 11.2 GB/user a mth, India's consumption far ahead of others; prices among lowest in world'

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

THE AVAILABILITY of low-cost data plans and an influx of affordable 4G-enabled handsets has pushed India's consumption of data ahead of other developed countries such as China, France, Spain, Germany, South Korea, and Japan, telecom equipment maker Nokia said in a report Thursday.

India's data use, which has seen a compound annual growth rate of 93 per cent between 2015 and 2019, has also been driven by availability and consumption of vast regional content, the report said. In its annual report on broadband usage patterns, Nokia said the overall data traffic for the country went up by as much as 47 per cent in 2019, primarily driven by continued 4G usage.

The mobile data usage in India is likely to increase further as broadband penetration approaches the level of similar developed geographies, Nokia India chief marketing officer Amit Marwah said, adding that domestic data price—at about Rs 7 per GB—continued to remain among the lowest across the globe.

"Is there affordability enough to take Rs 7/GB market to eight or nine rupees? I think yes. We have seen some tariff increase from the operators and we still need to see an impact of that increase on consumption. So far, it has not been, and we have not seen it happen," Marwah said.

In India, growth of mobile data consumption in both 3G and 4G spectrum has seen a spurt with the advent of country-wide over-the-top (OTT) platforms, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime and other smaller regional content players. On an average, Indians spend as much as 70 minutes per day on these OTT plat-

In its annual report on broadband usage patterns, Nokia said that the overall data traffic for the country went up by as much as 47 per cent in 2019, primarily driven by continued 4G usage

forms, and the average duration of each such watching session is as high as 40 minutes, Nokia said in its report.

"We believe migration of subscribers to 4G will continue to drive broadband growth in the country. The upcoming 4K/8K videos and Industry 4.0 solutions that promise to enhance productivity and bring down expenses for industries across different verticals, demand ultra high speed and extremely low latency," Marwah said.

At 11.2 gigabytes (GB) per month and a mobile phone penetration of only about 45 per cent, data usage in India for 2019 was far ahead of other countries such as China, where the consumption is 9 GB per month and mobile phone penetration is nearly 100 per cent. In other countries such as France, which has a mobile phone penetration of almost 90 per cent, the mobile data consumption stood at 7 GB per month, Nokia's report said.

For Germany and Spain, with mobile penetration at nearly 110 per cent each, the mobile data consumption per user per month stood at 2 and 3 GB, respectively. The study by Nokia, however, excludes the internet usage on WiFi, and therefore may have missed accurate readings in countries such as Korea and Japan, which have huge free public WiFi infrastructures.

WILL STILL PROVIDE SOVEREIGN GUARANTEE FOR ALL POLICIES

Centre starts process to sell partial stake in LIC, approvals being lined up

SUNNY VERMA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

THE FINANCE Ministry has not received any opposition to the proposal of listing Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) on the stock exchanges. The government is working on the modalities of LIC share sale, which will be carried out depending upon stability of markets, and an initial 5 per cent equity can be sold in the market, a senior government official said.

"We haven't received any opposition in writing on LIC share sale. It is a complex exercise and the work has already started to seek necessary approvals for selling shares in the market," the official said. Sources said even after the listing of LIC, the government will continue to provide sovereign guarantee for all policies issued by the Corporation.

The Budget 2020-21 announced an ambitious disinvestment agenda, aiming to raise Rs 2.1 lakh crore through stake sales next year, including plans to sell part of the government's stake in LIC, the country's largest insurer, through an initial public offering (IPO). The Centre also proposed to sell its equity in the stressed IDBI

EXPLAINED IPO could bring transparency to LIC's operations

THE GOVERNMENT is on course to sell a portion of its equity in LIC as it has not received any opposition to the proposal so far. While stake sale in the country's largest and oldest life insurer will depend upon market conditions, the Finance Ministry has started work on finalising modalities and seeking necessary approvals. LIC's initial public offering will be significant in bringing transparency in operations of the Corporation, while enabling the government to raise funds through disinvestment.

Bank to private, retail and institutional investors through the stock exchange.

"We are examining a number of legal issues post which a proposal will be taken to the Cabinet for its approval. Discussions are underway with the law department," the official said.

The government will have to first amend the LIC Act before taking the Corporation public. The Department of Financial Services is working on the structuring, modalities and timing of the pro-

posed IPO of LIC.

LIC is currently governed by the LIC Act of 1956, which enables the state-owned insurer to obtain a special dispensation in several areas, including higher stakes in companies beyond the limit set by the insurance sector regulator.

Listing of the Corporation's shares on the market is expected to lead to more disclosures of investment and loan portfolios of the Corporation as well as better corporate governance.

Share sale of LIC, which was

set up in 1956, is expected to generate significant investor interest given its dominant position. LIC had 66.24 per cent market share in total first-year premium and 74.71 per cent share in new policies in 2018-19, as per the insurer's latest available Annual Report.

The insurer's total assets had touched an all-time high of Rs 31.11 lakh crore in 2018-19, an increase of 9.4 per cent.

The Corporation realised a profit of Rs 23,621 crore from its equity investment during financial year 2018-19, down 7.89 per cent from Rs 25,646 crore in the previous fiscal. The government currently owns 100 per cent stake in LIC and 47.11 per cent equity in IDBI Bank, which is majority-owned by LIC with 51 per cent equity in the stressed lender.

"The share sale in IDBI Bank is likely through the offer for sale route. Even though IDBI Bank is categorised as a private bank, sale of government stake could act as a test case for privatisation of state-owned banks," the official said.

Apart from LIC and IDBI Bank stake sale, the government has also lined up privatisation of BPCL, Container Corporation of India, Shipping Corporation of India and Air India in the next financial year.

As coronavirus risk pulls down jet fuel prices, domestic carriers see silver lining

As the coronavirus continues to spread across the world, the aviation industry is being pegged to be one of the worst affected sectors. Even as an impact on the demand for international air travel continues to impact Indian carriers, the situation has a silver lining for struggling domestic carriers in subdued jet fuel prices

OUTLOOK

Going ahead, impact of the virus, which is now seeing a fresh wave in Europe, could also be seen on carriers such as Air India, which have significant connections from India to Europe. Two large airline groups in the continent—Lufthansa and KLM—have already announced budget cuts due to the outbreak's impact. KLM is said to be cutting back on hiring new staff and external consultants, delay new IT projects and office refurbishment plans, and reduce travel expenses significantly, while Lufthansa announced a cost savings programme earlier on Wednesday, including a suspension of new recruitment, to counter the business impact of the outbreak

A potential 13% full-year loss of passenger demand only for the Asia Pacific region has been estimated by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) in its

initial assessment of the outbreak impact

The estimated impact of the COVID-19 outbreak assumes that the public health emergency remains China-centric. If it spreads more widely to Asia Pacific markets, the impacts on airlines from other regions would be larger, IATA said

Even though only 0.9-1.3% of India's total international passengers fly on the India-China sector, a prolonged outbreak could mean the impact spreading to other southeast Asian sectors that account for 19.5-23% of India's international passengers, according to ICRA

In response to weak demand, Vistara has cancelled 20 flights between Delhi and Bangkok, 26 flights between Mumbai and Singapore and 8 flights between Delhi and Singapore in March



ATF PRICES IN DELHI In ₹/kilolitre

February 1, 2020	63,449.63
January 1, 2020	64,323.76
December 1, 2019	62,686.51
November 1, 2019	62,672.63

Source: Indian Oil

While a prolonged lockout of such markets could impact airlines' financials, the coronavirus outbreak has caused the crude oil prices to soften, which in turn, has resulted in lower jet fuel prices

The aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price has declined materially following the coronavirus outbreak in China, ICRA noted, adding that

this was the sharpest decline in since October-December 2018

It estimates that a decline in the ATF price by \$1 at the current level will have a positive impact of 0.5-0.7% on the profit margins of the airlines. This will partly compensate the airlines for the loss of revenues due to flight cancellations

In India, while all domestic airlines have cancelled scheduled flights to mainland China and Hong Kong, some are beginning to even see the impact on other Asian markets



This would translate into a \$27.8 billion revenue loss in 2020 for carriers in the Asia-Pacific region, with \$12.8 billion being lost in the China domestic market alone, as per IATA

FM on growth: Lot of efforts by govt, RBI ... mood is changing

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

A DAY after prodding state-run banks to shun unreasonable risk aversion and boost lending, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman Thursday insisted that green shoots of a recovery are not just visible but sustainable, and that "concerted efforts" of the government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have started yielding results. She conceded that some indicators may have weakened in recent months after showing signs of an uptick but added that they, too, will revive soon.

The FM's statement came on a day when non-food credit data showed growth crashed to just 6.3 per cent year-on-year in the fortnight through February 14, the lowest pace seen since May 2017.

She also asserted that the latest violence in Delhi and anti-CAA protests haven't dampened investors' sentiment. The minister added that the Centre would move into a less-litigation tax regime, which will help investors.

Speaking to media in Guwahati, she said: "There are monthly ups and downs in some indicators. That shouldn't worry. Very clearly, the FDI inflows are keeping steady, our foreign exchange reserves are doing very well... Inflationary pressures are coming down (after the recent spike in vegetable prices)."

"You also have the RBI not just monitoring inflation but also coming out with steps that would be treated as stimulus to growth—particularly the steps for



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at a press conference in Guwahati, Thursday. PTI

MSMEs and realty... So there is a lot of concerted efforts by the government and the RBI and, as a result, I can very clearly see that the mood is gradually changing."

Commenting on the impact of the coronavirus outbreak, Sitharaman said as per industry feedback, raw material supplies to companies would likely be hit if situation in China doesn't improve in two months. "We are trying to see what best we can do," she said.

At Guwahati, the minister held a series of meetings with various stakeholders, including experts and industry executives, to ensure that far-flung areas in the north-eastern region are given greater access to credit. She asked state-run banks to set up more branches and widen their network in these states. Top government officials, including Finance Secretary Rajiv Kumar, Economic Affairs Secretary Atanu Chakraborty and Revenue Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey, were in attendance. FE

Week after petition by Nirav Modi's son, SC stalls auction of paintings seized by ED

KHUSHBOO NARAYAN
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 27

IN A relief to fugitive diamond jeweller Nirav Modi, the Supreme Court directed the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and art auction house Saffronart to not auction the rare paintings seized by the agency till February 29, as Modi's son Rohin has claimed that these paintings belong to Rohin Trust and not Nirav Modi.

Rohin Modi, the beneficiary of Rohin Trust, moved a writ petition in the Supreme Court on February 19 against the auction by Saffronart that was scheduled on Thursday. While the Supreme Court bench led by Chief Justice of India, on Wednesday, directed Rohin Modi to approach the Bombay High Court for relief, it asked the Centre to not hold the auction till February 29.

Following the SC direction, Saffronart said it has postponed the live auction of at least 112 assets (including the paintings) till March 5. The auction house had also scheduled an online auction of Modi's assets on March 3. However, with Rohin Modi's pe-

tion, the fate of these auctions will now be decided by the HC.

Saffronart is planning to sell at least 15 artworks by modern and contemporary Indian artists such as Amrita Sher-Gil, MF Husain, VS Gaitonde and Manjit Bawa among others, through the two auctions. As per the auction catalogue, a 1935 piece by Sher-Gil has been valued at Rs 12 crore, while Husain's 'Mahabharata' series, which was on the cover of the catalogue for the Herwitz sale in 2000, has been valued at Rs 18 crore. Further, several luxury diamond watches, Hermes handbags and luxury cars such as Rolls Royce Ghost and Porsche Panamera S have been put on the block.

Most of these paintings were seized by the ED from Nirav Modi's houses in Mumbai after the agency registered a money laundering case against him and his uncle Mehul Choksi for defrauding Punjab National Bank by routing fraudulent transactions of about Rs 13,600 crore. Last year, Saffronart auctioned 68 artworks owned by Nirav Modi on behalf of the I-T Department, which raised about Rs 54 crore through the sale of the paintings.

GDP GROWTH MAINTAINED AT PREVIOUS ESTIMATE OF 2.1%, COMMERCE DEPARTMENT SAYS

US Q4 growth unrevised, but coronavirus risk looms

LUCIA MUTIKANI
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 27

THE US economy grew moderately in the fourth quarter, the government confirmed, and is facing a bumpy road in early 2020 amid the fast-spreading coronavirus that has left financial markets fearing a recession.

Through other data on Thursday suggested some stabilizing in business investment in January and the labor market remained solid, that failed to calm jittery investors.

More weekly unemployment benefits filed than expected

WASHINGTON: The number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits rose more than expected last week, but the underlying trend remained consistent with solid labor market conditions.

Initial claims for state unemployment benefits rose 8,000 to a seasonally adjusted 219,000 for the week ended February 22, the Labor Department said on Thursday.

