

IN BRIEF

Probe into kid's drowning sought

Thiruvananthapuram: The parents of a seven-year-old child who drowned in a river in Kollam district of Kerala on Friday, have demanded a high-level probe into the circumstances leading to the death of the girl. Devananda had gone missing from her home in Kollam on Thursday. Her body was found on the banks of Ithikkara river, about 600 meters from her home on Friday. She was a student of first standard of Saraswathi Vidya Niketan at Vakkanadu, Kollam. "She never ventures out of the house alone. She has never taken the path which goes to the neighbouring temple. It all happened within flash of a second. We want to know the truth. We went to know what happened to our child," said Devananda's mother Dhanya.

BMC set to ban single-use plastic

Mumbai: Aiming to make Mumbai free of single-use plastic by May 1 this year in line with Maharashtra government's announcement for the state, the BMC on Saturday said it will take strict action against those using such plastic. In a statement, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) urged citizens, traders and hawkers to not use the prohibited plastic. Maharashtra minister Aaditya Thackeray had, on Friday, announced in the Legislative Council that the state will be made free of single-use plastic items by May 1 this year. The BMC said it had seized 86,000 kg plastic and recovered ₹4.65 crore in fines since June 2018.

Tribal woman gang-raped

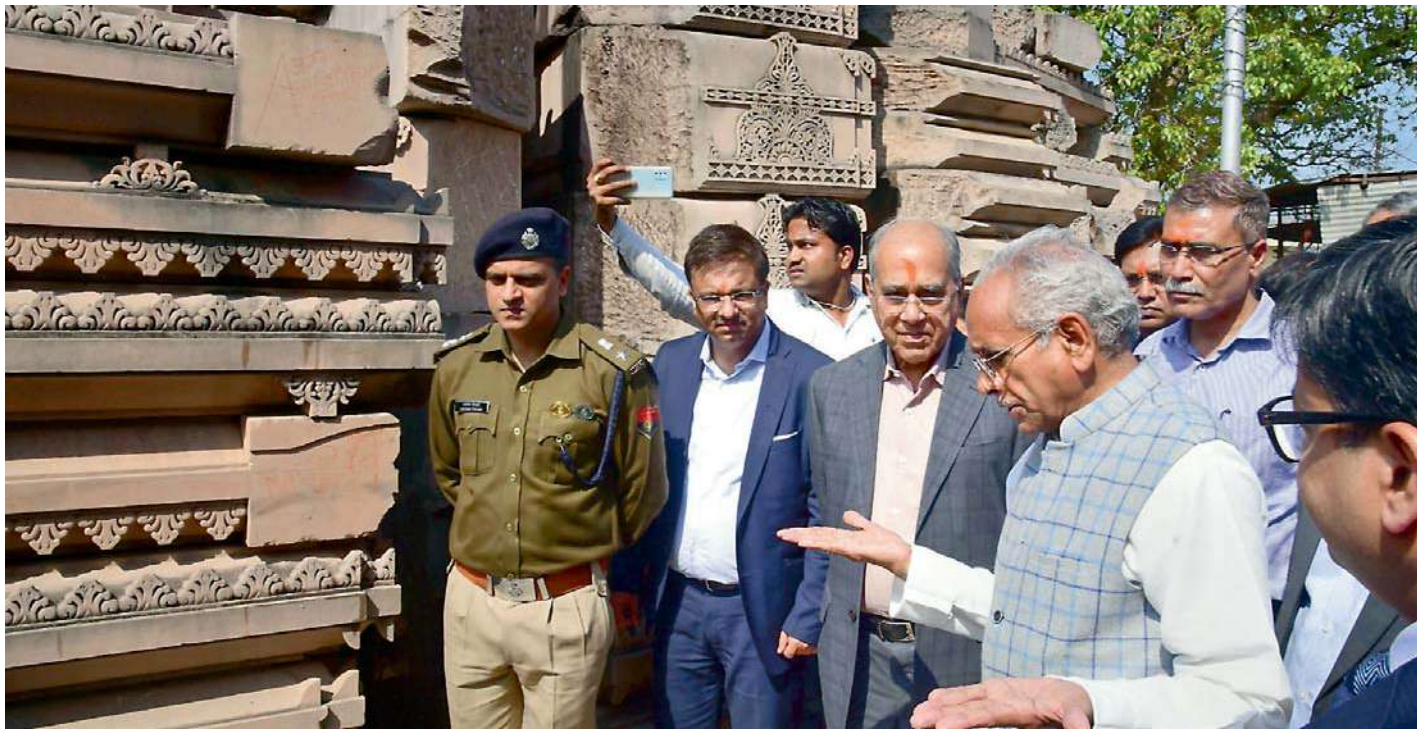
Raisen: A 40-year-old tribal woman was allegedly raped by three men in Madhya Pradesh's Raisen district, the police said on Saturday. Udaipura police station in-charge Indraraj Singh said two of the accused have been arrested. According to the woman, she set out for Saikheda in Silvani tehsil on Friday evening. A tractor driver gave her lift upto Boras village where she waited for a bus. As the bus did not turn up till 10 pm, Kunwar Lal, a local resident, offered to put her up at his house for the night and she accepted his offer, she told police. Lal then called his friends Manju Gaud and Preetam Bediya. They drank liquor and allegedly raped her, Singh said. While Lal and Gaud were arrested for alleged gang-rape, Bediya was absconding. Further probe was on, the police officer added.

MAHA BJP CALLS FOR RENAMING AURANGABAD

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC MUMBAI, FEB. 29

The Maharashtra Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is not leaving a single stone unturned to corner the Shiv Sena over issues which are bound to highlight its ideological divide with the Congress and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). The BJP on Saturday called for the renaming of Aurangabad as 'Sambhajinagar'. The Sena has always referred to Aurangabad as Sambhajinagar and uses the same name in the party's mouthpiece *Saamana* even today. The Congress and NCP, which are part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, are likely to object to the move, as the renaming would upset the Muslim community. Maharashtra BJP president Chandrakant Patil, who held a review meeting with party officer-bearers in Aurangabad for the upcoming Municipal Corporation election on Saturday, demanded that Aurangabad be named as Sambhajinagar. Mr Patil said, "We are descendants of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Sambhaji Maharaj not of Aurangzeb." Aurangabad had been a major Mughal city in the Deccan region and originates its name from the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, who was the sixth Mughal emperor and ruled over almost the entire Indian subcontinent for 49 years. Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, son of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, was tortured to death by Aurangzeb.

Faith Matters



Chairman of the Ram Temple Construction Committee, Nripendra Mishra, along with senior VHP leader Champat Rai during their visit at Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas kaaryashala, in Ayodhya on Saturday. Mishra visited the VHP's stone carving workshops, its local headquarter Karsewakpuram and major temples.

Convicts want stay on noose

2 of four Nirbhaya convicts move court

New Delhi, Feb. 29: Two of the four death row convicts in the Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case on Saturday moved a Delhi court seeking stay on the execution of the death warrants, scheduled for March 3.

Additional Session Judge Dharmender Rana issued notice to Bihar Jail authorities on the pleas moved of Akshay Singh and Pawan Kumar Gupta, directing the officials to file their response by March 2. In his plea moved through his lawyer, Singh claimed that he has filed a fresh mercy petition before the President of India, which is pending.

Advocate A.P. Singh, appearing for Singh, said that his earlier mercy petition that was dismissed by the President did not have complete facts. In his petition, Gupta told the court that he has filed a curative petition before the Supreme Court, which is pending. He said that he also has an option to file a mercy petition.

Both the convicts told the court that a number of other petitions are also pending before the Supreme Court and other authorities.

The court had on February 17 ordered that the four convicts — Mukesh Kumar Singh (32), Pawan Gupta (25), Vinay Kumar Sharma

● **THE 23-YEAR-OLD** physiotherapy intern, who came to be known as 'Nirbhaya' (fearless), was gang-raped and savagely assaulted on the night of December 16, 2012, in a moving bus in south Delhi. She died of her injuries a fortnight later in a Singapore hospital.

● **SIX PEOPLE, including the four convicts and a juvenile, were named as accused.** Ram Singh, the sixth accused, allegedly committed suicide in Tihar jail days after the trial began.

(26) and Akshay Kumar (31) — be hanged on March 3 after it issued fresh death warrants, observing that deferring the execution any further would be "sacrilegious" to the rights of the victim for expeditious justice.

It directed that the four men be hanged by neck on March 3 at 6 am until they are dead.

This was for the third time that the death warrants were issued by the court against them. The court had noted that death warrants were earlier issued on January 7 and the execution was later deferred twice, i.e., on January 17 and January 31.

"Now deferring it any further would be sacrilegious to the rights of the victim for expeditious

justice," it had said. Pawan was the only one among the four convicts who had not yet filed the curative petition — the last legal remedy available to a person, which is decided in-chamber by judges. He has not filed the mercy plea either.

The first date of execution, January 22, was postponed to February 1 by a January 17 court order. Then the trial court, on January 31, stayed, "till further orders" the execution of the four convicts as they had not exhausted all their legal remedies.

The court is hearing the applications by Nirbhaya's parents and the Delhi government, seeking fresh death warrants for the convicts after the Supreme Court granted liberty to the authorities to approach the trial court for issuance of fresh date for the execution of these convicts.

The 23-year-old physiotherapy intern, who came to be known as 'Nirbhaya' (fearless), was gang-raped and savagely assaulted on the night of December 16, 2012, in a moving bus in south Delhi. She died of her injuries a fortnight later in a Singapore hospital. Six people, including the four convicts and a juvenile, were named as accused. Ram Singh, the sixth accused, allegedly committed suicide.

THREE DIE IN MENTAL CENTRE IN A WEEK

GILVESTER ASSAY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 29

The death of three inmates of a mental health centre run by a private trust in Changannassery in Kottayam district of Kerala over a period of one week has raised serious questions.

The dead have been identified as Sherin, Girish and Yohannan who died on Saturday.

The post-mortem of Yohannan has revealed that the patient had respiratory infection and was suffering from acute pneumonia.

Blood samples of the victim have been sent to Amritha Institute of Medical Sciences, Kochi, for detailed chemical examination.

Health minister K.K. Shailaja directed the health secretary to submit a detailed report on the death of the three inmates of the Puthujeevan Trust Centre for Psychological Medicine and De-addiction.

The minister said the doctors had examined the cause of death when the first inmate died. Though the hospital authorities had insisted on post-mortem of the second person, the relatives didn't agree.

Shailaja said the preliminary examination of the samples in laboratory had ruled out coronavirus or H1N1. The probe has been ordered to ascertain other causes behind the death, she added.

QUOTA FOR MUSLIMS IN MP LIKELY

DC CORRESPONDENT BHOPAL, FEB. 29

Madhya Pradesh minister H.S Karad hinted at a move by his government to provide reservation for Muslims in educational institutions in the state.

"We are in the process of preparing detailed agenda for minorities," he said.

JAILED SP LEADER AZAM KHAN SAYS TREATED 'JUST LIKE A TERRORIST'

Sitapur (UP), Feb. 29: Jailed Samajwadi Party MP Azam Khan on Saturday alleged that very inhuman treatment was meted out to him, "just like a terrorist." "Bahut amanviya bartav hua hai mere saath," Khan who was taken from Sitapur jail to Rampur court on Saturday morning in connection with a hearing told newsmen from a police van. "Just like a terrorist," he shouted as he was being whisked away. Khan's legislator wife Tanzeen Fatima and their son and disqualified MLA Abdullah Azam were also taken to Rampur amidst tight security for a hearing in another case. —PTI

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CPI rallies behind Kanhaiya Kumar

DC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI FEB. 29

The CPI on Saturday said it will fight both "legally and politically" the sedition case against its leader Kanhaiya Kumar and alleged that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in the national capital had "succumbed to political pressure."

"The national secretary of the Communist Party of India (CPI) will fight legally and politically the sedition charges against party national executive member and former president of the JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) Kanhaiya Kumar. "The party is confident that Kanhaiya Kumar will come out unscathed as the charges are false and politically motivated," the CPI said in a statement.

Taking on the Aam Aadmi Party AAP, the CPI statement added, "It may be recalled here that the Chief Minister (Kejriwal) himself had in the beginning said that there is no case of sedition against

Kanhaiya and videos were doctored. We are yet to ascertain why this sudden change of heart has happened."

The party said that it will soon secure a copy of the Delhi government's standing counsel's recommendations which had not given sanction for the prosecution. "The party vehemently opposes the move to implicate Kanhaiya Kumar in a false sedition case and urges all its units and mass organisations to protest peacefully against the prosecution move," the statement further added.

Congress leader and former Union minister P. Chidambaram also criticised the Aam Aadmi Party government in Delhi for giving the go-ahead to the police to prosecute Kanhaiya Kumar. "Delhi Government is no less ill-informed than the Central government in its understanding of sedition law. I strongly disapprove of the sanction granted to prosecute Kanhaiya Kumar and others for alleged offences," he tweeted.

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2. The last date for receipt of applications is up to **31st March, 2020.**

3. Further, details and application form can be obtained from the TRAI website www.traigov.in

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DECCAN Chronicle

1 MARCH 2020

**Krishna Shastri Devulapalli****Off the beaten track**

10 reasons why I want to be reborn a South Hero

It was after three gruelling days of prayer to Swami Nithyananda that God finally appeared before me. “What boon do you seek?” he said. “And hurry up, I have this thing with Jaggi.” Getting over my initial surprise that He wasn’t a She, I replied without hesitation. “I want to be reborn a ... er ... South Hero, My ... er ... Lord.” “You sure?” God said. “Don’t be hasty. I am God. If I wish, you could be reborn as Mukesh Ambani’s driver, the touch-up guy at Victoria’s Secret shows...”

“I’m absolutely sure, Prabhu,” I said. “I have put years of thought into this.”

“Could you give me one reason?” said the Almighty.

“How about I give you 10?” I said. “In no particular order, though.”

“I am listening,” said God, looking at his fake Rolex, a gift from a devotee.

“Well, for starters, I’ve always fancied the idea of being bathed in milk by loving fans.”

“Seriously?” said God. “It’s no big deal. Sticky, actually. And the #*#*s water it down.”

“Then, I have always wanted a family whose sole purpose is being the supporting cast to my life. Appearing en masse in the large living room of our mansion in the middle of verdant fields, standing approvingly in the background as my awesome life unfolds, and disappearing discreetly when I’m singing with the heroine in Prague or Vienna as Western civilization looks on in bewilderment.”

“True,” said God. “That is a good one.”

“Actually, there’s my next reason,” I said. “Under the current scenario of travel restrictions for us brown folk, who but a South Hero can go to exotic locations, dance on busy streets with east European background dancers, wear outrageous clothes, hold up traffic, without being shot in the patootie with a bazooka?”

“Good point,” said God. “Then the retirement thing. The post of South Hero is the only one where one retires only when one dies. In fact, thanks to advances in the field of CGI and taxidermy, maybe even after. Rumour has it that one South superstar who had a Sankranti release actually died three years ago. They are hailing it as his best performance yet.”

“Next?” said God.

“The heroines,” I said.

“They get younger and younger and younger. It’s brilliant. In fact, one hero, as we speak, has delayed his comeback project because he is waiting for his heroine to be born. I think they are going in for a C-section because the teasers are out.”

“Hmmm,” said God.

“Have you ever seen the bad guys that attack a South Hero in a fight sequence?” I said.

“I’ve seen a couple. My wi-fi has been down. The Dthritrashtra-Sanjaya Network is up for sale, as you know.”

“They always come in a queue, Swami,” I said. “The South movie henchman, to my knowledge, is the only man in India who follows the queue system. The first guy comes, the hero dispatches him, then the second, repeat, then the third ... I tell you, it’s awesome.”

“You make a good case,” said the Omnipotent. “But hurry up, Amish just texted me.”

“Okay,” I said. “Then, the chief adversary. In my current life as writer, do you know how diabolical and ruthless my chief adversaries, my editor and my publisher, are? They make Goebbels look like Pandari Bai.”

“So what are you saying?”

“The main villain in every south film is a moron. He is completely clueless. A languor on downers could outwit the guy. The best part is, the idiot doesn’t even know Telugu or Tamil because he’s from Bombay. So the happy ending is a foregone conclusion for the South Hero.”

“True,” said God. “I do feel sorry for Kelly Dorji, Neil Nitin Mukesh, Jackie Shroff.”

“Well, here are three reasons in one shot,” I said. “When the going gets tough, South Heroes get to deliver alliterative ‘punch’ dialogues that make no sense at all. They say things like ‘I have great taste-u. You are bloody waste-u. If I hit you, you are paste-u’. Also, they sport cool prefixes like ‘Thunder & Lightning Hero’ or ‘Young Rootless Intergalactic Star’ before their names. And, finally, when they are arthritic and toothless, they get a shot at being CM ... where are you going, God?”

“My Uber has arrived, son,” said God.

“So are we on?” I said.

“Yes,” said God, waving. “But let me give it a try first.”

Krishna Shastri Devulapalli is a humour writer, novelist, columnist and screenwriter

Subhani



Delhi loved and lost. Will it love again?

**Shreya Sen-Handley****No More Mansplaining**

How was it for you? This last month of love? I sat on my soapbox in Sherwood Forest and asked the squirrels gathering around me. The one that appeared to be sweeping the forest floors in search of nuts, with a dark ring of fur around his neck that could have been a muffler, and whiskers like a little black tache, nodded vigorously. It had been a good month — he’d felt the love.

Four thousand, five hundred and fifty miles away in Delhi, so had chief minister Arvind Kejriwal. His incumbent party had swept the Delhi state elections, winning 62 seats to the ruling party’s paltry eight. Analysts explained that it was a vote for status quo, for efficiency, or a slap in the face of the rampaging BJP. But I’d like to think it was a vote for solidarity. For love.

Delhi = Love?? Pull the other one! That’s not an emotion we associate with our cut-throat capital, accounting for 40 per cent of rapes and 33 per cent of all crimes against women in India. As a 21-year-old working in television there, I’d been molested, stalked, and nearly killed (with a *karai* — honest). Twenty years later, in 2016, I returned to Delhi to further disasters when the hotel fried my electronic devices to a crisp, barring me from both my money and contacts. When they failed to compensate or help, I turned to the peeps who’d invited me over, to find them as perverse.

“You’re calling me at seven in the morning? *Jaante hain main kaun hoon?*” one huffed. Panic-stricken, I began to call one barely known Facebook friend after another to see who might assist. Before long I had a host of offers from unexpected quarters of their company, cars and phones! If the kindness of strangers saved my bacon, it was also this generosity that led Delhi’ites in their thousands to turn out in support of the protesting women of tenacious Shaheen Bagh, and JNU and Jamia students, under attack from right-wing goons. With love so unexpectedly given precedence, it was no wonder that Delhi went on to democratically sweep out hate.

A college in Kutch too was painting the town red. Not with satin hearts and red velvet cupcakes, but with blood. The principal of this Hindu sectarian institution, which prohibited menstruating women from participating in regular activities, suspected a large percentage of her students of lying to her so they could study unhindered (the gall! the depravity!). She ordered 68 of them to strip to prove their period-free status. The students complained and the enforcers were arrested. Briefly.

That might make educational institutions think twice before humiliating harmlessly ovulating students again, but will it make even a dent on the taboo around menstruation? Not while “godmen” like Swami Krishnaswarup get away with decreeing that menstruating women who cook will be reborn as dogs, and the men who eat their cooking, as bullocks. The word you want is the

British “pillock”, *Dasji*; many muck heaps worse than a harmless bovine, and the perfect name for brain-dead bigots like you.

Talking of British pillocks, BoJo lulled Brit-Indians into thinking they were feeling the lurrvvve when he scooped Narayana Murthy’s son-in-law Rishi Sunak into the blubbery bearhug of his Cabinet. Especially chuffed that he’d replaced Pakistani-origin Sajid Javid as Chancellor of the Exchequer, it only dawned on desis later that Rishi is as much of a privileged-and-not-parting-with-it toff as farcically malevolent Jacob Rees-Mogg. With his pots of money and perfect coiffure, I cannot see Rishi generously doling out love. Nor government largesse to the 15 million living in poverty in the UK. But he might win Hair of The Year yet and make us proud.

Nor will I hear a word against Pakistanis. Especially the kind that glower at you from behind the steering wheel till you bring up biryani. Subcontinental taxi drivers, with whom I have a heart-to-heart on every trip out of the Sherwoods, are my Best Ever Friends (not counting squirrels). “What on earth is going on in your country?” they cry. “Hah! What about yours?” I reply. And we both guffaw.

Of course, if British Indians were celebrating the appointment of an apparently normal desi to the Cabinet, they were right, as the other

BoJo lulled Brit-Indians into thinking they were feeling the lurrvvve when he scooped Rishi Sunak into the blubbery bearhug of his Cabinet. It only dawned on desis later that Rishi is as much of a privileged-and-not-parting-with-it toff as Jacob Rees-Mogg.

two are Priti Patel and Cruella, sorry, Suella Braverman. Priti hates the marginalised, the sick and the poor, and in pole position to help them all in shiny new Brexit Britain, she delights in making their lives a misery instead. From one brown gal to another, Priti, I’m not gonna beseech you to look into your heart, because you don’t have one. Yet, look into your past and see if you can’t find people who were ostracised when they first arrived, but through industry and the occasional opportunity sparked by the kindness of strangers, worked their way to where YOU are now. Remember, pretty please, and consider paying it forward.

So, if in these weeks of love, you didn’t feel it in the air, if your town was painted the wrong sorta red, have I got the month for you! For this is the month of warlike Mars, for the Ides of March, when the self-serving get their comeuppance. Cook up revenge all this month with a, er, vengeance, and don’t wait to serve it cold. Fan the flames of your rage at the fundamentalists, the brutish politicians and their circles of greed. Then burrrrrn ‘em with your democratic rights. Speak up. March. Vote.

Do as Delhi did. You may never hear me say that again!

P.S. As it turns out, you really *won’t* hear that from me again. Two days after I submitted my paean to Delhi’s love and kindness, it has descended into a hell of rioting and murder, and its worst self. Its true self? Prove us wrong, Delhi. Rise again.

Shreya Sen-Handley is the author of the recently published Strange: Stories, the award-winning Memoirs of My Body, and a forthcoming book of travel misadventures



‘The heroines,’ I said. ‘They get younger and younger and younger. It’s brilliant. In fact, one hero, as we speak, has delayed his comeback project because he is waiting for his heroine to be born. I think they are going in for a C-section because the teasers are out.’

‘Hmmm,’ said God.

Optics of a riot

The Central government’s decision to send National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval to the riot-affected northeast Delhi areas was a deliberate move. Apparently, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and his two deputies in North Block, G. Krishna Reddy and Nityanand Rai, were not keen to make any conciliatory gesture. The political leadership zeroed in on Doval. The NSA’s presence was effective after the crowd heard him say, “*Inshallah*, everything will be fine.”

Saffron takeover?

The Narendra Modi government is reportedly contemplating some sort of an interim government or an advisory council in Jammu and Kashmir with the help of Altaf Bukhari, Muzaffar Baig, Dilawar Mir, and a few others from Jammu region. The Centre is reportedly keen to undertake the delimitation

Amit shy, so Doval’s the troubleshooter

of Assembly seats by early 2022, with 50 constituencies in Jammu and 40 in the Kashmir Valley. The big question doing the rounds in Lutyens’ Delhi is whether such a plan can work without the three former chief ministers Feroz Abdullah, Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti? Enthusiastic elements in North and South Blocks point to the past when Sheikh Abdullah was imprisoned for almost two decades.

Framing concern

When Sonia Gandhi addressed a press conference over the Delhi riots, many party leaders were unable to recall the last time the AICC chief — for over 20 years since 1998 — conducted a press briefing

from 24, Akbar Road. So eager was the Congress leadership to be seen in the same frame as her that nine chairs were placed on the dais. The ninth chair placed for Shaktisinh Gohil almost teetered off the stage. The leaders who sat with Gandhi included Manmohan Singh, Ghulam Nabi Azad, A.K. Antony, Randeep Surjewala K.C. Venugopal, P. Chidambaram and Ahmed Patel. Many leaders who couldn’t find space on the dais sat with reporters. These included Rajeev Gowda, Mallikarjun Kharge and P.L. Punia.

Shakhas and leaves

The BJP’s choice of V.D. Sharma as the Madhya Pradesh party head has generated a lot of interest in party circles. Sharma is per-



By WAQYANAWIS

ceived to be close to Suresh Soni, an influential RSS leader. Many had

thought Shivraj Singh Chouhan would get the post or Rakesh Singh would get another term in office. Sharma’s appointment is seen as the RSS’s growing clout over the BJP organisation.

Berth pains in Cong

There are many anxious souls in the Congress as the Rajya Sabha poll dates draw closer. Reports of Sonia Gandhi traveling out in the first half of March and Rahul Gandhi returning to the country have rattled a section of the party’s old guard who were confident of securing berths in the Upper House. In Karnataka, veteran Mallikarjun Kharge is a contender while in Haryana, Kumari Selja is a hopeful. But Congress insiders claim if

LETTERS**DELHI BURNING**

The Delhi riots bring to mind the story of Roman emperor Nero who was playing the violin (lyre) when Rome was burning. It is sad to see so much hatred in a civilised society that guarantees freedom of speech, faith and brotherhood. Those in power are displaying a narrow-minded and undemocratic arrogance to establish egoistic hegemony. If they are so interested in religion, it is better to reconfigure the state from a republic since they have a brutal majority to do what they want.

Dr T.Y. Shekar
Hyderabad

BJP leader Kapil Mishra is roaming freely in spite of directions from the High Court to book an FIR against him. However, people like Kanhaiya Kumar who are trying to protect the Constitutional rights are being booked for sedition.

Khaizar Hussain
Hyderabad

ILLEGAL BUILDINGS

I feel sorry for the GHMC chief for getting strictures from the Telangana High Court on illegal constructions in the city (*HC: Why not sack GHMC chief, DC, Feb 20*). As long as there is nexus between politicians, councillors, contractors and officials, illegal constructions will continue and the GHMC chief alone cannot stop it.

Dr Oruganty Prasada Rao
Hyderabad

MYSTERY VIRUS

The mystery over coronavirus is deepening even after so many deaths and no cure in sight. Doctors are treating people based on trial and error with medicine used for cold and flu and not exactly tackling the virus. India is in a weak spot if the epidemic reaches our shores. It is time to put aside politics and focus on this issue.

M. Jeevanand
Secunderabad

CHICKEN VS MUTTON

It would be better if citizens opt to eat chicken for a month instead of mutton so that we can do justice to poultry farmers and keep a check on mutton rates.

T. Kailash Ditya
Hyderabad

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

Nepal Prince weds

KATHMANDU, FEB. 28. Amidst the chanting of the vedic mantras crown Prince Birendra of Nepal was married to Princess Aishwarya Rajyalakshmi Rana in the early hours of this morning at a glittering ceremony here.

In accordance with the “muhurat” fixed for the “Kanya Daan” the parents of the Princess gave away the bride in marriage to the crown Prince at 47 minutes past four this morning.