The Department said only claims for Alabama were estimated last week. The four-week moving average of initial claims, considered a better measure of labor market trends as it irons out week-to-week volatility, rose 500 to 209,750 last week. REUTERS

more applications received than previously reported. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast claims increasing to 212,000 in the latest week.

has busted the global supply chain apart, it will be a miracle if we avoid a recession." Gross domestic product increased at a 2.1 per cent annual-

ized rate, supported by a smaller import bill, the Commerce Department said in its second estimate of fourth-quarter GDP.

That was unrevised from last month's advance estimate and matched the growth pace logged in the July-September quarter.

This could hurt President Donald Trump who is seeking a second term in office in the November 3 election. Trump on Wednesday assured Americans

the risk from coronavirus remained "very low," and said public health officials were preparing to do "whatever we have to," to deal with the outbreak.

The coronavirus has killed more than 2,000 people and infected at least 80,000 people, most of them in China. Money markets have boosted their bets on the prospect of more Federal Reserve interest rate cuts.

The US central bank cut rates three times last year. The coronavirus outbreak will challenge the Fed's view to keeping monetary policy on hold at least through 2020.

Will look into Kamra's representation against airlines: DGCA to high court

EXPRESSNEWSERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

THE DIRECTORATE General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) Thursday informed the Delhi High Court that it will look into stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra's representation against the airlines which put a flying ban on him. The DGCA reply came against the backdrop of the HC expressing its displeasure on February 25 while hearing Kamra's plea against the ban.

The court had pulled up DGCA for asking airlines to impose the ban on Kamra pending inquiry. After the DGCA counsel made the statement before Justice Navin Chawla, the latter disposed of Kamra's plea and asked DGCA to take a decision on his representation within eight weeks.



Meanwhile, IndiGo said it has reduced the flying ban on Kunal Kamra (pictured) to three months. Express file photo

initially. Hearing this, the court gave the comedian liberty to challenge the panel's decision and the indefinite ban imposed by the other airlines—Air India, Spicejet and GoAir. IndiGo had imposed the ban on Kamra for a period of six months on the grounds of "unacceptable behaviour".

had said the aviation regulator ought not to have "certified" action of the airlines, other than IndiGo, which imposed an indefinite flying ban on Kamra without an inquiry. "Why did you (DGCA) give a certification on Twitter? Look at your tweet. You said the action by the other airlines was in compliance of the Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR). Not just IndiGo, you gave a certificate to the others also. You should withdraw your tweet," it had said.

The court had observed that once Kamra moved a complaint before DGCA claiming violation of CAR by airlines, the DGCA cannot say it will not look into it. Kamra moved the court seeking directions to DGCA to direct airlines to revoke the ban on the ground that it cannot be done without a complaint as required under the CAR.

BAGEHOT

The imperial prime minister

Boris Johnson is busy accumulating power in Number 10



Boris Johnson is in office thanks to the votes of people who had lost faith in politics. He knows that he will retain their support only if he can deliver for them. Reuters

THE EMPEROR NERO was reportedly in the habit of dipping dissidents in tar and using them to light his dinner parties. Boris Johnson has not so far shown an inclination to use his ministers as human torches, but there is nevertheless something imperial about his progress. He dispenses with colleagues with a chilling nonchalance. He barrels into prime minister's questions every Wednesday, his shirt-tail flapping behind him, to the cheers of the massed Tory benches. A recent cabinet meeting opened with a bizarre call-and-response chant, with the prime minister bellowing a series of questions—"How many hospitals are we going to build?" and so on—and ministers replying in unison.

The American presidency is imperial by nature. Presidents live in a big white house and get ferried about town in an armoured car nicknamed "the Beast". Directly elected by the people, they are exceedingly hard to remove from office. The British prime minister-ship is more malleable: Herbert Asquith, a Liberal who held the office in

the early 20th century, observed that it is ultimately "what the holder chooses, and is able, to make it". Prime ministers have few resources—they work with a small staff in a poky town house—and their autonomy is limited, since they serve at the pleasure of their party. Theresa May spent three years being tormented by her fellow Tories before her miserable demise.

Three things determine whether they will be emperors or wimps: the nature of their personality, the quality of the people sitting around the cabinet table and the size of their majority. In Mr Johnson's case all three dials are turned to "maximum imperial". His biography of Britain's greatest prime minister, Winston Churchill, was a disguised mission statement. He also has an imperial taste for vengeance. He cites "The Godfather" as his favourite film, for "the multiple retribution killings at the end".

While Margaret Thatcher had big figures such as Geoffrey Howe and Nigel Lawson (who eventually assassinated her) around her cabinet table, and Tony Blair had his nemesis Gordon Brown,

this Churchill wannabe has nobody who can stand up to him. He is not so much primus inter pares (Walter Bagehot's description of a prime minister) as primus inter poodles. His only powerful colleague, so far, is his chief strategist and consigliere, Dominic Cummings, whom he can sack at will.

Mr Johnson's 80-seat majority has also issued him with a blank cheque. The majority is in many ways a personal one: millions of people voted Tory, many for the first time, because of the combination of his personality and his message of getting Brexit done. It enables him to steamroller opposition.

This willingness to assert power goes along with a sense of fragility. Mr Johnson is in office thanks to the votes of people who had lost faith in politics. He knows that he will retain their support only if he can deliver for them, which is why the word "delivery" is on every minister's lips these days. That means delivering not just Brexit but also the things for which Brexit is a surrogate: a better deal for the north; more police and hospitals; government support for

the just-about managing. Mr Johnson calculates that in order to honour his promises to the electorate he needs to assert the supremacy of Number 10 and to treat departments of state less as centres of power than as delivery mechanisms.

Mr Cummings is at the heart of this centralisation project. He is pushing forward with his long-cherished plan of turning ministers' special advisers, or "spads", into a sort of New Model Army that sees its primary loyalty as being to Number 10 rather than to individual ministers. On February 13th the chancellor of the exchequer, Sajid Javid, resigned rather than agree to the merger of Number 11's advisers with those at Number 10. Mr Cummings is also succeeding in spreading fear across Whitehall. "When the Eye of Sauron is off the Whitehall machine", a "senior Downing Street figure" told the Sun newspaper in menacing Cummings-speak, "things stop working."

What are we to make of Mr Johnson's imperial turn? Critics worry that the last thing an over-centralised

country needs is more centralisation of power. Other experiments with hyperactive regimes in Downing Street had lamentable side-effects: Mrs Thatcher left local government shrivelled. They also worry about destroying the checks and balances that prevent Number 10 from making big mistakes or spending money that the country doesn't have. But these worries need to be set against two considerations.

The first is that there is nothing inherently sinister about Mr Johnson's plan to encourage Numbers 10 and 11 to work more closely together. On the contrary: the Treasury's traditional practice of keeping Number 10 in the dark about its budget and spending plans has led to embarrassments, as when Philip Hammond raised taxes on the self-employed only to have to reverse himself almost immediately because he had forgotten a manifesto pledge. The idea that Number 10 will steamroller the Treasury because its spads sit on a committee with Treasury spads is absurd. The Treasury has more than a thousand civil servants to rely on. The power of the

chancellor depends largely on his abilities, and Rishi Sunak, the new chancellor, is more talented than his predecessor.

The second point is that beefing up Number 10 is no bad thing, at least in the short term. The government is confronted with two of the biggest problems Britain has faced since the second world war: taking Britain out of the EU and addressing the political discontent that led to Brexit. It needs a thriving policy unit to develop an economic model to replace, or at least to adjust, the one that has prevailed since the 1980s. It needs an updated version of Mr Blair's delivery unit to monitor the government's success or otherwise in achieving its goals.

The real problem with Emperor Boris is not that he is gathering power. He probably needs to do more of it. It is that his government is frittering away its authority by picking fights with judges and journalists rather than focusing on delivering its core promises.

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ARAB STATES AND THE IMF

A bit too austere

Lessons for Lebanon from its struggling neighbours

IT IS probably the first time in years that Lebanon has wanted to turn down a loan. With the economy in free fall the country's new government, seated in January after months of horse-trading, has reluctantly turned to the IMF for help. They held a first round of talks on February 20th. For now Lebanon seeks only technical advice on managing a public debt that exceeds 150% of GDP. Politicians are keen to resist money from the fund, because it would come with strings attached. But it may be necessary. Economists fret that Lebanon could run out of hard currency by the end of the year, leaving it unable to pay for needed imports.

Before they negotiate an agreement, though, Lebanon's leaders might look at their neighbours. Economic crisis has been the norm in several Arab states for the past decade. Three of them took loans from the IMF. Egypt signed a \$12bn deal in 2016 and is discussing a follow-on programme, though probably a non-financial one. Jordan and Tunisia each received two loans. (Morocco was given several precautionary lines of credit but did not tap them.) Put another way, of the Arab states without significant oil and gas revenue, more than half have needed IMF support since 2010.

They have won praise for enacting difficult fiscal and monetary reforms. To meet the requirements of its loan Egypt floated its currency, which quickly lost half its value; imposed a 13% value-added tax (later raised to

If Lebanon strikes its own IMF deal, there is plenty of fat to trim. The state wastes billions on electricity subsidies and make-work jobs. And it will not fix the underlying problems that impoverished Lebanon in the first place.

14%); and cut fuel subsidies. Jordan reduced its fuel subsidies in 2012 to qualify for an IMF loan, causing some prices to soar by 50% overnight. Tunisia has raised taxes and allowed the dinar to depreciate. These changes, many of them overdue, helped to tame deficits.

Yet none of these countries looks to be emerging from crisis. Poverty is increasing. Unemployment remains high. Reforms were meant to unlock a flood of new investment, but it has yet to materialise. In 2011, as Arabs rose up in disgust against their leaders, Masood Ahmed, then-director of the IMF's Middle East programme, acknowledged the need for more "inclusive growth" in the region. But the recipients of IMF loans have continued to focus on cuts rather than structural reforms.

In the short term the pain is predictable.



Economists fret that Lebanon could run out of hard currency by the end of the year, leaving it unable to pay for needed imports. Reuters

Higher taxes and lower subsidies leave consumers with less purchasing power. A long-suppressed government report, finally released in July, found that Egypt's poverty rate has climbed five percentage points since 2015, to 33%. Though it has enrolled more than 9m people in two new cash-transfer schemes, these cover less than one-third of poor Egyptians. Jordan stopped publishing its poverty rate in 2010. It is thought to have climbed six points since then, to 20%. The World Bank estimates that 15% of Tunisians live below the national poverty line.

No surprise, then, that businesses are struggling. The January purchasing managers' index, a measure of economic activity, showed Egypt's non-oil private sector contracting at its quickest rate in almost three years. The index has shown expansion in only six of the past 54 months. Firms blame weak sales. Rapid subsidy cuts can also make it prohibitive to run a business. After years of austerity, Jordan's government abruptly changed tack in December and announced a stimulus package. It lowered electricity tariffs for industry and trimmed the tax on small firms.

When Egypt signed its deal with the IMF, the fund projected that foreign direct investment (IMF) would exceed \$9bn a year by June 2017. Inflows have actually fallen since then, to \$6.8bn in 2018, a 16% drop from two years before. Jordan drew a paltry \$950m in FDI in 2018. Both countries are attracting less investor interest now than they did a decade ago.

Austerity measures are painful, but easy to implement. It is far harder to fix broken bureaucracies or unpredictable legal systems. There are a few positive signs, from new bank-

ruptcy laws to simpler regulations. But many Arab states remain difficult places to do business. The World Bank ranks Egypt 171st for the ease of trading across borders: getting a shipment out of the country requires 136 hours of work, compared with 32 in Morocco, which has built a viable car industry. Starting a business in Egypt or Jordan needs more than two weeks and visits to six government offices. Entrepreneurs in the United Arab Emirates can get started in four days.

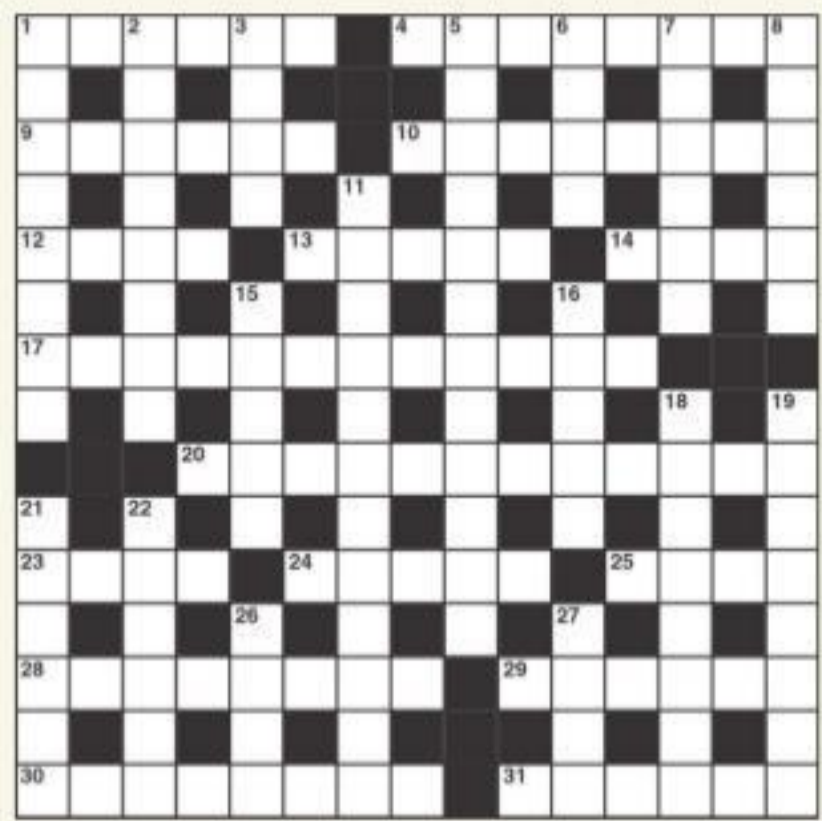
Decades of under-investment mean that workers struggle to compete. The World Economic Forum (wef) ranks Tunisia 96th of 141 economies for the quality of its workforce. Egypt comes in 99th. With budgets tight, governments are doing little to fix the problem. Egypt's constitution requires the state to spend at least 4% of GDP on education. It usually ignores that proviso. Per-person education spending is lower now than it was in 2011.

Arab governments hobble one another, too. Countries in the region export just 16% of their goods to each other, compared with 52% among Asian states and 63% in the European Union. A recent report by the WEF and Majid al-Futtaim, a Dubai-based retail giant, warned that cutting tariffs and other trade barriers would unlock \$130bn in new business for firms. "There are huge opportunities for growth in the region, but it requires a proper integration," says Alain Bejjani, the firm's CEO.

If Lebanon strikes its own IMF deal, there is plenty of fat to trim. The state wastes billions on electricity subsidies and make-work jobs. A currency peg, in effect since the 1990s, is costly and makes exports artificially expensive. But austerity will hit hard in a country where one-third of the population is poor. And it will not fix the underlying problems that impoverished Lebanon in the first place.

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CROSSWORD 4053



- CROSS**
- 1 I start to develop as a painter (6)
4 Insignia of royalty in other respects (8)
9 The way to the top - and why you can't get there? (4,2)
10 She makes me turn in a string of beads (8)
12 Useless clothes? (4)
13 Refuses to face about fifty charges (5)
14 Gas, but none is dispersed (4)
17 Have no attraction - like unprofitable investments? (4,8)
20 Article one put out after a bill for a rate increase (12)
23 A cheese that is made round (4)
24 It cuts a dashing figure (5)
25 The chicken sounds inedible (4)
28 It requires some reduction in the fare (8)
29 Back-biters? (6)
30 Neighbouring state (8)
31 They weren't worn long during the Sixties (6)
- Down**
- 1 Warm drink for a dog (8)
2 Manufacturer of eye drops (4,4)
3 A course for beginners (4)
5 Parsimonious companions? (5,7)
6 Look for a sign that a chick has hatched (4)
7 Publisher's expert or publisher's client (6)
8 Work of intelligence (6)
11 Washing may depend on them (7,5)
15 Steal only a small amount (5)
16 Film studios care about this award (5)
18 Is around, perhaps, but it disappeared ages ago (8)
19 Carefully examines any seals broken (8)
21 A cause to argue (6)
22 Irishman in a film (6)
26 Sign displayed by topless females (4 cut)
27 Tie up and cut (4)

Solutions Crossword 4052: Across: 1 Lotus, 4 Prelate, 8 Air, 9 Manifesto, 10 Lineage, 11 Nancy, 13 Toured, 15 Little, 18 Ovals, 19 Daytime, 21 Holyhock, 23 Men, 24 Recedes, 25 Loyal. Down: 1 Leaflet, 2 Tarantula, 3 Samba, 4 Penned, 5 Efhendi, 6 Ass, 7 Ebony, 12 Nuts in May, 14 Essayed, 16 Eternal, 17 Odious, 18 Other, 20 Yoke, 22 Lac.

OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBES by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

Life is best when you _____ - Michael Moriarty (3,2,4)

SVAAE



CPUOR



CCEIIL



EOPRNV

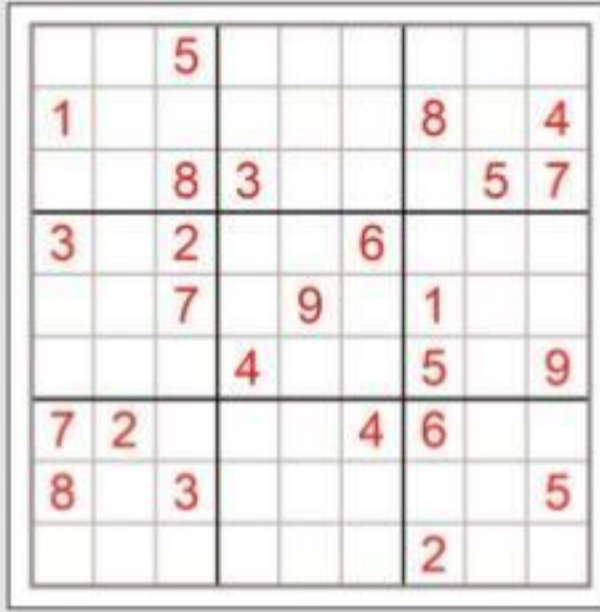


SOLUTION: EVES, GROUP, JICKE, PROVEN. Answer: Life is best when you are in love - Michael Moriarty

Difficulty Level 4s

Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

SUDOKU 4134



Difficulty Level
1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius

SOLUTION SUDOKU 4133



NOTICE BOARD

CORPORATE ASSOCIATE DIARY EVENTS, HONOURS



AWARD-HAL
HAL has been conferred with Governance Now 7th PSU Award for Research and Innovation. AR Meghwal, Minister of State for Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises presented the award to MS Velpari, Dir. (Operations) in New Delhi.



DIVIDEND-EdCIL
Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, Minister of HRD, received the dividend cheque of Rs 9.5 cr. for FY 2018-19 from Manoj Kumar, CMD - EdCIL, in the presence of other senior officials of EdCIL.



CSR-IRCON
IRCON recently supported Multi Skill Development Training Centre in Khorla Colony (Ghaziabad) in association with BS-GSS and the district administration. SK Chaudhary, CMD-IRCON, graced the function as Chief Guest and distributed certificates to the trainees, in the presence of Dr. Subhash Chand (ED - IRCON), Parag Gupta, (Adviser - NITI Aayog), and Aditya Prajapati (SDM, Ghaziabad). Allofice bearers of the NGO were present. While interacting with participants, CMD-IRCON spoke about the importance of IRCON's CSR projects and underlined the need for inculcating hard work, dedication, values, entrepreneurial competencies and capacity building among beneficiaries for their sustainable development.



INAUGURATION-NDMC
Amit Singla, Sec., NDMC, recently inaugurated the NDMC Officers/Employees Inter-Departmental Tournament & Sports Meet (Athletics) at New Delhi, saying "games & sports activities make a person healthy, stronger & stress free".



MOA-PFC
PFC has signed a MOA with IGIAT for providing financial assistance for skilling programmes. Under this, PFC will provide 1.44 cr. (approx.) to IGIAT for conducting Skill Development Training for 500 unemployed youth belonging to different categories.



OPV DELIVERY-GSL
The first in the class of 05 Coast Guard OPV was recently delivered to the Indian Coast Guard by Cmde BB Nagpal, CMD, GSL to DIG Rajesh Mittal, Commanding Officer (designate), Indian Coast Guard.



INDUCTION-CISF
Recently, CISF took over the security of Srinagar Airport. The unit will be headed by a Sr. Commandant rank officer. MA Ganapathy, Spl. DG, CISF, Airport Sector HQs, New Delhi, was the chief guest on the occasion.



MOU-NTPC
NTPC signed an MoU with CPCB to provide financial support for installation & commissioning of CAQMS. The MoU was signed by Dr. Prashant Gargava, Member Sec., CPCB & RV Babu, GM (Corp. Environment Mgmt.), NTPC.

ITPO AAHAR 2020 Minister of Commerce & Industry and Railway, GoI, Piyush Goyal will inaugurate the 35th edition of Aahar - the Food and Hospitality Fair at 1.30 pm on March 03, 2020, in Hall A4 A (GF) of the newly built International Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre (IECC), Pragati Maidan, New Delhi. The fair assumes tremendous significance in light of the announced Union Budget which has a focus on promotion of agri-community as well as tourism and MICE sectors which complements the hospitality segment.

APPOINTMENT
NFL Lait M Pandey has joined as CVO in NFL. A Mechanical Engineer by profession, he belongs to 1995 batch of IRSME. Prior to this, he was posted as Addl. DRM, Mumbai.



Delhi Agricultural Marketing Board
(Govt. of NCT of Delhi)
9, Institutional Area, Pankha Road, Janakpuri, New Delhi-110058
Tel:- 28522085, 28525232 Fax:- 011-28522085,
Email:- ambdl@nic.in, Website:- www.delagrmarket.nic.in

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER
The following item rates e-tenders are invited through e-tendering on behalf of Vice Chairman, DAMB.

S. No	Name of work	Estimated cost	Earnest money	Time of compln.	Last Date & Time of receipt of tenders through e-procurement	Tender ID no/NIT No.
1	Development and Annual Maintenance Contract of 04 nos. of parks (Horticulture work) at Fish Market Gazipur	Rs. 11,89,854/-	Rs. 23,800/-	Three months and 2 years maintenance contract after completion of work	12/03/2020 Up to 14:30 hrs	2020_DAMB188665-16/DAMB/Engg/PE-11/ 2019-20

To be opened online in the office of PE-II, DAMB, 9, Institutional Area, Pankha Road, Janak Puri, New Delhi-110058: (i) Technical Bid opening at 15:00 Hrs. on 12/03/2020. Terms and Conditions and details can be seen at website <https://govtprocurement.delhi.gov.in>

Sd/-
DIP/Shabdarth/1404/19-20
PE-II, DAMB

PUNJAB ENERGY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
SOLAR PASSIVE COMPLEX, PLOT NO. 1 & 2, SECTOR 33-D, CHANDIGARH
Ph.: 0172-2663328, 2663382 Fax: 0172-2662865, www.peda.gov.in

E-tender Notice No. PED/2019-20/20 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Punjab Energy Development Agency, the state nodal agency for promotion and development of New and Renewable Energy Projects in the State of Punjab invites offers from the interested project developers to participate in the selection process for setting up of 20 no. Bio-CNG plants each having 24000m³ capacity Raw Biogas per day based on mainly Rice Straw as Feed Stock in the state of Punjab, on Build Operate & Own (BOO) basis. The detailed terms and conditions, scope of work, eligibility criteria, selection process, Performance Guarantee, manner and place of submission of Bids etc. are given in the RFP document, which can be downloaded from the <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> or www.peda.gov.in. The important information and bidding schedule is as under:

Date of uploading RFP Document	Date of Pre-bid Meeting	Last date and time for submission of e-bid	Date and time of opening of Techno-commercial e-bids
03.03.2020 at 5:00 PM	13.03.2020 at 12:00 noon	21.04.2020 by 5:00 PM	24.04.2020 at 12:30 PM
Cost of RFP document	Non-refundable RFP Document fee Rs. 10,000/- through online mode only to be paid at the time of uploading of bid.		
Bid Processing charges	Non-refundable Bid processing charges Rs. 50,000/- per Project through online mode only to be paid at the time of uploading of bid.		
E-Processing Fee	Non-refundable e-processing fee as applicable through online mode only		
Earnest Money Deposit	Earnest Money @ Rs. 5,00,000/- (Five Lakhs only) per Project shall be deposited through online mode only.		

- Prospective Project Developers are requested to remain updated for any notices, amendments/modifications/clarification etc. to RFP document conditions, in the website <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> or www.peda.gov.in only. No separate notifications will be given for such notices, amendments/modifications/clarifications etc., in the print media (press) or individually.
- For participating in the above e-tendering process, the bidders shall have to get themselves registered with <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> and get user ID and Password. Class-3 Digital Signature is mandatory to participate in the e-tendering process. For any clarification/difficulty regarding e-tendering process flow, please contact PED/2019-20/20 at 8558870510, 9815602615, 9876051885, 9888269103, 0172-2663328, 2663382, 2648004 or Helpdesk number for portal 0172-2791326/2791226.
- Technical / Financial Bid Forms in RFP are for reference purposes only. Bidders have to download the Bid Forms from e-tendering website <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> only after payment of RFP document cost.
- PEDA reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the bids and also annul the entire bidding process without assigning any reason thereof.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE



SPIELBERG GETS OFF THE SADDLE

Filmmaker Steven Spielberg (right) has relinquished the director's chair for *Indiana Jones 5* for the first time in the franchise's history. Disney is now in negotiations with director James Mangold. Spielberg kickstarted the franchise with Harrison Ford-starrer *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in 1981.