Among others present at the ceremony at Singh Darbar (the bride’s residence) were King Mahendra, Queen Ratna, Prince Gyanendra and Prince Dhirendra (the two younger brothers of the crown Prince) and other members of the Royal family.

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Rahul gets a chance to have a decisive say in selecting Congress nominees for Rajya Sabha, loyalty may not be on premium and Kharge may find himself getting upstaged by Rajiv Gowda.

CMs to be tested

Now that Delhi elections are done and dusted, the Bharatiya Janata Party leadership is said to be giving a hard look at some of its party-ruled states. Three states — Haryana, Assam and Uttarakhand — are under the scanner, where the performance of the chief ministers is being evaluated against many parameters. BJP sources say, however, that an assessment does not mean the chief ministers of these states would necessarily be uprooted.

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

A controversial defence minister gets a fair reckoning



Ajith Pillai

review

B iographers tend to be unduly sympathetic towards their subject. But Congress politician and former Union minister, Jairam Ramesh, in his avatar as a chronicler, cannot be found guilty of donning hagiographic bifocals while unravelling the jigsaw puzzle called V.K. Krishna Menon. As he notes in the introduction of *A Chequered Brilliance: The Many Lives of V.K. Krishna Menon*, the subject of his biography was a multi-layered character much admired and equally despised. The sum of all the parts that made this rather controversial individual is what Ramesh captures through his book.

Given the luxury of 725 pages by his publishers, the author has had the space to explore Menon's life in considerable detail. And in this exercise Ramesh has been helped by archival material including copious notes and documents preserved in Delhi's Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. Also, the several letters exchanged between Jawaharlal Nehru and Krishna Menon before and after Independence was a valuable resource in exploring the latter's role in the freedom struggle as well as in the nascent Indian government.

As Ramesh points out at the outset, those who disliked Menon and his dismissive and abrasive ways had rather uncharitable things to say about him. He was variously referred to as "Rasputin", "Mephistopheles, Lucifer, Svengali, Evil Genius... the World's Most hated Diplomat and Sombre Porcupine". But for those who knew the other Krishna Menon he was Jawaharlal Nehru's intellectual "soulmate and sounding board" between 1935 and 1964. He also

Ramesh's discovery of V.K. Krishna Menon (1896-1974) is not only a delightful look at the latter's chequered journey from Calicut to London but also a study of the personalities and movements in England that helped India in its struggle for Independence

higher echelons of the three services over appointment of favourites of the defence minister to top posts. Matters finally came to a head when then Army Chief, General K.S. Thimayya, submitted his resignation in 1959 but was persuaded by Nehru to stay on till his term concluded in 1961.

However, issues raised in Thimayya's resignation letter pertaining to Krishan Menon's conduct were scooped by the *Statesman's* "political correspondent". The sensational story not only created a furore in Parliament but led to MPs demanding Menon's resignation from the cabinet. Interestingly, opposition to the defence minister also came from within his own Congress Party.

But how did the Army Chief's letter addressed to the Prime Minister leak to the media within hours of it being delivered? Ramesh's book offers this information: "For over five years the *Statesman* had a military correspondent who wrote on defence matters from time to time. This correspondent was no journalist really. He was none other than J.N. Chaudhuri, a top Army officer whose articles would appear occasionally under the byline 'By Our Military Correspondent'... My conclusion is that Chaudhuri was in the loop on Thimayya's resignation and instead of writing the story himself, passed it on to the paper's political correspondent."

The damage was done. From then on Krishna Menon became the target of persistent political attack. Indeed, such were the misgivings about the armed forces that in January 1961 there were rumours that a disgruntled army led by Thimayya may well stage a coup leading to a military takeover. According to then principal defence secretary S.S. Khera,

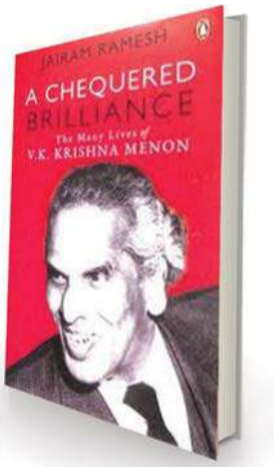
this "news" even reached Nehru and home minister Govind Ballabh Pant. Speculation was rife that January 30 — the anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination — was the day when the Army would strike. Thimayya's order to move a division from Ambala to Delhi had apparently fuelled the rumours.

This and other nuggets find their way into Ramesh's work which is not wanting in detail. One delightful aspect that is recorded in depth is the intellectual bonding and ideological camaraderie that existed between Jawaharlal Nehru and Krishna Menon. In fact, the latter, despite his brilliance, would not have flourished but for the trust reposed in him by the former.

As for Menon, not many would know that he was regarded as "brilliant" when he attended the London School of Economics by none other than Professor Harold Laski, noted economist and political theorist who went on to serve as the chairman of the British Labour Party. Neither is it widely known that Menon was among the three who launched Penguin Books in 1936, and that he was the first editor of its non-fiction imprint, Pelican. Among the books published under his editorship was Bernard Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism & Fascism* and Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo*.

More than anything else, Jairam Ramesh's discovery of V.K. Krishna Menon (1896-1974) is not only a delightful look at the latter's chequered journey from Calicut to London but also a study of the personalities and movements in England that helped India in its struggle for Independence.

The writer is a Delhi-based author and journalist



A CHEQUERED BRILLIANCE: THE MANY LIVES OF V.K. KRISHNA MENON

By Jairam Ramesh
Penguin Viking, ₹999

Home not where heart was for Enlightenment's intellectuals

Philip Marsden
review

E mily Thomas is a distinguished academic philosopher who has "spent a lot of time by herself getting lost around the world". Here she takes a trip to the wastes of Alaska and uses it to launch an extended meditation on a compelling question: what does it mean to travel? What is the significance of our urge to set off around the globe — not for trade, not to fight or conquer, but for its own sake?

By narrowing her remit thus, Thomas begins in 17th-century Europe, with the restless spirit of the Enlightenment. So we have no Pytheas, no Odysseus, no Marco Polo, no Ibn Battuta. Travel in her specific sense began as the prodigal child of science. It was about investigation, learning, the compulsion to explain, to understand and systemise. On completing his formal education, Descartes left home to continue it at large: "Resolving to seek no knowledge other than that which could be found in myself or else in the great book of the world, I spent the rest of my youth travelling."

A generation earlier, Francis Bacon had already called for a complete natural history, a universal study to be conducted not by contemplation but by observation. In the frontispiece of *The Great Instauration (Instauratione Magna)* with its ambitious plan to restore all that is there to know, all that was lost at the Fall, a ship is set against a flat and distant horizon: "Many shall go to and fro, and knowledge shall increase," (*Muldo pertransibunt et augebitur scientia*) reads the caption.

Travel became an empirical exercise. In London, the Royal Society met to discuss travel reports. It issued guidelines for the gathering of material (be sure to record longitude and latitude, climate, fishes and meteoric activity), and steered the itineraries of many inquisitive travellers towards places of interest — Greenland, the Caribbean, Hungary, Transylvania, Egypt and Persia. Men like Henry Blount and John Ray took to the road in pursuit of knowledge. In the 19th century, the voyages of the Challenger and the Beagle transformed our view of the natural world. Darwin quotes Bacon himself at the beginning of *The Origin of Species* — "let no man... think or maintain that a man can search too far or be too well studied".

Yet for all its functional benefits, many of travel's enduring rewards are more metaphysical. Thomas shows the sensibilities of travellers enlarging over the years to take in elements of the sublime, to seek out grandeur in landscape, to pursue the transcendental. Margaret Cavendish was not a traveller herself but wrote an early Utopian tract based on a fantasy journey. "Travellers," she suggests, "have most reason to adore and worship God best for they see most of his wonderful works."

How do these philosophical musings inform the 21st-century traveller? Thomas gives us useful discussions of the age-old gendering of the journey, traditional male roles articulated in the roving adventurer — and how it is changing; on the increase, for instance, are scholarly studies of women travellers, which "chip away at the beardiness". She speaks of trends such as "cabin porn" — the online popularity of huts in the wilderness — and "doom tourism" — the compulsion to see places before environmental damage destroys them.

In essence, though, the travel experience offers something perennial. It is not a pre-requisite for understanding — Socrates and Kant hardly budged at all. But for all those who do set off — be they scientist, explorer or backpacker — an immersion in the unfamiliar is invariably rewarding. Thomas distinguishes between such trips and commuting or tourism: "The difference between everyday journeys and travel journeys lies in how much otherness the traveller experiences." Otherness is the object of such travel and its own reward. "I want to forget my western outlook," muses the great 20th-century Swiss traveller Ella Maillart, "and feel the whole impact made on me by the newness I meet at every step."

But going to far-off places has another effect. Travel reduces the significance of home. As you travel further, your native habitat grows smaller. The ultimate example is the 1968 Earthrise image, taken from Apollo 8: the furthest that anyone had ever travelled revealed the cosmic frailty of our planet in a picture that has been described as the "most influential environmental photograph ever taken".

Emily Thomas has used her command of the philosophical canon to extend our understanding of an impulse that many of us share but few examine in such depth. *The Meaning of Travel* is a manifesto for the virtues that travel can bestow on the traveller — not just an increase in knowledge, but a deep humility at the scale and diversity of the world, and an enduring wonder that we live on such a planet.

By arrangement with the Spectator



THE MEANING OF TRAVEL: PHILOSOPHERS ABROAD

by Emily Thomas
OUP, £14.99

A Murshidabad manor tells a profeminist tale



Kushalrani Gulab

review

That's how evocative this book is: unconsciously evocative actually, because history is merely the backdrop of the story, though without it the book would be meaningless. *Suralakshmi Villa* swings back, forth and sideways in time between the 1930s and the 1990s through the lives of several people over several generations, all centred on and around Dr Suralakshmi Chaudhuri, the woman who owns the villa named for her by her parents.

Suralakshmi's mother, Lakshmi, was extraordinarily ahead of her pre-Independence times. When her oldest daughter was widowed at the age of 16, Lakshmi insisted that none of her five daughters would be forced into an arranged marriage. They would make their own decisions about everything: careers, marriage, children.

Much later, in a village that was once the capital of the Goud kingdom of Bengal, four girls live in

the stinking ruins of a palace that has become a tenement for poor



SURALAKSHMI VILLA
By Aruna Chakravarti
Picador India, ₹650

Muslims. None of the women here have agency over their own lives; they are mere possessions. Sexually abused by her father; Eidun is whisked to safety and a career in nursing by Suralakshmi after a botched abortion, but Jeeni is married off within a day at the age of 11 to save her from the same fate. Meroo is married to the village barber who treats her like dirt and unbeautiful Ojju, still unmarried at 21, takes out her frustration on her mother, Ruksana, a woman soaked in misery thanks to the many still-born babies to her name.

At other times and other places in the novel, you meet Kingshuk, the son Suralakshmi abandoned, Pratul, Suralakshmi's cousin who had been rescued by her father from a life of small-mindedness and neglect in his village joint family, and Tara, the daughter of a judge, who marries Pratul and becomes

Suralakshmi's best friend. There are lots of other people, each with some role to play in and around Suralakshmi's life — not to mention Suralakshmi Villa itself, which picks up the story of our heroine whenever her family and friends have no explanation for what goes on in Suralakshmi's head.

The only person you seldom hear from directly in this novel is Suralakshmi herself. This means that, like the characters in the book, you get no privileges in your understanding of Suralakshmi other than what the villa has to say. But you don't really need to know Suralakshmi well. You just need to know that *Suralakshmi Villa* is an unusual and understated novel that will one day creep into your dreams.

Kushalrani Gulab is a freelance editor and writer who dreams of being a sanyasi by the sea



Venezuelan journalist Ariana Neumann's first book, a memoir describing her father, Hans Neumann's extraordinary wartime existence, as a Czech Jew moving freely throughout Berlin is the talk of the reading circle. *When Time Stopped: A Memoir of My Father's War and What Remains* (Simon & Schuster) is a chillingly sad reconstruction of the Holocaust, from the point of view of one family, seen through a daughter's eyes.

Being a wannabe, being a writer, being a bit or a lot of both



Neha Bhatt

review

In the thick of the lit-fest season, when literary folk enjoy a spot in the sun, Namita Gokhale's metafictional novel examining the thorny writing life comes as a marvellously timely read. *Jaipur Journals* is set in the annual Jaipur Literature Festival, in and around the venue The Diggi Palace, offering both a delicious ring-side view and behind-the-scenes glimpses of "the greatest literary show on earth". It works because it taps, ever so gently, into the messy lives of the lonely and somewhat mysterious tribe of writers, with delightful insights and enough drama to make it worthy of a cinematic dramedy. Perhaps some day?

In *Jaipur Journals*, multiple stories and perspectives are linked into a single narrative, with a quirky set of characters colliding, as it were, at the literature festival. As co-founder of the Jaipur Literature Festival, Gokhale has obviously seen it all up close: the authors and their devoted audience, the literary squabbles and the schmoozing, the panels and the parties, the hyperbole and the hypocrisy, the sparks on stage and drama off stage. To her credit, Gokhale writes this novel with a gaze that is remarkably dispassionate, throwing open a literary cocoon to artful scrutiny, revealing, layer by layer, the many inse-

curities and vulnerabilities of the people that populate it.

At the centre of the book is the 70-something "failed novelist" Rudrani Rana, who carries around with her her life's most precious creation: the manuscript of her "private masterpiece" titled UNSUBMITTED. Haunted by her past and painfully guarded about her future, Rana is fearful of sending out into the world the very book she has devoted herself to. On the train to Jaipur, she meets a writer as young as she is old: 12-year-old Anura, who's attending the festival for a Young Adult session, invited to read from her self-published book of dystopian fiction. Rana, meanwhile, is a festival regular and something of a truth-teller. "This was her third year now, and she knew her way around the crowds, she knew how to tell the speakers what she thought of them, how to debunk their hubris, bring them back down to earth."

she knew how to tell the speakers what she thought of them, how to debunk their hubris, bring them back down to earth." And just like that, both writers, one weary and wise, the other curious and hopeful, are linked instantly in ways more than they will ever know.

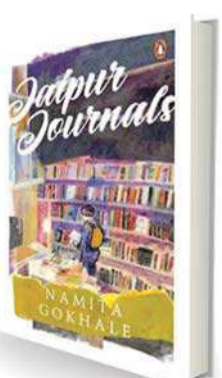
Through the lens of the popular literature festival, Gokhale pries open the politics of the literary world to look at not just the writing life, but our collective contemporary concerns — rising hatred, jarring jingoism, widening polarities, blurring boundaries — and how we engage with them in literature and in life. How do we make sense of it all, within and outside of the writing community?

Largely unfolding over five days of the festival, the narrative moves between private and public spaces where the carefully arranged masks come off briefly: the colourful tents that host the panel discussions, the author's lounge and the press terrace, the posh hotel rooms occupied by the speakers and the humbler guesthouses by the attendees, the saucy parties and the pink city's tourist hubs.

The charming and familiar setting helps build the novel into a piece of well-observed-of-and-for-the-moment social commentary, as a string of incidents set off in motion certain life changing events. We meet the mysterious

Betaab, a poet and thief who has a moment on the dance floor where he steals the evening singing Faiz Ahmad Faiz's *Bol ki lab azad hain tere* to thunderous applause. We run into the fiery feminist icon, the gender fluid writer Zoya Mankotia who begins to question what she stands for after she receives an anonymous letter accusing her of "intellectual pretensions". We follow academic and aspiring novelist Gayatri Smyth Gandhi's messy romantic and professional pursuits at the festival. And we fall for the kind and passionate Anirban M, a graphic crossover artist who befriends Rudrani Rana, she who seems like the odd one out, worthy of the centerstage but hovering on the margins. These are characters that feel lived in with solid backstories, although some of the other quieter characters and their subplots feel a bit underdeveloped. Even so, in the middle of a month that carries with it a heaviness that is all too pervasive, I was grateful for *Jaipur Journals* — to dip into it felt reassuring, its world familiar yet with depths untold, as it reminded me that the writerly life, though lonely, holds so much life, even in death.

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



JAIPUR JOURNALS
by Namita Gokhale
Penguin, ₹499

UK, with music by Edward Rushton. The world premiere of *Babur* took place in Switzerland in 2012.

Shreya Sen-Handley

A m i t Chaudhuri made his Royal Opera debut in 2016/17 as librettist for Ravi Shankar's *Sukanya*, which received its posthumous premiere in a co-production between The Royal Opera, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Curve, Leicester. Shreya may very well be the third notable librettist. Effectively then, it is three cheers for Shreya Sen-Handley! Way to go, Shreya!

WE RECOMMEND

The Welsh National Opera's *Migrations*, a series of six stories exploring migration from different angles, is composed by Will Todd and opens on October 3, 2020. **Shreya Sen-Handley** (*Memoirs of My Body, Strange*) is one of the six writers, and the first South Asian woman to have written a libretto for an international opera. She focusses on the experiences of the first Indian doctors in Britain.

Other than Jeet Thayil and Amit Chaudhuri, not so many Indian/Asian writers of either sex have had an opportunity to write international opera. **Jeet Thayil** is the author of the libretto for the opera, *Babur*, commissioned by Opera Group,



Sop opera for a welfare state

During his election campaign YSR Congress chief Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy had promised a slew of welfare schemes — Navaratnalu (nine gems). The nine promises created unprecedented hope among the electorate and propelled Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy to the seat of power in Andhra Pradesh. Will these freebies ruin the work culture or help the wheel of economic activity turn? These are some of the questions facing the Chief Minister.



PROMISES TO KEEP: File photo of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy during his swearing-in ceremony.

— DECCAN CHRONICLE

N. Vamsi Srinivas

This (election manifesto) is the Bhagavad Gita, Bible and Quran for me, my party workers and my government functionaries," announced Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, showing a single sheet of paper to thousands of his jubilant followers who were cheering him at his swearing-in ceremony in May last year.

On the day Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy released the YSR Congress manifesto, a few months earlier, he had highlighted how brief the manifesto was. All promises were listed in a single sheet of paper unlike the booklets that other political parties print to showcase their promises to people.

The nine promises, for which his poll managers coined the term 'Navaratnalu' or nine gems, created unprecedented hope among the Andhra Pradesh electorate as was evident from the massive mandate they gave Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy — 151 Assembly seats out of 175 and 22 Lok Sabha seats out of 25.

Is implementation of the welfare initiatives as simple as compiling them on a single sheet of paper?

Does Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy have a philosophy behind these initiatives and a long-term vision to realise them, or has it been done with an eye on the 2024 general elections? Will these freebies, as a non-beneficiary of these initiatives rues, ruin the work culture or actually help the wheel of economic activity turn? These are some of the questions facing the Chief Minister.

The nine initiatives can be summarised as follows:

- Rythu Bharosa, cash assistance for farmers
- Fee reimbursement
- Aarogyasri, state bearing the cost of medical treatment
- Jalayagnam, strengthening of irrigation network
- Gradual prohibition on liquor sale
- Amma Vodi, a cash incentive to mothers to send children to school
- YSR Aasara, loan waiver to women thrift groups and cash incentive to women aged above 45
- Pedalandariki Illu, housing for poor on saturation mode
- Pension Pempu, enhanced pension to citizens above 60

Except for irrigation projects and prohibition, the rest of the promises fall in the category of direct benefit transfer, or cash incentive in general terms, that would roughly take about ₹30,000 crore of the state Budget every year. Some of the initiatives are part of existing schemes, some are centrally-sponsored and others are the Chief Minister's brainchild, but all bear his imprint either in terms of enhanced allocations

SOME OF THE INITIATIVES ARE PART OF EXISTING SCHEMES, SOME ARE CENTRALLY-SPONSORED AND OTHERS ARE THE CHIEF MINISTER'S BRAINCHILD, BUT ALL BEAR HIS IMPRINT EITHER IN TERMS OF ENHANCED ALLOCATIONS OR IMPROVED IMPLEMENTATION METHODOLOGY.

or improved implementation methodology.

For instance, Basavaraju Prasada Rao, a septuagenarian from Nellore district, to his pleasant surprise found a state-appointed volunteer handing over his senior citizen's pension of ₹2,250 at his doorstep relieving him of the burden of either depending on his children to draw money from the bank and bear silently with the pilferage or go all the way to the local office to collect pension. Like him, about 59 lakh pensioners receive money at their doorstep every month.

Similarly, Kamalamma, a native of Madakasira in Anantapur district, died of cancer when a hospital in Hyderabad refused to honour the health insurance scheme of the then AP government as it was applicable only in Andhra Pradesh. Another cancer patient, Raghavendra Prasad of Kovurnagar in the same district, was fortunate enough to get treatment in Bengaluru, which is close by, after Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy extended the Aarogyasri health insurance to cover medical treatment availed outside the state.

PHILOSOPHY

According to Team Jagan, the 3,648-km padayatra covering the length and breadth of the state in 341 days perhaps gave a new dimension to the thoughts of Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy, then Leader of the Opposition. The extra mile he walked more than his father and late chief minister Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy did translate into an extra thrust on addressing the problems from the roots while attending to the people's immediate needs. "Our focus is to handhold a generation to prosperity," explains Mr G.V.D. Krishna Mohan, State Communications Adviser. Children who just join school today have to study for at least 20 years and equip themselves to face the world in 2040 and beyond. "We can't even imagine how the world would have technologically advanced," he adds.

HUMAN CAPITAL

The Chief Minister, according to his aides, realised that the failure to invest in building human capital left the country behind China, which was on par with India way back in 1981 on all parameters of development but went on to achieve five times India's GDP by investing in education and health. "Some accuse the Chief Minister of doling out freebies to win over the electorate and ruining the economy," says Dr P.V. Ramesh, additional chief secretary to the Chief Minister. The so-called free market economies like the US bear 48 per cent of the health cost, and 22 per cent of the UK Budget goes only to government hospitals, he said adding that spending on health is an investment in human capital.

In various review meetings, the Chief Minister has attributed the perennial problem of poverty to the ever-increasing

health cost of people of which only 20 per cent is borne by the government. This is apparently to defend his focus on huge spending on Aarogyasri and extending the health care benefit not just to the Below Poverty Line families but all those whose annual income is less than ₹5 lakh per annum.

According to the health indices released by the Centre, AP fared badly in various parameters including 30 per cent premature marriages of women and 25 per cent teen pregnancies. Lack of access to proper medicare still kept infant mortality at a high rate of 34 out of 1,000. The Chief Minister, Dr Ramesh says, has embarked on a ₹14,000-crore health infrastructure improvement programme.

EDUCATION

Contrary to the general perception, Andhra Pradesh fares poorly in education parameters. "For instance, the gross enrolment ratio in elementary education during Mr Chandrababu Naidu's regime was 83.2 per cent, far below the national average of 96.9 per cent," says Mr Duvvuri. An expert in finance and energy sectors, he was part of the Chief Minister's think tank that was involved in drafting the manifesto. Incidentally, his father D. Somayajulu rendered similar services to Dr Rajasekhara Reddy.

Explaining the philosophy behind the YSR Congress government's flagship programmes, Mr Duvvuri says making English medium of instruction compulsory in elementary education, Nadu-Nedu (now and then) a programme aimed at improving the infrastructure in schools, Amma Vodi, a ₹15,000 per annum cash incentive to mothers and fee reimbursement are investments on a generation.

Notwithstanding dues of crores of rupees to the agencies providing the mid-day meal scheme, the Chief Minister changed the menu to make it tastier and healthier. "We have witnessed a nine per cent increase in attendance last month after changing the menu," says Ch Sridhar, director of the mid-day meal scheme in the school education department.

The Chief Minister announced Nadu Nedu for schools also wherein ₹4,500 crore would be spent in the next four years to improve infrastructure in schools and of which ₹900 crore would be spent on capacity building of teachers.

AGRICULTURE

As per the rural finance inclusion report of the Nabard, the average monthly income and expenditure of farmers in Andhra Pradesh hovered at about ₹5,200 between 2014 and 2019 and the disposable surplus income with farmers was almost nil. On the other hand, the ratio of indebtedness is as high as 77 per cent against the national average of 47 per cent.

While Dr Rajasekhara Reddy ushered in a new concept of free power to the farm sector, successive governments including that of Mr Naidu, who once was a hard critic of the initiative, were left with no option but to continue the programme.

Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy has come up with a proposal to build 10,000 MW solar farm sector apart from providing cash incentive of ₹13,500 per acre every year under the Rythu Bharosa scheme to 46.5 lakh farmers.

The Chief Minister however was criticised for including the Central assistance of ₹6,000 and Mr Naidu demanded that the government give the promised assistance of ₹12,000 over and above the Central assistance.

THE NAVARATNALU

- 1 Rythu Bharosa, cash assistance to farmers
- 2 Fee reimbursement to students
- 3 Aarogyasri, state bearing the cost of medical treatment
- 4 Jalayagnam, strengthening of irrigation network
- 5 Gradual total prohibition on liquor sale
- 6 Amma Vodi, again a cash incentive to mothers to send their children to school
- 7 YSR Aasara, loan waiver to women thrift groups and cash incentive to women of various sections aged above 45 years
- 8 Pedalandariki Illu, housing for poor on saturation mode
- 9 Pension Pempu, payment of enhanced pension to senior citizens above 60 years

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Immediately after the gruesome rape and murder of a veterinary student in Hyderabad, the Chief Minister brought out the Disha initiative to ensure speedy justice to victims and tougher punishment to ensure safety of women. To everyone's surprise, the emotionally charged Chief Minister announced in the Assembly his appreciation of his Telangana counterpart K. Chandrasekhara Rao and the police for delivering instant justice by killing the four accused in the Disha rape and murder. "The father of two girl children, he was emotionally upset on the increasing incidence of attacks on women and children," home minister M. Sucharita points out.

Many of the welfare initiatives are women-centric in that the cash incentives will go to women who the Chief Minister has repeatedly said in public speeches would be more concerned and judicious in spending.

Despite the state reeling under severe financial crunch, the Chief Minister is keen on achieving total prohibition in a phased manner with the strong belief that it improves the living standards of a family.

The efforts are yielding results, with the consumption of liquor going down by at least 25 per cent. "The government took over the retail sale of liquor in October last and consumption since then till the end of February was 117.55 lakh cases. This was against 154.79 lakh cases for the corresponding period in 2018-2019," says D. Vasudeva Reddy, managing director of AP Beverages Corporation Limited.

Schemes good, need good governance

DC CORRESPONDENT

The principal Opposition Telugu Desam openly criticises Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for what it terms the "complete neglect" of industry and infra sectors, while his own partymen wonder under their breath if "overdoing" the welfare initiatives will leave state finances in such a bad shape that there will not be adequate funding for the 'Navaratnalu', the nine welfare initiatives, down the line.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, while building his image as messiah of the poor hasn't done much to counter the narrative of his critics that he is anti-development. Some political analysts have even taken exception to what they describe as "misrule."

"The welfare initiatives of Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy are undoubtedly good but they will yield results only when there is good governance," says Prof. K. Nageshwar, noted political analyst. For instance, the Amma Vodi scheme is aimed at encouraging mothers to send their children to school by compensating them for the loss of their wages with a financial assistance of ₹15,000 per annum.