(Clockwise from above) Mannequins wear his iconic designs at his Gurugram studio; a model in one of his earliest designs; Tarun Tahiliani; his Kumbh collection



Hallie Rubenhold *Rohit Jain Paras*; her latest book

Setting the Record Straight

British writer Hallie Rubenhold's latest book tells the story of the five victims of Jack the Ripper

ANUSHREE MAJUMDAR

UNDERNEATH THE jacket of Hallie Rubenhold's latest book, *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper*, the names of five women are printed — Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes and Mary Jane Kelly — the canonical victims of the unidentified serial killer, who brutally murdered them in and around the Whitechapel district in London in 1888. It is by design, she says, as we sit down for a quick chat in the midst of sessions at the recently-concluded Zee Jaipur Literature Festival. "Over the past 131 years, there's been such a fascination with the murderer. So much time and effort has been invested in finding out the minutest details of these horrific crimes and yet not much was done to find out who these women really were," says Rubenhold, who has upset 'Ripperologists' with her devastating deep dive into the other side of the horrific killings that continue to captivate lovers of true crime the world over. "Ripperologists focus on the last days or the final hours of these women; the newspapers of the time were quick to paint them with the same brush and say they were all prostitutes. When I started my research, I failed to see evidence that three of the five were sex workers at all," says Rubenhold. Identifying the women as such was easy for the police, the papers,

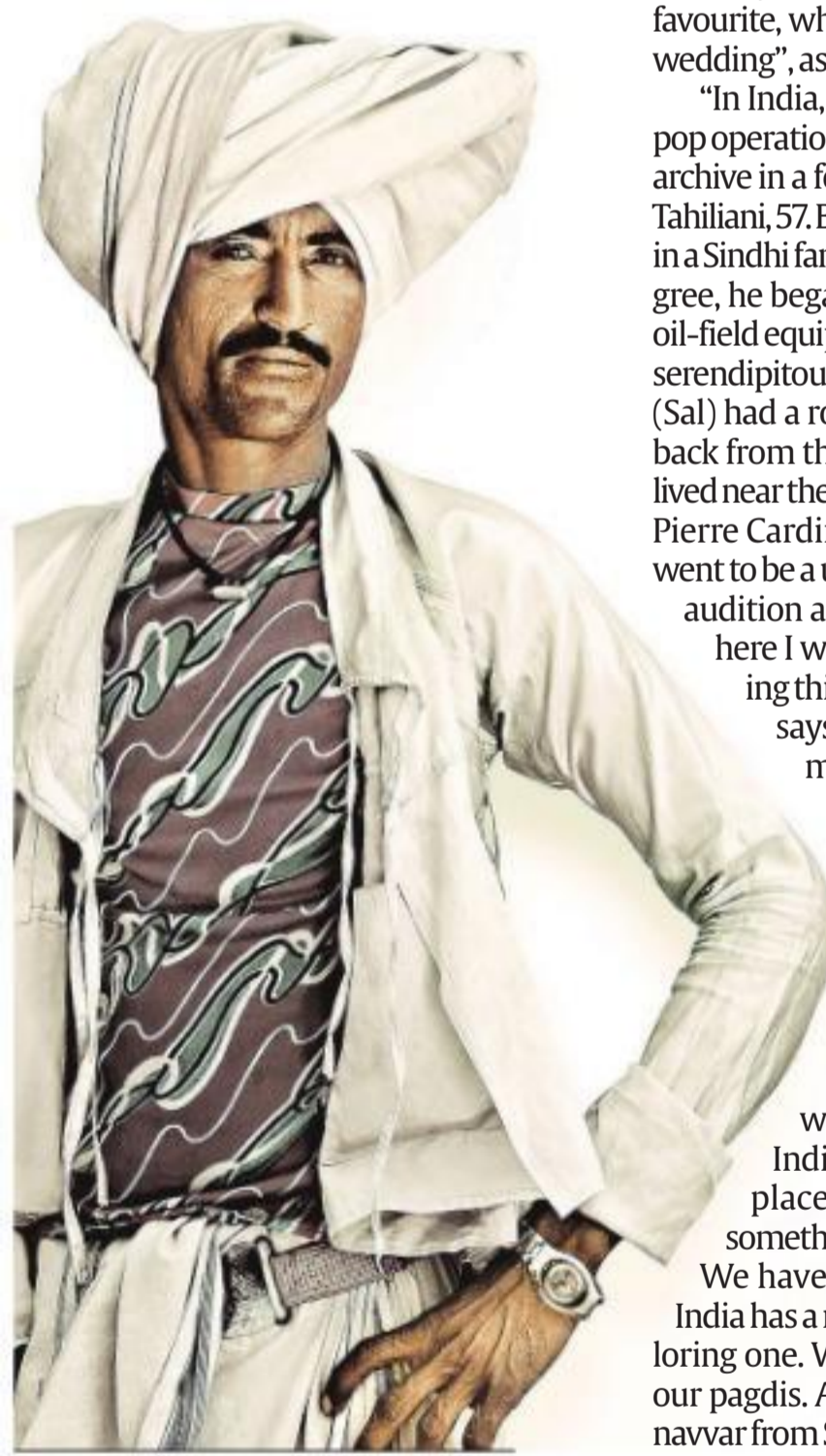


for Victorian society at large, for the idea of a woman's work is intrinsically tied to her worth; the killings were an event that single-handedly vilified sex work, a profession that serves men the most. Rubenhold describes herself as a "social historian" interested in the lives of ordinary people, especially women in the UK. "How women lived in any particular time will tell you what you need to know about society. For this book, I had to peel back all the conspiracy theories and locate primary sources of information such as birth and death certificates, marriage certificates, census and workhouse records. Poor women, as these women were, have a very narrow range of possibilities in their lives — it helped me trace their journey. The inquests that were held were like morality trials — held not to ascertain the cause of death but to find out if these women merited their deaths," she says. Winner of the 2019 Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-fiction, *The Five* is Rubenhold's bold attempt to not only rewrite a sordid history, but also claim a sliver of dignity for the victims. From Jack the Ripper tours in Whitechapel to Hollywood fare like *From Hell*, the deaths of the five have been capitalised to no end. "The tours have been there since the first murder — these women die over and over again, for entertainment and commerce. The best ammunition to fight those lies is knowledge and an awakening of empathy. I want my book to be the antidote to that venom," she says.

The London-based writer is now working on her next book, another true crime story that became the biggest newspaper headline in 1910. "It's about the Crippen murder: Dr Hawley Crippen, an American quack medic, murdered his wife, dressed as a boy and ran off with his secretary, and boarded a ship to Canada. He was caught, brought back and tried for murder and he was hanged. The trial was extraordinary, because nobody could understand how this meek little man could kill a woman much larger than him — she must have 'asked for it'. But the most incredible thing about this story is how 25 women brought this case to court, helped to catch him, and have him prosecuted. It's a story of women's empowerment at the turn of the century, and unsurprisingly, it has been erased," says Rubenhold.

Lightness of Being

Fashion designer Tarun Tahiliani speaks to Ektaa Malik on his journey of 25 years, what he learnt from his masterjis and what he can't watch brides do



CHANCES ARE you hear Tarun Tahiliani before you actually see him. The contagious energy and voice of one of India's foremost couturier's will reach you before his looming six-foot presence does. As he moves through the room, greeting people, adjusting the drape on a mannequin, picking up a stray coffee cup and climbing up a platform to make a speech, Tahiliani's infectious presence fills his Gurugram workshop atrium. It was a day-long event to celebrate 25 years of TT's (as he is fondly called) formal entry into the world of fashion. Nearly 25 of his most iconic looks on mannequins showed his journey, how he took the traditional lehenga and turned it around with a flamboyant corset or a tangpajama from the Mughal era, which he paired with a sheer golden cape. An emerald-gold duster jacket with cigarette-pants, is a favourite, which he says "one can wear to a wedding", as he takes us on a tour.

"In India, fashion is still largely a mom-pop operation, where we don't introspect or archive in a formal, organised fashion," says Tahiliani, 57. Born and brought up in Mumbai, in a Sindhi family, armed with a Wharton degree, he began with the family business of oil-field equipments. Fashion happened in a serendipitous way, in which his wife, Sailaja (Sal) had a role to play. "We had just come back from the US, and we were broke. We lived near the Taj Hotel in Mumbai, and knew Pierre Cardin was doing a show. Sal, who went to be an usherer, was asked if she would audition as a model since she's tall. And here I was watching all this and thinking this is a world I could be a part of," says Tahiliani. He started the first multi-designer boutique of India, Ensemble in Mumbai in 1987, with his sister Tina and his wife. His eponymous label was later launched in 1995, with a stint at Fashion Institute of Technology New York, in between.

Drape and silhouettes always fascinated Tahiliani, and Indian embroidery held a special place in his heart. "Embroidery is something that the West can't teach us. We have learnt it from our masterjis. India has a rich draping tradition, not a tailoring one. We drape our saris, our lungis, our pagdis. And the drape is a signature; a navar from Saurashtra is different from the

TT'S FASHION CANVAS

- 1. THE CONCEPT SARI:** The concept sari, where a light weight material sari is pre-draped and paired with a corset, an off shoulder blouse or a belt
- 2. THE MUGHAL INFLUENCE:** Be it Chikan kari or embroidery of Mughal motifs, like the jharokha, Tahiliani has made them the mainstay of modern Indian couture
- 3. LIGHTWEIGHT BRIDAL WEAR:** He broke bridal convention by making lehengas super light, yet very dressy, enabling the bride to dance till the wee hours of the morning
- 4. DIGITAL PRINTING:** He was on the first to incorporate digital printing for lehengas and other occasion wear. "I don't know why we had bad mouth technology, it certainly helps to make things more accessible and fluid," he says
- 5. STRUCTURED BLOUSES:** While the concept saree sensationalised the way the six-year wonder was worn, it was the super structured blouses from his label that added that extra zing. They are almost like a piece of art, with the finishing effect akin to a corset



Back then, there were no good tailors, they didn't know what arm holes were. Now we have taken traditional handloom and paired it with fit and construction... Designers need to give solutions

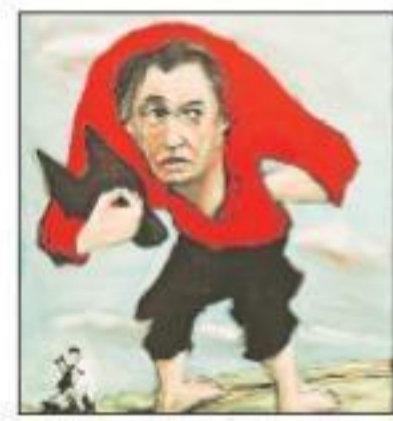
TARUN TAHILIANI

dancing in it. I couldn't watch it," he says. He got a bride to wear a cape with her lehenga, and even a veil, or a cloak-like blouse, held together by a fastening on the chest. "A Tarun Tahiliani bride is a rebel at heart, just like him. I remember every sixth design would be an eclectic, crazy one, maybe not wearable by a chunk of brides," says designer Amit Aggarwal, who was apprentice under Tahiliani for three years in early 2000s. "He has a distinct habit, perhaps something even he doesn't register. We called it the 'cheek test'. To approve a fabric, TT would feel it against his cheek, unlike the rest of us who would feel it with our fingers. His keen attention to detail, and his wicked sense of humour is what I always remember," says Aggarwal. Amidst all the celebrations, Tahiliani has made time to attend the various protests in the Capital, from those in Jamia Millia Islamia to Jawahar Lal Nehru University. While the Indian fashion fraternity has largely been aloof from the larger concerns of the world around them, Tahiliani comes as a welcome break. "A lot of people who work with me are Muslims, and a great part of our craft and embroidery traditions have Islamic roots. I think we are chipping away at our own social fibre. We have always been such a secular country, that's what has made us what we are," he says.

Konkan," he says. "It took us 20 years to get a dhoti saree," says Tahiliani. "But back then, there were no good tailors, they didn't know what arm holes were. Now we have taken traditional handloom and paired it with fit and construction. We need to have solutions — the *naada* with a churidar doesn't work, that's how they got zippers. Designers need to give solutions," he says.

Tahiliani's designs have always been about making the traditional, functional. "The idea of a bride wearing a 20 kg lehenga, in this hot, tropical country, and then walking and

AROUND TOWN



Centenary Notes

WELL-KNOWN musicians are coming together to honour the legendary Pt Ravi Shankar on his 100th birth anniversary. Organised by SRF Foundation and SPIC MACAY, the event, "Smaran", will have performances by shehnai and flute musicians Sanjeev and Ashwini Shankar, tabla player Bickram Ghosh, Begum Parween Sultana, Pt Hari Prasad Chaurasia (pictured), and Ustad Zakir Hussain, among others, across two days. On February 29 and March 1, 5 pm, at Nehru Park, Niti Marg, Chanakyapuri. Entry free.