"It is equally important to impart quality education in schools that have all basic amenities," points out Prof. Nageshwar. On the agriculture front, merely handing out ₹13,500 per annum under the Rythu Bharosa scheme will prove counter-productive in the absence of a climate that is conducive to making agriculture viable, he says adding that the Chief Minister's focus should be equally on creating economic activity. He found fault with "politics of vengeance" pursued by the Chief Minister.

The initial days of Mr Jagan Mohan Reddy's tenure were marred by a setback to the construction sector, a major area of economic activity, due to the stoppage of sand supply. Then came the suspension of all irrigation project works, revisiting of power purchase agreements (PPAs), rumours over the relocation of KIA Motors and, above all, the proposal of dividing the capital between Visakhapatnam, Amaravati and Kurnool.

"Higher capital expenditure is an indication of a healthy economy but that is completely missing. On the contrary, the revenue expenditure is high and increasing," says former finance minister and senior TD leader Yanamala Ramakrishnu. The annual salary bill of ₹8,000 crore on so-called volunteers is a sheer waste as it is nothing but doling out a cash incentive to YSR Congress workers, he alleges. The government's finance managers have a different story. Countering the TD argument, Chief Minister's special secretary Krishna Duvvuri says: "We are left with a legacy that is better explained in statistics — enhanced debt of ₹2.58 lakh crore from ₹97,000 crore in 2014 and unpaid bills of ₹70,000 crore."

The power sector was the worst hit during the TD's rule, he said adding that the liabilities went up from ₹21,000 crore in 2014 to ₹70,000 crore in 2019. In the same period, arrears payable by the power utilities to producers went from ₹2,500 crore to ₹21,000 crore. "Does clearing bills of ₹20,000 crore by us in the last eight months not amount to prudent financial management," Mr Duvvuri asks.

Defending the revisiting of PPAs, the special secretary said the previous government had entered into agreements to purchase power at a higher cost of ₹5 or more per unit when it is available at ₹2.50. "While the Centre and industry may look from the perspective of the government not honouring the previous agreement, we are worried over the future of the power utilities," he points out.

The government also attributes financial stress in the state to the general recession as reflected in a mere 1.22 per cent growth in tax revenues and 4.5 per cent GDP growth. The GDP growth rate reached 4.5 per cent because of the 14.5 per cent increase in government spending, without which the actual growth would have been 3.3 per cent.

While hoping for the revival of the economy, the finance managers are confident that prudent spending would help sustenance. "The Chandrababu Naidu government borrowed ₹5,000 crore through the Civil Supplies Corporation before the elections and spent the money on his Pasupu Kumkuma poll sop. This is unremunerative expenditure," said Mr Duvvuri.

He does not mention that the YSRC government also doled out a sop in the form of the Amma Vodi scheme just before Sankranti in January. Even ruling party MLAs admitted that a majority of women beneficiaries spent the money on buying clothes for the family members, just as they did with Pasupu Kumkuma incentive.

THE CHIEF MINISTER BROUGHT OUT THE DISHA INITIATIVE TO ENSURE SPEEDY JUSTICE TO VICTIMS AND TOUGHER PUNISHMENT TO ENSURE SAFETY OF WOMEN. TO EVERYONE'S SURPRISE, THE EMOTIONALLY CHARGED CHIEF MINISTER ANNOUNCED HIS APPRECIATION OF HIS TELANGANA COUNTERPART K. CHANDRASEKHARA RAO AND THE POLICE FOR DELIVERING INSTANT JUSTICE BY KILLING THE FOUR ACCUSED IN THE DISHA RAPE AND MURDER



IN BRIEF

DR Congo: Militia fighters kill 24

Bunia (DR Congo): Militia fighters in Democratic Republic of Congo killed 24 people and injured 12 others, a local official said Saturday, the latest bout of unrest in the violence-wracked north-eastern province of Ituri. The killings took place late Friday in the province, where some 700 people have died since a surge in communal violence in 2017. The government on Friday signed a peace deal with one of the local armed groups, the FRPI (Patriotic Resistance Forces in Ituri), who have been active in the area for two decades.

Fire: Paris station partly evacuated

Paris: Paris police reported a fire Friday near the Gare de Lyon train station, which was partially evacuated amid violent protests against a Congolese singer due to give a concert nearby. "Avoid the area and allow the emergency services to intervene," the police said on Twitter, adding later the fire had been brought under control and was "being extinguished." Police said they had intervened to stop protesters who set alight garbage bins and scooters, releasing a thick, black smoke cloud over the city centre. The police on Twitter reported "unacceptable violence by people who have violated the ban on protesting on the sidelines of a concert". It posted a video of what it said was "scandalous behaviour" by protesters shown wielding large roadworks barriers to prevent firefighters from getting to the blaze.

Pak: 20 killed as train, bus collide

Karachi: A horrific collision between a speeding train and a passenger bus at an unmanned crossing killed at least 20 people, including children, and left scores injured in Pakistan's southern Sindh province, officials said. The accident took place on Friday at the Kandhra railway crossing, near the Rohri railway station in the province, when the '45 Up Pakistan Express' train coming from Rawalpindi towards Karachi collided with the passenger bus. Sukkur Commissioner Shafiq Ahmed Mahesar confirmed that at least 20 people, including children, died in the incident, adding that the casualties could rise as the condition of several of the injured was critical. "We have shifted at least 60 injured people to hospitals in Rohri and Sukkur," he said. "The bus, carrying more than 50 passengers, was going from Sukkur to Punjab," senior Sukkur police official Jamil Ahmed said. "It was a horrible accident. So strong was the impact of the train hitting the bus that it was split into three parts," he said. The bus was dragged around 150-200 feet by the train, Ahmed said.

MUHYIDDIN IS MALAYSIA PM, MAHATHIR OUT

Kuala Lumpur, Feb. 29: Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad lost a power struggle Saturday with a little-known ex-interior minister to be the country's new prime minister in a shock twist that will return a scandal-plagued party to power. Muhyiddin Yassin will be sworn in on Sunday, royal officials said, after a week of turmoil that followed the collapse of a reformist government and Mahathir's resignation as premier.

"The process to appoint the prime minister cannot be delayed because the country needs a government for the well-being of the people and the nation," a palace statement said. The king appoints the premier, and rival candidates had this week been seeking to show they commanded majority support from MPs. As well as ending the premiership of Mahathir, at 94 the world's oldest leader, it means there will be little hope of his designated successor Anwar Ibrahim becoming prime minister. Muhyiddin's coalition is dominated by the multi-ethnic country's Muslim majority, and includes the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the scandal-plagued party of disgraced ex-leader Najib Razak.

Anti-Putin protest



An opposition supporter carries a placard depicting Russian President Vladimir Putin during a march in memory of murdered Kremlin critic Boris Nemtsov in downtown Moscow on Saturday. Thousands rallied in central Moscow to call on President Vladimir Putin not to stay in power indefinitely, in the first major protest by the Russian opposition since the Kremlin chief announced controversial plans to change the Constitution. The rally marked five years since the assassination of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov, but its organisers also want the event to send a message to Putin after he proposed major constitutional changes. — AFP

John Ratcliffe is new Intel chief

Washington, Feb. 29: US President Donald Trump announced Republican lawmaker John Ratcliffe as his intelligence chief Friday, sparking fresh controversy over a crucial position that has lacked a permanent office holder for months. The 53-year-old Trump loyalist was nominated as director of national intelligence after Dan Coats stepped down in July last year, but withdrew from consideration after strong criticism from Democrats and a tepid response from key Republicans. Trump instead named counterterrorism expert Joseph McGuire as acting director, overseeing the 17 agencies of the intelligence community including the CIA and National Security Agency. But he forced McGuire out on February 20 after a senior intelligence official told Congress in a closed briefing that the Russians were again supporting Trump's bid for re-election.

The revolving door continued to spin as Trump appointed another loyalist, Richard Grenell, two weeks ago. But the former ambassador to Germany had no relevant experience and was viewed as highly political. Some intelligence experts view the latest nomination as a tactic by Trump to ensure that Grenell stays on beyond the statutory limit for "acting" directors who haven't been approved by the Senate. **Trump's 'Remain in Mexico' policy blocked:** A federal appeals court on Friday blocked a key asylum policy of Donald Trump's administration which has forced many applicants to wait in Mexico while their claims are processed, delivering a blow to the US president's signature crackdown on migration at the southern border. The policy, known as

PREZ TRUMP WINS KEY COURT CASE ON SNUB

Washington, Feb. 29: The White House won a key victory for presidential power Friday when an appeals court rejected a lawsuit over President Donald Trump blocking his former legal advisor from honoring a Congressional subpoena. The Washington appeals court ruled two-to-one that the US judicial branch has no power to decide whether Trump could prevent former White House counsel Don McGahn from testifying in an investigation of the president by the House Judiciary Committee. McGahn had been called last year to testify in the impeachment investigation of Trump, particularly on allegations that Trump illegally obstructed the Russia political interference probe. But McGahn refused to appear on Trump's instruction, with the White House citing Trump's executive privileges.

The issue provoked a rare constitutional showdown in which the judiciary was asked to rule on the power struggle between the two other branches of government — the executive and legislative. —AFP

"Remain in Mexico", has been used to send tens of thousands of asylum seekers from Central America back to Mexico, but was placed on hold by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. The court ruled that the policy "is invalid in its entirety" under US law concerning migrant rights and UN refugee protocols, and should be blocked "in its entirety". —AFP

PRISON | WRITER

Politics is a collective swindle: Demirtas
Kurd's books fly off shelves

Istanbul, Feb. 29: He may be languishing in jail but with his books flying off the shelves, Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtas has joined an illustrious line of Turkish prison writers. A former presidential candidate and persistent thorn in the side of Turkey's current leader, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Demirtas has spent more than three years in jail and faces up to 142 years more if convicted of ties to Kurdish militants, which he denies. "I am engaged in a major battle of wills because I am a



A picture of Demirtas's publisher Emir Ali Turkmen —AFP

political prisoner and this is motivating me to expose my creativity," Demirtas said in written responses sent to agencies through his lawyers from his cell in western Edirne city. Despite the possible sentence hanging over him he has found some consolation in his ever-growing number of readers as sales of his books, written in Turkish, reach into the hundreds of thousands. His first book, Seher (Dawn), was published in 2017 — a collection of short stories that contain glimpses into daily lives of ordinary people including women characters whose voices often go unheard. It has turned into a runaway success, translated into 16 languages with 240,000 copies printed. —AFP

Intra-Afghan talks by Mar. 10

It will be first face-to-face meet of the representatives since the 9/11 attack

Washington, Feb. 29: The intra-Afghan peace talks, involving representatives from the Afghan government, the Taliban and various other groups, will be held in Norway's capital Oslo by March 10, officials here said on Saturday, as the US signed a landmark agreement with the Taliban in Doha to bring peace in the war-torn country. This will be probably for the first time since the 9/11 attacks that the representative of a duly elected Afghan government and the Taliban would be meeting face-to-face for peace talks. "The parties will be meeting in Oslo. That negotiation will kick off as soon as each of the various components of that can get their negotiators to Oslo. We certainly expect it to be in the first half of March. It may take a week, a week and a half, for all

- **THE TALIBAN SAID** on Saturday that they had ordered a complete one-day halt to attacks in Afghanistan ahead of the signing of a historic deal to withdraw American troops.
- **THE US HAS** committed to make an initial reduction in its forces in Afghanistan to 8,600 as part of its agreement with the Taliban.
- **THE UNITED STATES** "will not hesitate to nullify" its historic deal with the Taliban if the insurgents renege on their security guarantees and commitment to hold talks with the Afghan government, US Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Saturday.
- **NATO CHIEF JENS** Stoltenberg was in Afghanistan on Saturday for meetings with officials as he was to participate in a Kabul media conference, the NATO statement said.

the parties to travel there," a senior administration official told reporters here. Throughout this period, the reduction in violence remains in place, so it will give the US a good opportunity to test the durability

of the reduction in violence and also perhaps set a better stage for it to move towards a permanent ceasefire once all the parties are at the table, said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. —PTI

UK Home office chief Philip quits

London, Feb. 29: The top civil servant in the UK Home Office at the centre of a row over a strained relationship with Indian-origin Home Secretary Priti Patel resigned from his post on Saturday and said he plans to sue the government over his "constructive and unfair" exit. Philip Rutnam, Permanent Secretary in the department led by 47-year-old Patel, said there had been a vicious and orchestrated campaign against him over the last 10 days and pointed the finger of blame at the minister. The Home Secretary (Patel) categorically denied any involvement in this campaign to the Cabinet Office.



Philip Rutnam

I regret I do not believe her, he said in a statement. Even despite this campaign, I was willing to effect a reconciliation with the Home Secretary, as requested by the Cabinet Secretary on behalf of the Prime Minister. But despite my efforts to engage with her, Priti Patel has made no effort to engage with me to discuss this, the statement said. Rutnam said his experience formed part of a wider pattern in

government and that he plans to take legal action on the grounds of constructive dismissal.

I believe that these events give me very strong grounds to claim constructive, unfair dismissal, and I will be pursuing that claim in the courts. My experience has been extreme, but I consider there is evidence that it was part of a wider pattern of behaviour, his statement adds.

The resignation comes just days after he and Patel had issued a joint statement in an effort to quell media reports of discord within the Home Office. The Home Secretary and Permanent Secretary are deeply concerned about the number of false allegations appearing in the media, a UK Home Office spokesperson said on Monday. —PTI

India says it will back agreement

New Delhi, Feb. 29: In a guarded reaction to the peace deal between the US and the Taliban, India on Saturday said its consistent policy has been to support all opportunities that can bring peace, security and stability in Afghanistan and ensure end of terrorism. External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said India will continue to extend all support to the Afghanistan as a contiguous neighbour, in a clear reference that the Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir belongs to India. After months of negotiations, the US and Taliban signed a landmark peace deal in Qatar capital Doha

on Saturday, effectively drawing curtains to the United States' 18-year war in Afghanistan since 2001. India's Ambassador to Qatar P. Kumar was among a host of diplomats present at the ceremony where the deal was inked.