Saying it the French Way

PAINTINGS BY French artist Gérard Garouste, known for his theatrical artworks, continues at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) till March 29. The exhibition features his work of 40 years, from 1980 to 2019, which are a combination of surrealist imagery, literature, classical mythology, Judaism and Christianity. His self portraits, filled with emotion and energy, present a certain eclectic freedom that comes from awareness.

Cultural Context

AN ANNUAL festival "Words in the Garden 2020" will be held at India international centre (IIC) from February 28 to March 1. This event will explore the 'Sanskriti of Delhi' and will have a variety of sessions and performances centred around the city's cultural stalwarts writer-actor Habib Tanvir (pictured); theatre director Ebrahim Elkazi; kathak dancer Birju Maharaj; writer-artist Ram Kumar; and designer-scenographer Rajeev Sethi. The festival will be screening director Laurent Bregeat's film *Ram Kumar - Nostalgic Longing*, which presents the world of the reclusive and introspective abstractionist Ram Kumar. Kathak exponents Pandit Birju Maharaj and Prerana Shrivastava will also be performing. Experts from the fields of liter-



ature, history, fashion, food, and photography will be speaking too. Tickets for the entry will be available online. Tickets on <https://fs12.forms.site.com>.

SNAP SHOTS



Freedom Matters

ROGER WATERS, 76, famed English musician and co-founder of Pink Floyd — one the well-known bands in the world — at an event in London, recited the English translation of *Sab yaad rakha jayega*, a recent poem by Aamir Aziz, 30, a former Jamia Millia student and a Mumbai-based singer-songwriter. Endorsing the anti-CAA protests, Waters read: "You write injustice on earth, We will write revolution in the sky; Everything will be remembered, Everything recorded". He also said "this kid" has got a future." According to Aziz, the poem is "like most protest poetry, born out of the current movement".

TALK CHECKS OUT

Bold and Beautiful

Popular restaurant Pan Asian returns as Yi Jing, with assertive spiciness from Sichuan and Hunan

POOJA PILLAI

REPLACING A popular favourite is not an easy decision. For years, Pan Asian at the Sheraton, New Delhi, was the go-to place for those who had a craving for well-made Chinese and South East Asian food and had wallets fat enough to endure it. In its place now is Yi Jing, which opened at the Sheraton in December. This is the second Yi Jing in the country. The first one opened at the ITC Kohenuur in Hyderabad few years ago.

The new restaurant eschews any attempts at a broad representation of Asian flavours and focuses on Chinese cuisine, a fact made immediately obvious in the red,



black and gold decor. The intent, chef Zheng Wei says, is to serve contemporary interpretations of classical Chinese food. In fact, yi means 'to change' and jing means 'classic' in Chinese. While the menu offers flavours from across China, most of the food is from Hunan and Sichuan. Of the eight culinary regions of China, the food from these provinces is known to be the spiciest and the decision to focus on them is a wise one, given the Indian taste for bold flavours. Hunan's food draws its heat from uninhibited use of a wide variety of chillies, which goes well with the liberal quantities of garlic used in this cuisine. Sichuanese food, on the other hand, draws its heat from the fragrant Sichuan peppercorn — a deceptively-mild looking spice with a numbing



(Left) Chicken Char Sui Dumplings; Sichuan Braised Pork Belly

quality that is completely unlike the heat of black peppercorns or chilli peppers. "Just a drop of the Sichuan peppercorn oil, which we import from China, is enough for a dish, usually, because it's very strong and it's not the kind of spice that diners are very used to. It's got a beautiful aroma, but it needs a light hand," says Zheng, who specialises in food from this province.

In its avatar as Yi Jing, the restaurant now boasts two tables (seating four people each) with live hot plates, as found in hotpot restaurants across China. There is also a tie ban table, similar to a teppanyaki grill in Japanese restaurants, where diners sit around a table fitted with a flat iron plate, watching the chef cook different kinds of meats and vegetables.

BRIEFLY

Dhoni hasn't played for a year, should play more games: Kapil

New Delhi: The legendary Kapil Dev is not excited about Mahendra Singh Dhoni's return to action during the IPL, saying the league is for future stars and suggested that he should play a few matches to be considered for selection in India's T20 World Cup squad. Dhoni will start training for his much-anticipated return to action in the Indian Premier League (IPL) from March 2 amid never-ending speculation on his career, which has been on hold since last year's ODI World Cup. He was dropped from the BCCI's list of centrally contracted players in January. "It's not just Dhoni who is playing the IPL. I am a person who look for a young player who we can be proud of in the next 10 years. I think Dhoni has already done so much for the country," Kapil said during the fifth edition of HCL Grant event here on Thursday. "As his fan, yes (would like to see him playing the T20 World Cup) but as a cricketer I think it all depends on the management. He hasn't played for one year. He should play more matches to be in the team. There shouldn't be different parameters for different players," the 1983 World Cup winning skipper said. "He is on his last leg. I am his fan so I would love to see him but in IPL I am looking for the next generation." **PTI**

Arun Lal backs DRS for Ranji knockouts

Kolkata: Bengal coach Arun Lal and captain Abhimanyu Easwaran on Thursday gave a thumbs up to the BCCI's move to use the Decision Review System (DRS) for the first time in the semifinals of the Ranji Trophy. The DRS would be in use for the first time in India's domestic circuit in the two Ranji semifinals beginning Saturday, but only with limited options as there will be no HawkEye, Snickometer or UltraEdge. But the four semifinalists — Bengal, Karnataka, Saurashtra and Gujarat — will be benefitted by the usage of virtual pitch map (for lbw decisions) and slow-motion cameras, with each team getting four reviews per innings. "I don't have much experience with DRS. It's of limited usage and hopefully it might remove some of the major howlers," Lal told reporters ahead of their match last-four against Karnataka. **PTI**

Two RR games to be played at Guwahati

New Delhi: The Barsapara Stadium in Guwahati will host Rajasthan Royals' first two home matches during the upcoming edition of the IPL. The BCCI said. "They will now play Delhi Capitals & Kolkata Knight Riders on April 5th & April 9th respectively in Guwahati. Both games will have an 8 PM IST start." BCCI secretary Jay Shah said. Rajasthan Royals will play their remaining five home matches at their designated home ground of Saiwam Singh Stadium in Jaipur. The Steve Smith-led Rajasthan Royals will open their campaign with an away match against Chennai Super Kings on April 2. "The Royals are bringing the IPL to the Northeast for the very first time, expanding cricket's footprint in the region. See you in April, Guwahati!" Rajasthan Royals wrote on their official twitter handle. Last year, Rajasthan Royals had made a request to play few of their matches in Guwahati and have been in talks with the Assam Cricket Association (ACA) for quite sometime. The move, which is backed by the IPL Governing Council, was however challenged by a PIL at the Rajasthan High Court earlier this year. **PTI**

Either-or question: Option A, Option J

India has to choose between Ashwin, who offers more variations, and Jadeja — a better all-round package — for the second Test



EXPRESS IN NEW ZEALAND

SANDIP CHATTERJEE
CHRISTCHURCH, FEBRUARY 27

RESTING HIS legs on a table, leaning back in his chair in an enclosure over the pavilion, Ravindra Jadeja was lost in his world when Ajinkya Rahane called him out for a sprint after the nets session. His reverie interrupted, he asked Rahane: "Kya baat hain bhai, aur thoda bowling karna hain?" Rahane replied: "Nahin, thoda running karna hain?" Jadeja, smiling impishly, quipped: "Mein to hamesha daudta rahata hoon."

Then he flicked his fingers through his phone, which began belting a Gujarati song, and sprinted down the stairs to the ground. "Chalo, dekhle kaun jeetega!" he challenged Rahane. Aware of Jadeja's athleticism, Rahane threw in the disclaimer: "Yeh to competition nahin hain."

The pair began to circle the ground, not quick sprints, but more of a jog, parallel to each other but just before each lap ended, Jadeja would accelerate, break away and turn back at Rahane, who will be a few yards behind him.

It was quintessential Jadeja, the energiser bunny of the team, unrelentingly energetic and bubbly. Until a few minutes ago, he was at the nets, mostly bowling to his teammates, beating them often, throwing challenges, finding something funny in them and bantering, keeping the spirits alive on a tour wherein their fortunes have frighteningly plummeted. For a team that has lost its last four competitive games, his infectious energy could be revitalising.

Jadeja's unbridled energy and effervescence was badly missed in the Wellington Test. As a substitute, he took a low catch of Kane Williamson at short cover off Ravichandran Ashwin, resulting in the only phase of the game where India ratcheted up the pressure on the Kiwis. It's one of the several aspects of his utility that the team management would weigh in when it finalises the playing eleven for the Christchurch Test. It's a facet of the game where he scores over his spin colleague Ashwin.

The office is not a sloppy fielder, was a good slip catcher at the start of his career, one doesn't see the ball burst through his hands, but he is not as naturally athletic as Jadeja. One doesn't find him lunging his body to prevent a four, or frenziedly run behind a boundary-bound ball or affect a dead-eye run-out. He is more a chip off the old block, a touch slow off the blocks, reacts rather than anticipates, concedes the chase the moment he understands the ball is winning the race.

Though five-day games don't prioritise fielding over other facets of the game, skipper get easily sick and tired of slouchy fielders in this day and age. And Virat Kohli has always raved about Jadeja's vibrancy on the field. "He is probably in the best batting form of his life. Bowling, he is a proper finger spinner, very accurate as well. In the field, we don't have any doubts about him. I think this is really his best phase as an all-rounder and you want to maximise that," he recently said.

In that sense, it was surprising that he was left out of the first Test. But should the team management re-evaluate its decision to pick Ashwin over Jadeja in Wellington, their value-addition on the field will be sneaking into the conversation at some point, where Jadeja would score significant brownie points over Ashwin. It could make a strong case, though it's not the only one, for his inclusion in the Christchurch Test. The primary reference point though will be their bowling, in terms of what the team requires from them in the prevailing conditions.

The debate is not as much about their ability to attack or defend as their resourcefulness on a particular pitch and conditions.



At windy Wellington, the team management hoped Ravichandran Ashwin would be able to generate drift and hence opted for the off-spinner over Ravindra Jadeja.

Toggling between roles

There's nothing literally much to choose between their effectiveness on overseas strips. Jadeja could be a shade more thrifty, but Ashwin brings more variations. Both seamlessly toggle between roles adeptly.

Broadly speaking, their bowling can be explained this way: Jadeja is a defensive bowler who can attack, while Ashwin is an attacking bowler who can defend. Both are smart and experienced enough to straddle either world. So, there genuinely is nothing to choose between them abroad.

Rahane dwelled on it. "See, we have not taken any such decisions. Ashwin had bowled really well in Wellington and he is a quality bowler, Jadeja is also a quality bowler. The decision will depend on the condition of the wicket and the thought process of captain and coach and what combination they have in mind for the team," he said.

In Wellington, the wind played an influential role in Ashwin's precedence over Jadeja, who until then was touted as India's first-choice spinner overseas. Maybe, the team management reckoned Ashwin's ability to harness the wind to produce drift could make him a more potent force.

Besides, the Basin Reserve tends to get slower without cracking up, so Ashwin, with his variations, adds teeth to the bowling. It's reputation of bounce, too, could have been evaluated. So as a lone spinner, strictly on bowling merit, Ashwin nosed ahead of Jadeja. And in fairness, he did play his part in Wellington, clearly looking the second best Indian bowler after Ishant Sharma. Maybe, if it were a three-Test series, Ashwin would have been given a more sustained run. Or had India won the first Test.

But the Hagley Oval strip is different. It could be quicker and greener, but not as bouncy, and the surface doesn't slow up as rapidly as the Basin. Hence, the spinners could be confined to bit-part roles.

In such a context, the other virtues of the pair will be computed. Like in fielding, Jadeja holds an advantage over Ashwin in batting. The latter has looked utterly out of touch in recent outings, though he studiously works on his batting in the nets.

But somehow in the middle, he seems to have lost confidence. He has never been a great mover of the feet, but had fabulous hand-eye coordination. But somewhere down the line, he lost faith in his batting. A touch slower in judging length, a fraction late in deciding the shot, a wee bit late in reacting, age seems to be catching up with him.

Jadeja is two years younger, but age has only ripened him as a batsman, infused him with a sense of discretion that he lacked in his breezy youth. Over the last two seasons, he has morphed from a counter-puncher to a late-order accumulator, who can be equally defensive and stodgy, with a supreme awareness of the match situation. The defensive technique is sounder and he doesn't throw his wicket away.