"India's consistent policy is to support all opportunities that can bring peace, security and stability in Afghanistan; end violence; cut ties with international terrorism; and lead to a lasting political settlement through an Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan controlled process," the MEA spokesperson said. —PTI

Bernie look-alike enjoys limelight

Los Angeles, Feb. 29: Up until a few years ago, Jeff Jones was going about his life, minding his own business and enjoying his passion for music. Then Bernie Sanders burst onto the national political stage, prompting many to do double takes on seeing Jones, who bears a striking resemblance to the Democratic presidential candidate. "Around 2015, people started asking if anyone told me I looked 'sorta like' Bernie Sanders," Jones, who wears glasses and sports a tuft of white hair like Sanders, said at a recent rally in California for the Vermont senator. "This happened so often that my youngest daughter Robin suggest-

ed I make an 'I am not Bernie' shirt as a gag." With Sanders riding high in the polls for the presidential nomination, Jones, who lives in Los Angeles, has been making much use of his "I am not Bernie" shirt as he attends rallies for the candidate, gladly posing for pictures with wide-eyed voters. When asked, Jones, who at 77 is a year younger than his doppelgänger, even manages to imitate Sanders' demeanor, hunching his shoulders, tousling his hair and lifting his arms as he scowls. "I'm a Bernie fan," says Jones, who was a registered Republican until the 2016 elections that saw Donald Trump win the presidency. —AFP

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IN BRIEF

Pope indisposed for third day

Vatican City: Pope Francis cancelled official engagements for the third day in a row Saturday as he battled an apparent cold. The 83-year-old Pope, who lost part of a lung to a respiratory illness as a young man, has never cancelled so many official events in his seven-year papacy.

Kim's warning if virus hits N. Korea

Seoul: North Korean leader Kim Jong-un warned top party officials of "serious consequences" if they fail to prevent an outbreak of Covid-19 in the country, state media reported Saturday. The impoverished nation, with a weak and ill-equipped healthcare system, has closed its borders to prevent the spread of the disease into its territory.

Bahrain threatens legal action

Dubai: Bahrain on Saturday threatened legal prosecution against travellers who came from Iran and hadn't been tested for the new Covid-19, and also barred public gatherings for two weeks as confirmed cases across the wider Mideast grew to over 520.

Free transport in Luxembourg

Luxembourg: Luxembourg on Saturday became the first country in the world to offer free public transport, as the small and wealthy EU country tries to help less-well-off workers and reduce road traffic.

Fourth origin unknown virus case in US

Heightens outbreak fears but Trump downplays risk, accuses Dems and press of stirring up hysteria

Los Angeles, Feb. 29: US health officials reported a fourth case of novel Covid-19 of unknown origin, indicating the disease was spreading in the country. The latest case is a boy under 18 in Washington State who tested "presumptive positive," local authorities said without releasing further details about the patient.



Military vehicles spray disinfectant as part of preventive measures against the spread of the Covid-19, on a road near Dongdaegu railway station in Daegu, South Korea on Saturday. — AFP

In neighbouring Oregon, authorities said Friday that an adult who had had contact with people at an elementary school had been hospitalised and was also considered "presumptive positive".

The school will be closed until March 4 as it undergoes a deep clean, officials said, adding they would talk to employees and parents. Earlier Friday, Californian health authorities said an older woman was confirmed infected with unknown origin — the second such case in the northern part of the state.

"This new case indicates that there is evidence of community transmission but the extent is still not clear," said Sara Cody, director of public health for Santa Clara County. "What we know now is that is here, present at some level, but we still don't know to what degree," she added.

Dems' 'hoax': Prez The latest infections have heightened fears of an outbreak across the country. President Donald Trump, however, downplayed the risk in the US at a campaign rally in South Carolina, accusing Democrats and the press of stirring up hysteria.

"We are preparing for the worst," he said. "My administration has taken the most aggressive action in modern history to prevent the spread of this illness in the United States." He called the Covid-19 the Democrats' "new hoax." "The Democrats are politicising the Covid-19. They're politicising it," he said. "They don't have any clue. They can't even count their votes in Iowa." — AFP

MEETING OF SE ASIAN LEADERS POSTPONED

Washington, Feb. 29: The United States has postponed a meeting of leaders of southeast Asian nations that was set for Las Vegas in mid-March due to the spread of the Covid-19, a senior Trump administration official said Friday. President Donald Trump had invited the leaders of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations to meet in the US this year after he skipped their annual meeting last year, which was held in Thailand. Trump sent national security adviser Robert O'Brien to the meeting in his place.

With White House effort, states set to get test kits

Washington, Feb. 29: Federal health officials scrambled Friday to get Covid-19 testing up and running in every state, as the Trump administration signalled it may also involve a 70-year-old defence law to guarantee the availability of protective gear should the virus spread. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said two more Americans tested positive for the virus out of the group of quarantined passengers from the Diamond Princess cruise ship. The World Health Organisation upgraded the risk level from the virus to "very high" as it continued to spread around the globe.

Two days after the White House abruptly shifted gears from President Donald Trump's initial assurances of minimal US fallout to an all-out mobilisation under Vice President Mike Pence, the administration's messaging still wasn't completely seamless. Trump administration political appointees and non-partisan career government scientists both agree that the current risk to Americans is low, although that could quickly change. But some political officials are continuing to offer assurances that concerns will blow over soon, while the scientists are emphasising preparations for circumstances as yet unknown. "I acknowledge that this could change. I acknowledge the situation could deteriorate. I acknowledge the risks," White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow told reporters Friday.

Later in the day Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell signalled that the central bank would cut interest rates to support the economy if needed. On Capitol Hill, lawmakers of both parties are working on a spending bill to be unveiled early next week and expected to be two to three times more than the \$2.5 billion the White House had requested for antiviral efforts. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar called attention to the breadth of options under consideration, telling reporters the administration may invoke the 1950 Defence Production Act to ensure production of needed supplies for anti-virus effort. — AP

S Korea reports 813 more cases

Seoul, Feb. 29: South Korea confirmed 813 more Covid-19 cases on Saturday, the biggest increase to date for the country and taking the national total to 3,150 infections with four additional deaths. Authorities also reported the country's first case of reinfection — a 73-year-old woman who tested positive for a second time after her recovery and release from hospital last week.

- FORTY-SEVEN more people have died of the virus in China.
● DEATH TOLL in the country rises to 2,835.
● NO. OF confirmed cases climbs to 79,251.
● 427 FRESH cases and 47 deaths on Friday.
● 2,885 PEOPLE discharged from hospital.

Daegu area and one man died of the illness, taking the national toll to 17, the statement added. All were aged in their 60s or older. The national total is expected to rise further with screening of more than 260,000 people associated with the Shincheonji Church of Jesus, a secretive entity often accused of being a cult that is linked to around half of the country's cases. — AFP

Nine deaths in Iran, total at 43

Tehran, Feb. 29: Iran on Saturday reported nine new deaths from the novel Covid-19 and 205 fresh cases in the past 24 hours, bringing the overall tolls to 43 dead and 593 infected. "The total number of cases is 593 and the overall deaths 43 up until midday today," health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour told a televised news conference. "We have had 205 new cases of Covid-19 within 24 hours," he added, including 22 cases in a new outbreak in the province of Golestan.

Most of the people died in the capital Tehran and the holy city of Qom in central Iran, where the country's first case was reported, the London-based global news network's Persian service said. Iran's official death toll stood at 34 on Friday afternoon, with eight new deaths reported over the previous 24 hours. Health ministry spokesman Kianoush Jahanpour accused BBC Persian of joining the Islamic Republic's regional enemies in a "race to spread lies" about Iran. "Iran's exemplary transparency in publishing information on the Covid-19 has stunned many people," Jahanpour tweeted. — AFP

World Health Organisation and elsewhere that Iran may be underreporting the number of cases. Yet even as Iran sends spray trucks and fumigators into the streets, officials are trying to downplay the virus' reach. — Agencies

CHINA EXPERTS IN TEHRAN TO CONTAIN SPREAD

Beijing, Feb. 29: The Covid-19-hit China, which is grappling to contain the outbreak amidst rising death toll and number of infected cases, has sent a group of experts to Iran to help combat the spread of the disease in the country. The Chinese experts are on their way to Iran, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hua Chunying said on Friday. "We must fight together," Hua was quoted as saying by the state-run China Daily. During his telephonic conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif earlier, State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said China will continue to provide assistance to Iran in curbing the epidemic and treating the sick, the report said. — PTI



Shinzo Abe

ABE PLEDGES EMERGENCY FIGHT PLAN

Tokyo, Feb. 29: Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Saturday pledged another emergency package to tackle the Covid-19, appealing for cooperation as he faces criticism over drastic prevention measures. The plan comes as the government ramps up its response to the virus, which has infected at least 230 people across the country and been linked to five deaths. "We will swiftly compile a second emergency package" by using reserve funds worth over 270 billion yen (\$2.5 billion) in around 10 days," Abe told a news conference. In mid-February, the government set aside an initial 15.3 billion yen for the fight against the virus, including money to boost testing, strengthen inspections at borders and support manufacturers of face masks. "On my own responsibility, I will take the best possible measures against various issues," Abe said Saturday. He also vowed to speed up the introduction of legislation aimed at easing the impact of the virus on people's lives. But Abe added that "we cannot score a victory in this battle only with the government's efforts." "It is not easy to battle against the enemy that you can't see or know well," he said. — AFP

Mexico confirms first 3 cases of infection

Mexico City, Feb. 29: Mexico's health ministry said the country has confirmed three cases of the Covid-19, becoming the second Latin American nation after Brazil to be hit by the outbreak. The three men — two in Mexico City and one in the northern state of Sinaloa — are all believed to have visited northern Italy, the epicentre of the virus in Europe. "Probably all three were infected from the same source. All three are imported cases," Jose Luis Alomia, general director of epidemiology at the Ministry of Health, said. In Mexico, two more suspected cases are under analysis. — AFP

- TWO MORE people tested positive for the novel Covid-19 in Pakistan on Saturday, taking the total number of the infections in the country to four. Earlier, two people tested positive in the country on February 26.
● QATAR HAS confirmed its first case of Covid-19 after a 36-year-old Qatari woman who was evacuated to Doha from Iran tested positive. Qatar has repatriated a number of its citizens from Iran and confined them to a 14-day period of quarantine.

CLAIMS REFUTED Owner affirms sales strong despite epidemic's global spread

Virus: Corona Beer doesn't lose fizz

New York, Feb. 29: Confusion between Covid-19 and Corona beer has been a punchline of questionable taste during the outbreak, but for the brand, the matter may be no joke. The phrase "38% of Americans" was trending Friday on Twitter following a survey showing that proportion of beer drinkers "would not buy Corona under any circumstances now," according to public relations firm 5W.

But Constellation Brands, which owns the Mexican-heritage beer label, disagreed, releasing a statement saying that sales have stayed strong in the US even as the virus has spread internationally, and dismissing the question as a non-issue. "Our thoughts and prayers go out to those affected by this terrible virus and we hope efforts to more fully contain it gain traction soon," said Bill Newlands, chief executive of Constellation. "We've seen no impact to our people, facilities or operations and our business continues to perform very well." But the brand also got an earful on social media for an awkwardly-phrased advertising campaign to plug new hard seltzer offerings in the US. The beverages, in four "delicious" flavours, will be "coming ashore soon", according to the spot posted to Twitter that got 7.3 million views on the Corona USA page. "Given what's hitting the news right now, this seems



Corona beer bottles. — AFP

in remarkably poor taste," one critic posted. "Pretty sure Corona has always had poor taste," another replied. 5W, the public relations firm that released the survey of 737 US beer drinkers, also found that 16 percent were confused about whether Corona beer is related to the virus. "While the brand has claimed that consumers understand there's no linkage between the virus and the beer company, this is a disaster for the Corona brand," Ronn Torossian, founder and CEO of 5W. 5W lists several other beverage companies as clients

on its website, including 1800 Tequila and Sparkling ICE. In an email, Torossian denied that the company works for any Corona competitors. The survey results were supported by a report from market analysis firm YouGov that pointed to an uptick in internet searches for phrases like "Corona beer virus" that was weighing on brand reputation. Brand favourability for Corona dropped from 75 percent in early January to 51 percent in late February, according to daily consumer surveys taken by YouGov. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

Injured Rabada out of India tour

Johannesburg: South Africa's premier pacer Kagiso Rabada has been ruled out of the three-match ODI series against India after sustaining a groin strain which has abruptly ended his ongoing Australia tour. The 24-year-old will be out of action for four weeks after suffering the injury during the final T20 international against Australia on Wednesday. South Africa after losing the T20 series 1-2, are now locked in a three-match ODI series with Australia. "Kagiso sustained a groin muscle strain in the T20 series against Australia, he was assessed by the medical staff, assisted by an MRI scan," Cricket South Africa (CSA), Chief Medical Officer, Shuaib Manjra said in a media statement. "The significant injury means that he will take approximately four weeks to heal, which effectively rules him out of both the Australia and India ODI series," he added. The Proteas are scheduled to travel to India for a three-match ODI series, starting on March 12 in Dharamsala. — PTI