The maturity has automatically manifested into numbers: Since 2017, he has hoarded 996 runs in 31 innings at an average of 49.80. Conversely, Ashwin has eked out only 573 runs at 17.36 with a lone fifty-plus score. Jadeja has rattled 10 half-centuries, that is a 50-plus score in every third innings, and a hundred, thus glossing over the ineptitude of India's last three batsmen. Ashwin, in his current form, makes the tail appear longer.

So bowling aside, where little differentiates them, Jadeja offers a more complete package. A more in-form batsman, a superior fielder, and of course the energiser bunny of the team. After a few laps, reclining in his chair, resting his legs on a table, leaning back, Jadeja resumed his reverie. Wake him up from that, he would still run a few laps just like that.



Who could be in: Gill for Shaw; Saha for Pant

India could tinker with their playing eleven for the Christchurch Test



SHAW OR GILL?

If Shaw doesn't recover from the pain in his left leg, Shubman Gill will automatically replace him. But if he is deemed fit enough, Shaw will have a slender advantage over Gill. For, Shaw has looked fairly comfortable in the middle, and it would be harsh to dislodge a young opener after a solitary failing. Moreover, the skipper has always stressed on giving his men a fair run to cement their spot. That said, if the strip is on the bouncer side, Gill could be in line for his Test debut, considering his back-foot proficiency. But that would be a leap of faith.

PANT OR SAHA?

As recently as the Test series against Bangladesh, Saha was the undisputed first-choice wicketkeeper. So it was a mild shock when Pant strode onto the field in Wellington. Maybe, like the horses-for-courses policy for bowlers, India were pioneering a keepers-for-courses strategy. Saha on dry, spinning

tracks at home and Pant in overseas climes. With the spinners' role peripheral in New Zealand, they clearly went for Pant's explosive batting. Moreover, Pant's batting has been up to the task in overseas conditions. He did look composed in both innings. In the first, he looked in supreme touch before running himself out, while in the second he perished going after the bowling as he kept losing partners at a steady clip. Saha is no slouch with the bat either, perhaps better at farming the strike and batting with the lower order. Again, the decision will depend on the pitch. If it swings more than Wellington, Saha could come back on the merit of his 'keeping skills, though Pant's keeping was near flawless in Wellington. So the scales are still tilted hugely in Pant's favour.

UMESH OR SHAMI?

It would be a left-field decision if Yadav gets the nod ahead of Shami. But considering that Yadav is the only Indian bowler who can genuinely swing the ball at pace, the other four being predominantly seam bowlers, he offers a canny option if the strip is outrageously green. A bowler like him, with his out-swinger, could have been useful at Basin Reserve. Besides, Shami was listless in Wellington, spraying the ball all over the place and gifting too many boundary balls. But given his reputation to bounce back, and his staggering form before the series, it's unlikely that Shami would be dropped, even though the direness of the situation could prompt changes. **ENS**

Warner makes a point at where it all went downhill

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CAPE TOWN, FEBRUARY 27

David Warner returned to the scene of the scandal and played a central role in a victory this time as Australia beat South Africa by 97 runs in the final Twenty20 to clinch the series 2-1 on Wednesday. The last time Warner was at Newlands he instigated one of the biggest embarrassments in Australian cricket history with a ball-tampering plot in a test against South Africa in March 2018. Warner's contribution in this game was to top score for the Aussies with 57 off 37 balls to set up 193-5.

South Africa didn't come close. Mitchell Starc blasted out captain Quinton de Kock (5) and former skipper Faf du Plessis (5) in the first and third overs of the chase. The quick bowler finished it with Kagiso Rabada's wicket and South Africa was all out for 96 in 15.3 overs for a formidable victory for the Australians. In between Starc's early and late strikes, spinners Ashton Agar (3-16) and Adam Zampa (2-10) knocked the stuffing out of the South African lineup.

Agar, who has already taken a hat trick in this series, nearly had another when he had Anrich Nortje lbw and bowled Lungi Ngidi next ball. Earlier, Warner and captain Aaron Finch, who hit 55 off 37, put on 120 in their opening stand after South Africa put them in to bat. Australia was ahead from then on.

The series win is a promising start to Australia's buildup to the Twenty20 World Cup in October and November, which will be held in Australia. South Africa has had a tough season. It lost test and T20 series at home to England earlier this year and drew the one-day series.

For Australia, the victory may not completely erase memories of the ball-tampering scandal but it might soften them for the team and for Warner and former captain Steve Smith, another man involved in the tampering plot two years ago and who also made his return to Newlands on Wednesday.

BRIEF SCORES: Australia 193/5 in 20 ovs (D Warner 57, A Finch 55; L Ngidi 1/33, T Shami 1/25) vs South Africa 96 all out in 15.3 ovs (van der Dussen 24, H Klaasen 22; M Starc 3/23, A Agar 3/16).

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHRISTCHURCH, FEBRUARY 27

Ajinkya Rahane wants to take on the New Zealand pace battery with more intent in the second Test and his foolproof strategy includes countering the awkward angles which became a nightmare for Indian batsmen during the first Test at the Basin Reserve. Rahane, who top-scored with 46 in the first innings of the opening Test, is hopeful that a turnaround will happen on a green top at the Hagley Oval, which he reckons will be better for batting compared to the one they got in Wellington.

"I am not saying (we have to be) more aggressive but having that intent and clear mindset will help us," Rahane told reporters on Thursday.

New Zealand pacers Trent Boult, Tim Southee and Kyle Jamieson used the short ball liberally after coming wide of the crease with an angle that was disconcerting for the batsmen. "I think they used that angle really well in Wellington. Bowling wide of the crease or from the centre, they changed angles while bowling the short balls. I think their plan was completely clear. As a bats-



Ajinkya Rahane was the top-scorer for India in the first innings. *File*

man, if you going to think about a particular shot, then you need to back yourself and play that shot. You cannot doubt yourself. We need to forget what happened in Wellington," the Indian vice-captain said.

According to Rahane, the two net sessions at the Hagley Oval is being used to practice negating the awkward angles that Neil Wagner and company can create.

"That's what I said: try and learn what mistakes we did as a group, what can we learn. I think we have to practice those angles. We had a practice session and we have one more tomorrow. And you have to practice that and trust your ability in the middle," Rahane said in a reassuring tone.

While net sessions are important, it's the instincts in match situations that counts, he said. "But to change or adjust those angles there are times you need to be instinctive while you are batting. It can mean standing on off-stump, or standing outside the crease or staying deep inside the crease — like if it is a pitch for cut shot then you can stand deeper in the crease. This is the mental side of the game," Rahane said.

"For me, as a batsman it is important you show your intent to the bowler, if you stand in

one spot then the bowler doesn't need to change anything. These are small things we have been working on in practice and how to use the crease and the angles. Doesn't matter how much you practice you must trust or have the belief to be able to do it in the middle," he added.

Cheteshwar Pujara has drawn a lot of flak for his dour approach in the first Test where his painstaking 11 off 81 balls put enormous pressure on the other batsmen. "Pujara was trying his bit, he was actually looking to score runs. But I think Boult, Southee and all their bowlers did not give away much. It is all about having that intent and I think Pujara was actually looking to score runs. It happens to all batsmen, I mean all batsmen go through that phase," Rahane said.

Each batsman is different and everyone will have their counter mechanism, he explained. "You have to come back stronger and play accordingly. If you can trust your ability at the centre and counter attack and everyone's game is different. I play completely different game than Virat and Pujara. As a team we need to figure it out how we are going to play in the middle, communication will be the key," he said.

Healy, Mooney lead Australia to crushing win over Bangladesh

PRESSTRUST OF INDIA
CANBERRA, FEBRUARY 27

ALYSSA HEALY and Beth Mooney hit attacking half-centuries in a dominating 151-run opening stand as Australia hammered Bangladesh by 86 runs in their ICC Women's T20 World Cup match, here on Thursday. The partnership between Healy (83) and Mooney (81 not out) is Australia's highest for any wicket at the Women's T20 World Cup.

Australia's 189/1, the highest total of the tournament, proved too much for Bangladesh who could manage only 103 for nine. Healy began with bristling intent, peeling three boundaries from Jahanara Alam's opening over. Salma Khatun opted to take pace off the ball with five overs of spin in the powerplay but Healy rocked back and cleared long-on to take the score to 53 without loss from the first six overs.

The keeper-batter made it look easy as she struck sixes over long-off and then mid-wicket from Khadiza Tul Kubra, bringing up a brutal 26-ball fifty. Mooney turned over the strike before showing her own strength down the ground with three boundaries in as many overs to bring up the first T20 century partnership for the openers. Their first reprieve came when Rumana Ahmed beat Mooney's bat but Nigar Sultana Joty was ponderous in whipping off the balls.

The breakthrough finally came when Healy sliced to point off Salma, departing for 83 from 53 balls. Ashleigh Gardner had licence to swing and did just that in the penultimate over, carting Salma for three boundaries in her 22 from nine balls.

Bangladesh's reply began with Murshida Khatun (8) lofting Megan Schutt down the ground at the start of the fourth over but departed two balls later as Jess Jonassen took a fine catch pedalling back at mid-on. Sanjida Islam found the third man boundary from her first ball but was comprehensively bowled by Schutt in the next ball as an eventful over ended with the scoreboard reading 23 for two. Annabel Sutherland's first T20 World Cup spell yielded a maiden wicket as Sanjida was strangled down the leg side for three.

Nigar stroked Nicola Carey through the covers for four when Meg Lanning turned to spin, and Sutherland leaked more runs as Fargana stroked two boundaries from an over that cost 13. Nigar and Fargana, who struck Carey for a handsome off-drive, brought up Bangladesh's second fifty partnership at the T20 World Cup, and it ended there when Nigar skied one to Lanning off Carey on 19. Rumana made a sprightly 13 from 12 balls but picked out Wareham on the midwicket fence to make it 95 for five and Schutt had her third when Fargana's top-edge was gleefully caught by Healy.

BRIEF SCORES: Australia: 189/1 in 20 overs (Alyssa Healy 83; Salma Khatun 1-39) beat Bangladesh: 103/9 in 20 overs by 86 runs.

Flying start, close finish

Shafali's long-sailing sixes and Pandey's inch-perfect yorker in final over takes India to semi-final

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
FEBRUARY 27

FOLLOWING INDIA women's team four-run win against the White Ferns in Melbourne, Shafali Verma received a text message from Ashwani Kumar, her childhood coach. It read: "It's great to see you hitting sixes and boundaries. But in the future, look to rotate the strike a bit more."

It's been a dream run for Shafali — the 16-year-old opener from Rohtak — at the ongoing Women's World T20. Her consistency and big-hitting prowess shone through, which has given India blazing starts upfront. In the three games, she has stacked up scores of 15-ball 29, 17-ball 39 and a 34-ball 46.

On Thursday, she made a conscious effort to address this anomaly. Shafali ran as many as 12 singles in her knock that was laced with three sixes and four boundaries.

India may well be the first team in this competition to qualify for the semi-final by virtue of their three consecutive wins in the league stage. But there are some niggling issues that they would like to address before they enter the business end of the World Cup. Topping the list would be their under-fire top-order. The team's two biggest stars — opener Smriti Mandhana and Harmanpreet Kaur — have struggled so far. While Mandhana managed scores of 11 and 10 in the two matches, Kaur's lack of form was a bigger concern, as she registered just 11 runs from three matches.

Against the White Ferns, India rode on the back of a rapid third-wicket alliance between Shafali and wicket-keeper Taniya Bhatia, who helped herself to a 25-ball 23. When they were in the middle, it looked like India would breach past the 160-run mark with ease. However, India struggled losing wickets in clumps.

First-overs later when Jemima Rodrigues was also dismissed, pressure set in. It walked an out-of-sorts Kaur. Today, her vigil lasted just five deliveries. Her dismissal was quickly followed by Shafali's. The young opener's exit triggered a collapse. From being in a comfortable position of 68/1 after 9 overs, India finished up at a not-so-flattering 133/8 at the end of 20 overs — their last 11 overs yielding 65 runs for the loss of 9 wickets. For a fleeting moment, India looked like they would sail through choppy waters, courtesy an unlikely 9th-wicket stand between Radha Yadav and Shikha Pandey, which accounted for 22 runs. Considering the slim margin of the win, this partnership very much turned out to be a match-winning effort.

Nevertheless, Kaur rued the inability of her batters to capitalise on good starts and cautioned them against making 'silly mistakes' as they gear up for bigger matches. "It's a great feeling when your team performs day in day out. Still we made the same mistakes after a good first ten overs, we got a good start but couldn't carry the momentum. We can't make silly mistakes with harder games coming up. Shafali (Verma) is giving us good starts, her initial runs



This was India's third win in as many games at the Women's World T20. ICC

are crucial for us," Kaur said after the win.