3rd Women's T20 challenge in Jaipur

New Delhi: Jaipur will host the third season of the Women's T20 Challenge that will see an addition of an extra team, the BCCI announced on Saturday. "As part of its ongoing commitment to grow the women's game, BCCI are pleased to announce the 2020 Women's T20 Challenge." BCCI secretary Jay Shah said in a statement. "This edition will see a fourth team added to the tournament," he added. The 2020 season will have a total of seven matches which will be played during the IPL Playoff week at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium. The inaugural edition of the tournament in 2018 comprised an exhibition match played between the IPL Trailblazers and the IPL Supernovas at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai before the first men's qualifier. Last year, the tournament expanded into a three-team event with the edition of IPL Velocity, who lost to the IPL Supernovas by four wickets in the final. — PTI

NCA physio Ashish under the scanner

Christchurch: The resurfacing of Ishant Sharma's ankle injury has left the BCCI red-faced and National Cricket Academy (NCA) head physio Ashish Kaushik under the scanner. The 31-year-old speedster could miss the first part of the IPL in case he is required to undergo rehabilitation at the much-maligned NCA. Ishant joined the Indian team in New Zealand 72 hours before the first Test and bowled nearly 25 overs for a five-wicket haul. The Indian team management has remained tight-lipped about the outcome of his scan results but according to sources in the BCCI, the same ligament injury on his right ankle has flared up once again. "Once Ishant was ruled out for six weeks by the Delhi team physio after his scan reports revealed Grade 3, how did Kaushik and the NCA team come to conclusion that three weeks is good enough for return to competitive cricket?" a BCCI insider questioned. — PTI

Kiwis pin India to mat

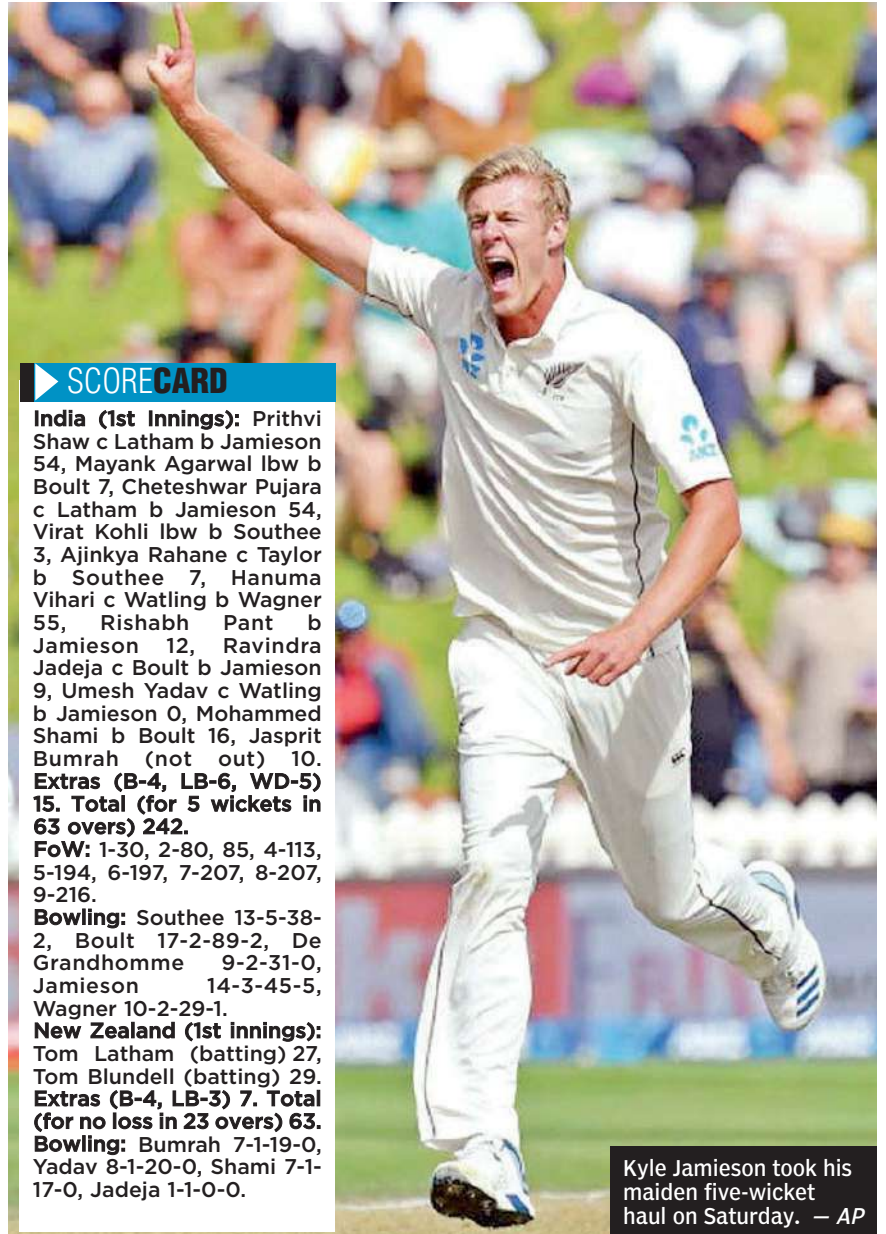
Jamieson takes five as New Zealand bowl India out for 242 to seize momentum

Christchurch, Feb. 29: Indian batsmen showed intent but their reckless shot selection took them only as far as 242 on an eventful opening day of the second Test against New Zealand, here on Saturday. Prithvi Shaw (54) and Cheteshwar Pujara (54) hit contrasting half-centuries to take the fight to the rival camp. However, Hanuma Vihari's (55 off 70 balls) dismissal at the stroke of tea tilted the scale in New Zealand's favour as they gained a clear upper-hand by stumps. Kyle Jamieson (5/45) in an inspired post-tea spell blew away the middle and lower-order to finish with his maiden five-wicket haul in only his second Test. The hosts ended the day at 63 for no loss with both the Toms — Latham (27 batting) and Blundell (29 batting) hardly troubled by Indian pacers. The pitch will be best for batting on days two

and three which means that for Virat Kohli and his men, the catch-up game starts from the second day itself as ignominy of a 0-2 series loss looms large. On a green-top, three Indian batsmen showed that scoring runs wasn't difficult. Shah's lunging drive after his second half-century in Tests and Vihari and Pujara's ill-timed pull shots were a testimony that their dismissals were more about profligacy than New Zealand's bowling. Rishabh Pant, who has been preferred over a much-accomplished Wriddhiman Saha, purely on batting skills, played a lazy shot to find his stumps rattled. From 194 for four with a standard first innings total of 350 looking imminent, India lost five wickets for 22 runs in a period of six overs and it could well have a decisive impact in the final outcome of the contest. Jamieson, in his post-tea spell, got rid of Pujara, Pant and Umesh Yadav in quick succession as India lost a golden opportunity to press home the advantage. The 32 boundaries and three sixes with a run-rate of 3.84 in 63 overs will not be able to tell the story how Indians fluffed their lines during the day. The immensely talented Shaw displayed improved footwork that saw him drive elegantly as the likes of Trent Boult (2/89) and Colin de Grandhomme (0/31) were guilty of over-pitching in trying to get some swing. There were square drives and a few on-drives while he also played and missed a few. He did live dangerously but more importantly had the scoreboard ticking even when Pujara was stuck at the other end. Neil Wagner bowled a bouncer and Shaw hooked him for maximum to reach his half-century. Having added 50 runs with Pujara, the senior partner should have ideally calmed the inexperienced one. — PTI

DISMISSALS DUE TO ERRORS FROM BATSMEN, SAYS VIHARI

Christchurch, Feb. 29: Hanuma Vihari on Saturday said poor shot selection led to India getting bowled out for a below-par 242 against New Zealand on a "fair pitch", dealing a blow to their hopes of a comeback in the two-Test series. New Zealand were 63 for no loss at stumps on the opening day of the second and final Test. Vihari, who was very impressive in his 55 off 70 balls, said that he wanted to attack so that Cheteshwar Pujara can play his natural game of grinding the bowling. "Yes, obviously as the pitch didn't do as much as we expected," Vihari said. "They bowled in good areas and knew what to expect from this track. Prithvi set the tone, Pujara spent time. All dismissals happened at wrong time," he said. — PTI



SCORECARD

India (1st Innings): Prithvi Shaw c Latham b Jamieson 54, Mayank Agarwal lbw b Boult 7, Cheteshwar Pujara c Latham b Jamieson 54, Virat Kohli lbw b Southee 3, Ajinkya Rahane c Taylor b Southee 7, Hanuma Vihari c Watling b Wagner 55, Rishabh Pant b Jamieson 12, Ravindra Jadeja c Boult b Jamieson 9, Umesh Yadav c Watling b Jamieson 0, Mohammed Shami b Boult 16, Jasprit Bumrah (not out) 10. Extras (B-4, LB-6, WD-5) 15. Total (for 5 wickets in 63 overs) 242.

FOW: 1-30, 2-80, 85, 4-113, 5-194, 6-197, 7-207, 8-207, 9-216.

Bowling: Southee 13-5-38-2, Boult 17-2-89-2, De Grandhomme 9-2-31-0, Jamieson 14-3-45-5, Wagner 10-2-29-1.

New Zealand (1st Innings): Tom Latham (batting) 27, Tom Blundell (batting) 29. Extras (B-4, LB-3) 7. Total (for no loss in 23 overs) 63.

Bowling: Bumrah 7-1-19-0, Yadav 8-1-20-0, Shami 7-1-17-0, Jadeja 1-1-0-0.

Kyle Jamieson took his maiden five-wicket haul on Saturday. — AP



Hanuma Vihari en route to his half-century. — AP

Poor scores from Kohli have stood out

After the first day of the second Test, I'm afraid India are looking down the barrel of a gun. This match is crucial to save face (having lost the first Test badly) and also get 60 important points for the World Test Championship. That now seems difficult. So far, New Zealand have handed out an object lesson to Virat Kohli's team in how to bat and bowl on grassy tracks. India's experienced batsmen with enviable records and reputations have floundered, and the widely toasted pace attack hasn't been able to make impact either. True, these are 'home' conditions for the Kiwis, where they have always done well. Many visiting teams have struggled. Kohli's bad luck with the toss has also been a contributing factor. But such handicaps and misfortunes are factored in before the contest begins. It's how things transpired in the middle reveals a team's mettle and mindset. What

Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

The first day's play showed virtually no progress made from the 10-wicket debacle in Wellington. In a series on which so much is at stake - individually and collectively - this is highly disappointing. The technique and skill of batsmen against the moving ball — through swing and seam — was always going to be on test. In this, the top order had added onus, particularly given India's longish tail. This responsibility has so far not been fulfilled. Poor scores from Kohli, the side's premier batsman, have stood out. It is highly unusual for him to go through almost an entire tour with only one-half century across formats. But nobody has looked like taking control, being on top of the situation either. Not just skills, but temperament also matters as much especially when the conditions pose so many hardships. In this too, India's batsmen have been found wanting. This was even more painfully evident on Saturday when three from the top order got half centuries, yet India fizzled out for 242. The need to show aggressive intent to win a match is undisputed. But this must emerge from quick and astute understanding of the circumstances, not just bravado. Prithvi Shaw, Cheteshwar Pujara and Hanuma Vihari all fell to strokes that will agonise them for a long while. Shaw looked in scintillating touch, but one loose shot, playing far away from his body, made it his innings a cameo rather than a potential match-winning effort. Vihari fell on the stroke of tea, succumbing to misplaced agro despite having got boundaries in the same over. The biggest blow came after the break when Pujara played a cringe-worthy pull. India's state hadn't looked too bad a few overs earlier, now it had become dire. Had two of these three half-centurions not been so impetuous, India could have got to the 350, a strong score on this pitch. None of this is to deny New Zealand's bowlers their due for an excellent performance, particularly from youngster Kyle Jamieson who has 'star' written all over him already. He's not very quick, and gets his hostility from the steep bounce he extracts because of his height. Southee and Boult were marvellous with controlled swing and seam, Jamieson and Wagner attacked with sustained short-pitched deliveries, and the Indian batting crumbled once again. What was noteworthy was how well these bowlers varied lines and lengths from different batsmen. In comparison, the 23 overs India bowled before close were lacklustre. There was covert attempt to intimidate the openers with the short stuff, but it didn't work because neither Latham nor Blundell were going to be hustled into indiscretion, as the Indian batsmen had been. Bumrah, Shami and Umesh were at least a yard shorter than needed to get swing or lateral movement off the pitch that could put the batsmen under scrutiny. In the event, the openers were able to defang them fairly easily. It is hazardous to make predictions after just one day. The history of sport is littered with examples of sterling fightbacks and turnarounds. But so far on this tour, the Indian team hasn't quite looked the part, leave aside playing like the world's top ranked Test team.