India survive Kerr scare

After contributing with the bat during the fag end of India's innings, pace spearhead Shikha Pandey, the only pacer in the line-up, accounted for New Zealand opener Rachel Priest. On a slow, sluggish Junction Oval track, India were packed with spinners, who quietly applied the choke. New Zealand innings, much like India was bereft of any momentum. Consequently, the run-rate pressure build incrementally. The match boiled down to the final two overs, with New Zealand requiring 34 runs for a win. It looked like a Herculean task, but New Zealand leg-spinner Amelia Kerr stepped up, smacking four boundaries in the penultimate over off Poonam Yadav.

Subsequently, they collected seven runs off the first four deliveries off the final over, to leave them needing two boundaries to take the match into a Super Over. Such a scenario looked imminently possible when Kerr played an smart scoop shot for a boundary in the penultimate delivery of the match off Pandey. The White Ferns contingent waited collectively for Kerr to repeat that act. Instead, Kerr failed to negotiate a sensational yorker from Pandey. A mix-up ensued that resulted in Kerr's partner Hayley Jensen getting run out under the most thrilling circumstances.

BRIEF SCORES: India: 133/8 (Verma 46, Kerr 2-21, Mair 2-27) beat New Zealand 129/6 by four runs.

'Shafali will bring crowds to the stadium'

DIANA EDULJI
FEBRUARY 27

SHAFALI VERMA is a player who will bring crowds to watch a women's game. It's not good to compare but one player who I'm reminded of in terms of the aura is Virender Sehwag. Shafali's attacking approach brings freshness to women's cricket. Growing up, we never had the liberty or skills for such an attacking style of play. And yes, those days we never played T20 cricket, only the 90-over game.



There is no doubt that Shafali is the sole reason for India's wins, as far as batting is concerned. I don't remember the Indian team ever having such great starts earlier.

It's her starts that have been the major difference. Many people who I meet in public places have asked about her. She has certainly attracted more viewers to this T20 World Cup.

The more she stay at the crease, the more the bowlers fear her. Such players decided the course of the game.

But someone needs to tell her that post 30-40, she should try to bat for another four or five overs because if she stays long, she can single-handedly take the game away. She is new, fearless and raw but in today's world, teams will come better prepared for her in the future.

Look at Thursday's game, she didn't get deliveries which were in her reach, instead, New Zealand made her work.

She will learn and get better. One can argue that one should not change her natural game but a time will come when someone has to make her realise the importance of her wicket.

And what she can achieve as long she stays at the crease. She has all the qualities to become one of the most lethal batters women's cricket has seen in the shorter formats.

(As told to Devendra Pandey)

Prodigy slays idol to advance on road to Tokyo Games

SHAHID JUDGE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 27

RAJ MALIK remembers the evening of August 17, 2016 quite well. The morning was uneventful — he'd dropped his daughter Sonam off for wrestling practice on his way to work at a sugar mill in Gohana, in the Sonapat district of Haryana, and then picked her up on the way back home. Nothing unusual so far, until he reached home.

A news channel was turned on, and the images and fliers running at the bottom of the screen announced that Sakshi Malik had become the first Indian woman to win an Olympic medal in wrestling. Raj remembers watching the news for quite a while along with his 14-year-old daughter. The youngster watched, wide-eyed, breaking her norm of watching television for not more than a

few half-hearted minutes. Once the news segment was over, she watched videos of Sakshi receiving the bronze medal.

"Chhoti si thi jab Sakshi medal jeeti," recalls Raj, who in his youth had tried but failed to forge a wrestling career for himself. "We were watching the videos over and over again when I told her, 'ab aap aise karoge?' She just smiled and continued watching."

It was a casual challenge from Malik senior, but it turned out to be one Sonam was destined to strive for. She took another step forward when she beat Sakshi, for the second time in as many months, in the trials to earn a spot at the Asian Olympic Qualifiers. Reaching the finals there will earn her a berth at the Tokyo Olympics — that too just a few months after she started competing in the senior category.

But Sonam's second win over Sakshi, in the domestic qualifiers, came in a most dra-

matic fashion. The 27-year-old Olympic medalist led for the majority of the match. But in the dying seconds, Sonam, a few months short of her 18th birthday, pulled off the 'Dhak' routine — a match-winning move that requires a wrestler to pull the opponent over the shoulder and throw her onto the mat. It's a risky but crowd-pleasing move, with a low success rate. But Sonam pulled it off when it mattered.

"She's always been mentally strong and calm. She knows when to make which move and how to execute them. She needed points quickly, so she got herself into a good position for this move," says her coach Ajmer Malik. "She's practised it many times during training. So it wasn't new to her. It was just a matter of timing." There were no nerves in the younger grappler as she took on and beat, twice, a wrestler as celebrated as Sakshi. "Sher ke saamne kushti ladne jaaye to dar

to lagta hai," says Ajmer. "But we've worked a lot on her mental strength. Ab sher ki takkar sher se hi hogi."

The mental toughness is one part of the equation, and Sonam also has a great degree of self-belief. And it's something she had exhibited back in 2018, when she 'pestered' her father to take her to New Delhi for her first Bharat Kesari Dangal.

Raj had to spend some time convincing the organisers to let his "chhoti si bachchi" compete, till they relented. In her first match, she faced a novice and won with ease. In her next bout, the 60 kg wrestler had to fight an opponent in the 80 kg category.

"I told her enough is enough, but she was adamant. She said she'd seen the girl during the national camps and that she could be beaten easily. Sonam refused to withdraw," Raj says. "So she played, and won, and then won her next few matches and ended up

winning the Rs 1 lakh prize and a scooter!" That was her first dangal. She'd go on to win the next four as well.

It all started for the teenager from Gohana when she accompanied her father to watch wrestling practice at akhadas in the city. Raj had never been able to wrestle at a higher level, a fact that had made him a subject of frequent taunting. But when Sonam told him she wanted to train, he had no objections.

"I tried my luck, it didn't happen for me. So who am I to get in the way of a child who wants to wrestle? I didn't try to live my failed dreams through her. But she's been so self-motivated, I've started to dream," he says.

Now the priority is Sonam's fitness — she is nursing a right elbow injury, but played through it to beat Sakshi this week. After that, her Olympic dreams are only one step away. The 'chhoti si bachchi' has stated her intent. Twice.

BCCI VP to contest state secy election

DEVENDRA PANDEY
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 27

THE VICE-PRESIDENT of Indian cricket board Mahim Verma will be contesting for the post of secretary of cricket association of Uttarakhand in the forthcoming election. It's the first case where a member of BCCI Apex Council has decided to contest in his home-state without resigning from his post as vice-president. He filed his nomination papers, a move that surprised many.

Verma says he will resign in case he wins. As per Lodha Committee's recommendation which is now a Supreme Court order, no individual can hold two posts at a time. Verma was elected as BCCI secretary four months ago but resigned from his post after he was elected as vice-president unopposed in BCCI.

"I will resign from BCCI if I get elected as Uttarakhand secretary. At the moment I can file nomination and if I don't win, I will continue to be vice-president of BCCI."

Four months after serving as vice-president Verma says he felt he had to get involved after watching the "downfall of his state cricket". Last October, the new BCCI regime took charge with Sourav Ganguly as president after three-year tenure of Supreme Court-appointed Committee of Administrators (COA).

The cricket association of Uttarakhand had left the post vacant for the past few months before they decided to hold an election on March 8.

Uttarakhand entered BCCI's fold two years ago; last season they fielded teams in all age-group tournaments of Indian board.

"I was not keen to make a comeback but various districts called me and said that the association needs my service in Uttarakhand. There has been a big downfall in cricket too. The performance of Ranji Trophy team was very bad and I wanted to get things back on right track," Mahim said. Mahim is expected to have a tight contest with five other candidates.

Mahim Verma says he will resign in case he wins. As per Lodha Committee's recommendation which is now a Supreme Court order, no individual can hold two posts at a time. Verma was elected as BCCI secretary four months ago but resigned from his post after he was elected as vice-president unopposed in BCCI.



This was Sonam's second win over Sakshi in the domestic qualifiers.

[SPORTS BAR]



Rahul retains second place in T20I rankings

India opener KL Rahul retained his second position while captain Virat Kohli remained static at the ninth place in the latest ICC T20 Rankings released on Thursday. Pakistan's Babar Azam maintained the pole position with 879 points, while Rahul, who scored 224 runs, including two fifties and a 40 plus score in the five-match series against New Zealand, has 823 points. Australia captain Aaron Finch (820) remained the top-ranked batsman from the country, bridging the gap between him and Rahul. New Zealand's Colin Munro (785) and Australian Glenn Maxwell (721) rounded up the top five. There was no change in Kohli's rankings as the Indian skipper continued to be ninth (673) while India vice captain Rohit Sharma, who is nursing a calf injury, was also steady at the 11th spot with 662 points in the batting list.

Loan limits set to come into force in July: FIFA

Restrictions on the international loan of players are set to come into force in July as part of a wide-ranging reform of the transfer system, FIFA said on Thursday. The global soccer body said it would also establish a new system of so-called "training compensation" for ensuring that clubs receive a fair slice of the cake when players they develop leave at a young age and are involved in expensive transfers later in their careers. FIFA said that a meeting of its stakeholders committee — featuring representatives of players, clubs, leagues and national associations — endorsed a move to limit international loans of players aged 22 and over.

Pune Univ returns atop Khelo medal table

Savitribai Phule Pune University consolidated their position at the top by claiming three gold medals at the inaugural Khelo India University Games here on Thursday. Mahesh Datta Asawale and Prajakta Ravindra Khalkar won gold in weightlifting competition, while Jyotiba Bajrang Atkale bagged a yellow medal in wrestling. Punjab University (Chandigarh) and Jain University (Bengaluru) remained on eight gold medals each, while with 13 golds, Pune University surged ahead. Guru Nanak Dev University (Amritsar) and University of Mumbai complete the top five on the charts.



A boy places flowers on a wall with an image and signature of Kobe Bryant at the "House of Kobe" basketball court in Manila, Philippines. AP

Kobe handprints, other memorabilia up for auction

Some key Kobe Bryant memorabilia, including two of his Los Angeles Lakers uniforms and cement handprints from his induction into the Grauman's Chinese Theater hall of fame gallery, are going up for sale in April. Julien's Auctions said Thursday that the items would be up for sale on April 30 as part of its annual sports auction that includes a silver medal from the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles and a 2002 FIFA World Cup gold winner's medal. Bryant's items were already being planned for auction when he, his daughter Gianna and seven others were killed in a helicopter crash on Jan. 26. "We are honored to include this collection of his items and pay tribute to this giant who was an inspiration not only to basketball fans but to the entire world," said Darren Julien, Julien's Auctions' president and CEO. The Lakers uniforms up for sale are one worn during the 2000 NBA Finals, with his original number 8. The uniform included a black armband which marked the memory of Wilt Chamberlain, who died that season.

Kapur and Khalin tied-44th in NZ Open

Indian golfers Shiv Kapur and Khalin Joshi shot an even par 71 each to be tied-44th at the end of the opening round of the 101st New Zealand Open on Thursday. Korea's Jooyung Kim, who pipped Kapur to win his maiden Asian Tour title at the Panasonic Open last year, underlined his growing stature as he took the opening round lead with a seven-under-par 64. Among other Indians Ajeetesh Sandhu and Viraj Madappa shot one-over 72 each to be Tied-60th while both Aman Raj and Chiragh Kumar carded 74 and were Tied-105th.



Fit-again Jinghan, Jeje called up for camp

Defender Sandeep Jinghan and striker Jeje Lalpekhlua (in pic) on Thursday returned to the fold for the 18-day national football camp ahead of India's FIFA 2022 World Cup qualifier against Qatar in Bhubaneswar. India's World Cup qualifier against Qatar will be played on March 26. Jinghan had been sidelined because of a knee injury which he sustained six months ago, while Jeje is returning from a knee injury he suffered in June last year. Lalpekhlua, Jerry Mawihlingthanga, Jeakson Singh, Liston Colaco, Pratik Chowdhary, Shubham Sarangi, Rafique Ali Sardar, Prabhukhan Gill, Sumit Rathi, Seriton Fernandes, Edwin Sydney Vanspaul are among the ones who have been handed their first call-up to the senior team. A total of 23 players have been called up in the first phase of the training camp in Bhubaneswar on March 9.



TRACKING THE VIRUS

Korea seeks clarity from NRAI over its participation

The national shooting federation of South Korea, one of the global hotbeds of the deadly novel coronavirus, has asked its Indian counterpart to make its position clear on whether athletes from the East Asian country would be allowed at next month's ISSF World Cup in New Delhi. In a letter to National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) President Raninder Singh, Korea Shooting Federation Secretary General Yongjae Lee has said that shooters are keen to participate in the event from March 15 to 26.

'Athletes should not risk health for Games'

Australian swimming great Ian Thorpe says athletes should not put their Olympic dreams before their health in deciding whether to compete at the Tokyo Games as global health authorities battle to contain the spread of the new coronavirus. The flu-like virus is believed to have originated in a market selling wildlife in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year and has infected about 80,000 people and killed more than 2,700, the vast majority in China.

Italian golfers tested, added to Oman field

Italian golfers Lorenzo Gagli and Edoardo Molinari were reinstated into the Oman Open on Thursday after medical tests showed neither player had the virus spreading around Europe. They were isolated as a precaution on Wednesday after Gagli exhibited flu-like symptoms, with Molinari having been sharing a hotel room with his compatriot but showing no signs of illness. The European Tour said the Omani Ministry of Health reported early Thursday that Gagli had not tested positive for the coronavirus and they could be added to the field "due to these exceptional circumstances."

Asian CL games postponed

Six Asian Champions League games were postponed over the coronavirus on Thursday as the Asian Football Confederation wrestles with the deadly outbreak. Four Iranian clubs were affected by the postponements, which came as the regional body announced emergency talks over the epidemic. Next month's World Cup qualifiers could also be disrupted, and the women's Olympic playoffs involving China, South Korea, Vietnam and Australia will be rescheduled. "These are unprecedented and challenging times, but the AFC is working tirelessly to monitor the situation," AFC general secretary Windsor John said in a statement. The Champions League has been hard hit by the outbreak, with Chinese clubs mostly sidelined until April and one game in South Korea set to take place behind closed doors. Next week's four games involving clubs from Iran -- which has the highest toll outside China, with 22 dead -- have all been postponed.

AGENCIES

Smart City

Guardiola's men come from behind to defeat European giants Real Madrid, courtesy late goals via Jesus and De Bruyne

ASSOCIATED PRESS
MADRID, FEBRUARY 27

With two late goals in five minutes, Manchester City turned the tables on Real Madrid and boosted its chances of finally winning an elusive Champions League title while it can. Gabriel Jesus scored an equalizer in the 78th minute and Kevin De Bruyne netted an 83rd-minute winner from the penalty spot as Man City came from behind for a 2-1 win over Madrid in the first leg of the last 16 at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium on Wednesday.

"It's a great satisfaction to be able to win at the Bernabeu," Man City coach Pep Guardiola said. "We are not used to these types of results. It shows that we can go to any stadium and win." City is likely playing in its last Champions League before having to serve a two-year UEFA ban from European competitions for breaching financial regulations and failing to cooperate with investigators.

The club has yet to win a Champions League title despite the heavy spending that helped it win two straight Premier League crowns under Guardiola, and was eliminated by Tottenham in last year's quarterfinals.

Francisco "Isco" Alarcon opened the scoring in the 60th for Madrid, which played the final minutes without defender Sergio Ramos after he was shown a straight red card for a foul to stop an 86th-minute breakaway by Jesus.

"Those last 10 minutes changed the game," Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane said. "We played a good match, it hurts to see those mistakes in the end. We didn't deserve that, but in football you have to be fully focused for the entire 90 minutes."

Pep warns against complacency

The return match in England will be on March 17. "Happy for the victory, of course, but for the performance as well," Guardiola said. "They started really well in the first 15 minutes, but after these 15 minutes we played really good. But it's still not over. If there is one team in the world that can overcome this, it's this club (Real Madrid)."

In Wednesday's other game, Lyon beat Italian champion Juventus 1-0 at home.

Guardiola's team was the most dangerous throughout the match but couldn't get past Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois until Jesus' close-range header. The Brazilian forward, a surprise starter over Sterling and Sergio Aguero, jumped behind Ramos to meet a well-placed cross by De Bruyne.

Sterling, back in action after nursing a muscle injury, made a crucial impact after coming off the bench by setting up the penalty that De Bruyne calmly converted past Courtois. Madrid struggled to get clear chances but took the lead after Rodri gave the ball away near midfield. The blunder allowed Vinicius Junior to make a run into the area and find Isco free from markers for an easy goal.

Courtois wall

Courtois made a few difficult saves in both halves, while Madrid's best chance until Isco's goal was a close-range header by Karim Benzema saved by Ederson before the break. "We created good chances but we were off-target and Courtois made some great saves," Guardiola said.

Madrid historically has thrived at the Bernabeu in the Champions League, but it has won only three of its last 10 European matches at the stadium, drawing three and losing other four. It was eliminated by Ajax in last year's round of 16 after a 4-1 home loss. That marked the first time since 2009-10 the Spanish powerhouse failed to reach at least the semifinals.

It was the third straight setback for Madrid, which was coming off a draw and a loss in the Spanish league, results that dropped the team behind Barcelona at the top of the Spanish league. Man City has filed an appeal against UEFA's ban at the Court of Arbitration for Sport, but if the UEFA punishment stands, City won't be back in the Champions League until the 2022-23 season.



Manchester City forward Gabriel Jesus (left) scores the equaliser in their 2-1 win against Real Madrid on Wednesday. Reuters

Pep's masterclass

Out of the Premier League title race and, as of now, banned for two years from European competitions, Manchester City needed a shot in the arm. They got that with a memorable result at the Santiago Bernabeu. How did Pep Guardiola orchestrate the come-from behind win against 13-time European champions Real Madrid?



TACTICAL SET-UP
Questions were asked when star forwards Sergio Aguero and Raheem Sterling started on the bench with the Englishman still tending to a hamstring injury suffered against Tottenham Hotspur three weeks ago. However, it proved to be a tactical masterstroke. With Gabriel Jesus spending the first half on the wings, Real Madrid found it difficult to pick out a striker to mark as Bernardo Silva took up a more central role. With Ilkay Gundogan and Rodri providing cover for the backline which lost Aymeric Laporte early on, Los Blancos saw their attacks dealt with comfortably, also leaving them exposed to the quick counter-attack.

STERLING THE GAME-CHANGER
Going behind in the 60th minute after a defensive lapse led to Isco finding the net, changes were needed with Real switching to a more defensive shape.

Guardiola decided to bring on Sterling in the 73rd minute, a move that would turn the game on its head. In the new set-up, Jesus moved back to a central position, and Sterling's runs put the Real defence under pressure. It was one such run by the England international that opened up space in the middle for Jesus to net the equaliser. Just four minutes later, Sterling's pace forced a mistake from Dani Carvajal inside the box and the penalty was coolly converted by Kevin De Bruyne.

DE BRUYNE IN TOP FORM
The Belgian had a phenomenal evening at the Bernabeu, creating a handful of chances throughout the match. However, it was when space was opened up by Sterling's pace that De Bruyne started being more effective, eventually sending in a marvellous cross for Jesus whose header found the back of the net for the equaliser. And the Belgian put an end to City's recent penalty woes -- they have missed their last four attempts from the spot -- slotting one calmly past Thibaut Courtois, capping off a fantastic comeback and a splendid night for Manchester City.

RAHUL ASNANI

Lyon outclass Ronaldo's sluggish Juventus

ASSOCIATED PRESS
LYON, FEBRUARY 27

A RARE goal from combative midfielder Lucas Tousart gave hard-working Lyon a 1-0 home win against a lethargic Juventus in the first leg of their round-of-16 game in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Tousart, who was sold to German side Hertha Berlin last month but loaned back for the rest of the season, netted in the 31st minute with a neat volley from a cross by midfielder Houssem Aouar.

"We heard before the game we weren't favourites, and rightly so. But we played very well," Aouar said. "We're going over there (for the return leg) with a lot of confidence." Italian champion Juventus is bidding to end a 24-year-wait to win the Champions League, but woke up too late in this match. "We were second to every ball in the first half, I don't know why. Something went wrong with our approach, I could sense from before kickoff something had not switched on," Juventus defender Leonardo Bonucci said. "We were all far from each other in the first half, making everything easy for Lyon. We need to work hard ahead of the re-

turn leg because we cannot afford another game like this in Turin."

Still, Juventus nearly came away from Groupama Stadium with a draw.

Juventus star Cristiano Ronaldo threw his arms up in the air after the referee ruled against his late claim for a penalty, following an apparent push from behind by Lyon defender Jason Denayer.

Then, forward Paulo Dybala had a goal ruled out for offside in the 87th. A minute later, he also had a penalty shout turned down even though he seemed to be pulled back by a Lyon defender. Juve coach Maurizio Sarri was incensed by both penalty decisions, leaping up and down on the touchline.

Yet he was equally bemused by his team's inability to move the ball quickly.

"I continued to tell them, and there were many who were doing it, that they were moving the ball too slowly and therefore getting into the wrong positions," he said. "The second half was better, but frankly it's not enough for a Champions League match." Ronaldo waved away a fan who ran onto the field in the fifth minute of injury time, apparently trying to take a photo with him.



A pitch invader kneels in front of Juve forward Cristiano Ronaldo. Reuters

MMA FIGHT

Phogat watches Khabib videos before fight behind closed doors



Ritu Phogat's next match will be played in an empty stadium in Singapore, keeping in mind the coronavirus threat.

GAURAV BHATT
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

RITU PHOGAT remembers the deafening noise during her first walkout in China last year. And it bums her out that there won't be any when she marches to her second MMA fight on Friday.

Phogat's debut in China successfully capitalised on the Dangal and the surname fanfare. The venue choice for the second fight was again strategic. Singapore has been the home away from home for Phogat, who has been training at the Evolve MMA Gym since signing the contract with One Championship last February.

The coronavirus outbreak however prompted promoters to convert the 'King of the Jungle' event into an empty arena show for broadcast only.

"It will be a little weird for sure. If the crowd is shouting for you, getting invested then you also get a different kind of energy," Phogat says about fighting Wu Chiao Chen (2-1) of China behind closed doors. "The focus remains on the match however.

Singapore has been the home away from home for Phogat, who has been training at the Evolve MMA Gym since signing the contract with One Championship last February.

I would just request all my fans to catch the fight live on streaming."

Phogat needed 3 minutes and 38 seconds to stop her opponent the first time around. With the debut and any resulting nerves out of her system, Phogat has been counting down the days since the open workout in Delhi earlier this month.

"Bas din ginte raho 28 ke intezaar me. Kab ho, kab match karu (just counting days, waiting for the 28th. When will it be, when will I fight). There were many who turned up in Delhi just to meet me," says Phogat. "I don't know how big MMA was before I started, but since I took it up I am seeing interest go up. People keep messaging me,

everybody asks me 'how can I do this? I want to join an MMA gym'. So that is very motivating because you realise that you are fighting for so many people."

Phogat looked good, for a debutante. The coaches have been raving about her heavy hands, but the movement looked heavier too. She did the classic 'feinted jabs into a takedown' well, but the movement isn't smooth enough, and thus telegraphs the intent.

"The first fight went well but I could note things to improve. I have progressed on all fronts but we will see the real progress on Friday."

Phogat lists things she has worked on, or perhaps feels comfortable enough to disclose. She took her opponent down thrice, but had to let her stand twice because she couldn't "work from the position I was in, so I had to let her up and try again."

But better opponents won't give Phogat many chances to take them down or simply reset in the hope of a better position. Onus on making the movements happen is on Phogat, who struggled moving from the half guard into a full mount or side control.

Phogat also talks about the moments where she "forgot to go for the punches" once she had Korean Nam Hee Kim on the mat.

"If you see the fight again, there are moments where I am lost. I forget to go for the punches," Phogat laughs. The Indian did close out the show with sharp elbows and punches, after her corner's yelled reminders. "These are the things that I've had to remember."

Showing aggression

It's a question she has been asked in dozens of variants since she announced her switch to MMA: How does a wrestler learn to punch someone in the face?

"People forget, wrestling is also very intense. It can be very aggressive. But yes, after years of wrestling training, it takes a while to prepare to punch someone," says Phogat. "But it's not a mental thing, that I don't want to hit. In MMA, it's part of the sport."

In terms of inspirations, Phogat can't do any better. The 25-year-old has been devouring videos of Khabib Nurmagomedov, the UFC lightweight champion with a 28-0 record. The mauler from Dagestan relentlessly takes op-

ponents to the ground and keeps them there. Once down, he advances positions and completes passes, or simply smashes his opponents; the 10 submission and 8 KO wins a perfect template for Phogat to follow.

"I was looking at his movements, entries. Like him, I'm also from a wrestling background and takedown is the main thing. So, I was studying how to control after completing a takedown. His fighting style is very motivating."

"I feel like her fame might light me up," her opponent Chen told One Championship. "I feel that if I beat her in this match I could be famous too! I feel grateful to be competing with her. I know her story through the movie, I know her family through the movie, too, and as a female fighter, I feel I can relate to it. She has a lot of fans, I want to make her fans all be mine."

Phogat had a simpler declaration. "I will look for an even quicker finish through a knockout," Phogat says. "After that, outside of the cage, we can be friends." **ONE CHAMPIONSHIP'S 'KING OF THE JUNGLE':** Live on Hotstar and Star Sports Select 2 from 6:00 pm.