Radha, Shafali sizzle as India make it four in a row

Melbourne, Feb. 29: Spinner Radha Yadav flummoxed the rival batting lineup with a career-best 4/23 before Shafali Verma's blistering 34-ball 47 powered India to a seven-wicket win over Sri Lanka in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup here on Saturday. Opting to bat, Sri Lanka were restricted to a modest 113 for nine in their final Group A match with left-arm spinner Radha (4/23) running through the rivals' batting line-up, including claiming the prized scalp of skipper Chamari Atapattu. Shafali, then, top-scored as India chased down the target in just 14.4 overs. The win meant India entered the semifinals with an all-win record. This was India's fourth successive victory in the tournament as the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side consolidated their position on top of the group with eight points. The 16-year-old Shafali, who was dropped twice in the second and fourth over, hit seven fours and a six in her knock but was unable to reach her maiden fifty for the second time in the tournament, getting run-out in the 11th over. She had scored 46 against

BRIEF SCORES

Sri Lanka 113/9 in 20 overs (Chamari Atapattu 33, Kavisha Dilhari 25 n.o., Rajeshwari Gayakwad 2/18, Radha Yadav 4/23) lost to **India 116/3 in 14.4 overs** (Shafali Verma 47). New Zealand in her previous outing, Kaur and opener Smriti Mandhana again squandered their good starts, departing for 15 and 17, respectively. Mandhana mistimed the ball to Kavisha Dilhari in the fifth over while the skipper departed while trying to clear the long on fielder in the 10th over. For Sri Lanka, Udeshika Prabodhani (1/13) and Shashikala Siriwardene (1/42) picked up a wicket each, before the duo of Jimimah Rodrigues (15) and Deepti Sharma (15) sealed the victory. Earlier, Sri Lanka were dealt a blow when opener Umesh Thimashini (2) tried to go for a big shot off a Deepti Sharma delivery, only to be caught by Rajeshwari Gayakwad in the third over. In-from skipper Atapattu (33) continued to attack, hitting five fours and a six, and stitched a 30-run partnership with Harshitha



India's Radha Yadav (second from left) celebrates a wicket with her teammates. — ICC

Madavi (12). However, left-arm spinner Gayakwad tightened the screws in the eighth over, bowling a wicket maiden while dismissing Madavi. The introduction of Radha in the ninth over worked as immediately after hitting a six over deep wicket, the Sri Lanka captain was caught at square leg. Sri Lanka then suffered a batting collapse as Radha

accounted for Hansima Karunaratne (7) and Hasini Perera (7) in her next over. She also dismissed wicket-keeper Anushka Sanjeevane (1). The Indian spinners dominated the proceedings as besides Radha, Gayakwad (2/18) picked up two wickets, while Deepti (1/16), Shikha Pandey (1/35), and Poonam Yadav (1/20) took one apiece.

Radha praises bowling coach Hirwani Radha hailed the impact of bowling coach Narendra Hirwani after claiming a career-best 4/23. India's spinners have been the talk of the tournament so far in Australia and Yadav was the latest to shine, laying the foundation for their win with a four-wicket haul to restrict Sri Lanka to 113 for nine. But

RANJI TROPHY SEMIFINAL

Majumdar ton revives Bengal

Kolkata, Feb. 29: Anustup Majumdar struck an unbeaten century to once again become Bengal's saviour after a familiar top order collapse as he single-handedly took his side to 275 for nine on the opening day of their Ranji Trophy semifinal against a star-studded Karnataka here on Saturday. Fresh from his career-best 157 from a similar position in the quarterfinals, Majumdar slammed an unbeaten 120 to revive Bengal innings after they were asked to bat first. The home side are making a bid to reach the final after 13 years. The first day's play also saw the first dismissal via DRS in domestic cricket when Karnataka pace spearhead Abhimanyu Mithun got the wicket of Abhishek Raman (0) in the 16th delivery of the innings. The scoreboard read a precarious 62/4 when the onus fell once again on Majumdar after Tiwary departed.

BRIEF SCORES

Bengal 275/9 in 82 overs (Anustup Majumdar 120 (batting), Akash Deep 44, Shabbaz Ahmed 35, Abhimanyu Mithun 3/65) vs **Karnataka. Saurashtra 217/5** (Sheldon Jackson 69 (batting), Kishan Parmar 37, Arzan Nagwaswalla 3/40) vs **Gujarat.** Gujarat keep Saurashtra at bay At Rajkot, Led by Arzan Nagwaswalla's three wickets, Gujarat bowlers produced a disciplined and restricted Saurashtra to 217 for five on the opening day. For the hosts, only Sheldon Jackson (69 not out) was able to convert his start at the SCA stadium. Initially, it seemed Gujarat skipper Parthiv Patel's decision to put Saurashtra in backfired, but the bowlers made a splendid comeback and pegged the hosts back on two occasions. — PTI

CORONAVIRUS | SCARE

Govt asks Chinese shuttlers' updates

New Delhi, Feb. 29: The Government of India has sent a questionnaire to the Badminton Association of India, seeking clarity on health status of the Chinese shuttlers, scheduled to travel to the national capital for next month's Indian Open.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Wednesday asked the BAI to furnish some details about the Chinese players before it takes a call regarding their entry into the country for the Super 500 tournament, which is a crucial event for the Tokyo Olympics qualification.

Some of the questions asked by the Ministry include: 'Players/Officials are from which state of China?'; 'How many players/officials have undergone for medical check-up and medical certificate has been issued?'; 'How many players / Officials are coming from the other countries?'

After receiving the queries, BAI has directed the questions to their Chinese counterparts and is awaiting a response.

"We have sent the questions received from the external affairs ministry to the Chinese Badminton Association. We are waiting for a response. Once they revert, we will send them to the Ministry to start the visa process," BAI secretary Ajay Singhania said.

World No.1 Chen Yufei,

world number eight He Bingjiao and former All England champion Shi Yu Qi are some of the stars of the 60-plus Chinese squad who are expected to compete at the Indira Gandhi International Stadium from March 24 to 29.

WADA CALLS OFF ITS MEET IN SWITZERLAND

The World Anti-Doping Agency has cancelled its annual symposium and related athlete session in Switzerland over concerns about the coronavirus epidemic.

In a statement issued on Friday, Montreal-based WADA said it took the decision based on the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health's announcement banning large-scale gatherings of more than 1,000 people in Switzerland until March 15.

INTERNATIONAL GAMES MAYBE POSTPONED: FIFA

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has refused to rule out postponing international football matches in response to the escalating global threat of the coronavirus.

This weekend's matches in the leading two divisions in Switzerland, where football's global governing body FIFA has its headquarters, were postponed on Friday after the government banned all events involving more than a thousand people.

— Agencies

El Clasico: Barca face Real test in top-table clash

Madrid, Feb. 29: Quique Setien admitted it was strange to take charge of a club sitting top of the table but Barcelona's new coach heads into the Clasico on Sunday

with a chance to take charge of the title race.

Barca can go five points clear of Real in La Liga with a victory at the Santiago Bernabeu, where

they have won on their last three visits and not lost in the league since 2014. Setien's appointment on January 13 was greeted with a mixture of intrigue about the

return of a purist coach at Camp Nou and scepticism that a 61-year-old, whose last jobs had been at Real Betis, Las Palmas and Lugo, had been given the

keys to one of the biggest clubs in the world. — AFP
LIVE ON TV: Barcelona vs Real Madrid from 1.30 am (Monday) on Facebook.

BISHKEK NOT TO HOST ASIA'S WRESTLING OLY QUALIFIERS

New Delhi, Feb. 29: Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek has pulled out as host for next month's Asian Olympic wrestling qualifying event as part of preventive measures against the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

The March 27 to 29 event was originally scheduled to be held in Xian but was moved out of the Chinese city amid the outbreak of the virus that has killed close to 3000 people and infected nearly 80,000 globally.

The Kyrgyzstan government has postponed all sporting events in the country till further notice in the wake of the epidemic. The sport's world governing body United World Wrestling has communicated to all Asian federations that Bishkek is no more hosting the tournament.

"Today (February 28), UWW has received the information that the Kyrgyz government has decided to take measures against the spread of the COVID-19, and such measure unfortunately include the cancellation of the Asian Olympic OG Qualifier that had been previously reallocated to the city of Bishkek," the UWW said.

— Agencies



Dutee Chand (right) with her coach N. Ramesh of Hyderabad after winning the women's 100 metres race at Khelo India University Games in Bhubaneswar on Saturday.

Sprinter Dutee clinches gold

Bhubaneswar, Feb. 29: In her first competitive race of the year, India's fastest woman Dutee Chand clinched gold in 100m dash at Khelo India University Games here on Saturday.

The 24-year-old sprinter, representing Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT), raced ahead to take a massive lead within no time.

With her competitors nowhere close to Dutee, the national record holder bagged gold with a timing of 11.49 seconds.

The second best, Dhanalakshmi S from Mangalore University, clocked 11.99 seconds and

Sneha SS from Mahatma Gandhi University clinched the bronze with a timing of 12.08 seconds.

Dutee, who bettered her own national record with a timing of 11.22 seconds at the National Open Athletics Championships last year, needs to clock 11.15 seconds to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics.

"My practice is going on really well for me. I am training for six-seven hours every day. My coach has been guiding me well in track and gym workout," she said.

She will take part in the 200 metres on the final day of the Games.

— PTI

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SBI CARDS AND PAYMENT SERVICES LIMITED

Our Company was incorporated as 'SBI Cards and Payment Services Private Limited' on May 15, 1998, as a private limited company under the Companies Act, 1956, at New Delhi, with a certificate of incorporation granted by the Registrar of Companies, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Haryana at New Delhi ("RoC"). On the conversion of our Company to a public limited company pursuant to a special resolution passed by our shareholders on August 2, 2019, our name was changed to 'SBI Cards and Payment Services Limited' and a fresh certificate of incorporation dated August 20, 2019 was issued by the RoC. For details of the change in the registered office of our Company, see "History and Certain Corporate Matters" on page 167 of the Red Herring Prospectus dated February 18, 2020 read with corrigendum and clarification dated February 27, 2020 published on February 28, 2020 in all editions of Financial Express and Jansatta ("RHP").

Registered Office: Unit 401 & 402, 4th Floor, Aggarwal Millennium Tower E-1, 2, 3, Netaji Subhash Place, Wazirpur, New Delhi 110 034, India; Tel: +91 (11) 6126 8100, Corporate Office: 2nd Floor, Tower-B, Infinity Towers, DLF Cyber City, Block 2 Building 3, DLF Phase 2, Gurugram, Haryana 122 002, India; Tel: +91 (124) 458 9803, Contact Person: Ms. Payal Mittal Chhabra, Company Secretary and Compliance Officer; Tel: +91 (124) 458 9803, E-mail: investor.relations@sbiCARD.com; Website: www.sbiCARD.com; Corporate Identity Number: U65999DL1998PLC093849

OUR PROMOTER: STATE BANK OF INDIA

INITIAL PUBLIC OFFERING OF UP TO [●] EQUITY SHARES OF FACE VALUE OF ₹ 10 EACH ("EQUITY SHARES") OF SBI CARDS AND PAYMENT SERVICES LIMITED (OUR "COMPANY" OR THE "COMPANY" OR THE "ISSUER") FOR CASH AT A PRICE OF ₹ [●] PER EQUITY SHARE (INCLUDING A SHARE PREMIUM OF ₹ [●] PER EQUITY SHARE) ("OFFER PRICE") AGGREGATING UP TO ₹ [●] MILLION, COMPRISING A FRESH ISSUE OF [●] EQUITY SHARES BY OUR COMPANY AGGREGATING UP TO ₹ 5,000 MILLION ("FRESH ISSUE") AND AN OFFER FOR SALE OF UP TO 130,526,798 EQUITY SHARES (THE "OFFERED SHARES") AGGREGATING UP TO ₹ [●] MILLION, INCLUDING UP TO 37,293,371 EQUITY SHARES AGGREGATING UP TO ₹ [●] MILLION BY STATE BANK OF INDIA ("SBI") ("PROMOTER SELLING SHAREHOLDER") AND UP TO 93,233,427 EQUITY SHARES AGGREGATING UP TO ₹ [●] MILLION BY CA ROVER HOLDINGS ("CA ROVER") ("INVESTOR SELLING SHAREHOLDER") AND TOGETHER WITH THE PROMOTER SELLING SHAREHOLDER, THE "SELLING SHAREHOLDERS" AND SUCH OFFER, THE "OFFER FOR SALE" AND TOGETHER WITH THE FRESH ISSUE, THE "OFFER".

THE OFFER INCLUDES A RESERVATION OF UP TO 1,864,669 EQUITY SHARES, FOR SUBSCRIPTION BY ELIGIBLE EMPLOYEES (THE "EMPLOYEE RESERVATION PORTION") AND A RESERVATION OF UP TO 13,052,680 EQUITY SHARES, FOR SUBSCRIPTION BY SBI SHAREHOLDERS (THE "SBI SHAREHOLDERS RESERVATION PORTION"). THE OFFER LESS THE EMPLOYEE RESERVATION PORTION AND THE SBI SHAREHOLDERS RESERVATION PORTION IS HEREAFTER REFERRED TO AS THE "NET OFFER", AGGREGATING UP TO [●] EQUITY SHARES. THE OFFER AND THE NET OFFER SHALL CONSTITUTE [●] AND [●] OF THE POST-OFFER PAID UP EQUITY SHARE CAPITAL OF OUR COMPANY, RESPECTIVELY.

* A discount of ₹ 75 per Equity Share is being offered to Eligible Employees bidding in the Employee Reservation Portion.

QIB Category: Not more than 50% of the Net Offer | Retail Category: Not less than 35% of the Net Offer | Non Institutional Category: Not less than 15% of the Net Offer
Employee Reservation Portion: Up to 1,864,669 Equity Shares | SBI Shareholders Reservation Portion: Up to 13,052,680 Equity Shares

Price Band: ₹ 750 to ₹ 755 per Equity Share of face value of ₹ 10 each. | The Floor Price is 75 times the face value and the Cap Price is 75.5 times the face value of the Equity Shares.
Bids can be made for a minimum of 19 Equity Shares and in multiples of 19 Equity Shares thereafter.

ASBA* | Simple, Safe, Smart way of Application - Make use of it!!! | Mandatory in public issue from January 1, 2016. No cheque will be accepted. *Applications supported by blocked amount (ASBA) is a better way of applying to issues by simply blocking the fund in the bank account. For further details, check section on ASBA below.

UPI-Now available in ASBA for Retail Individual Investors and SBI Shareholders Bidding in SBI Shareholder Reservation Portion (up to ₹ 2,00,000). Investors are required to ensure that the bank account used for bidding is linked to their PAN.**

**UPI-Now available in ASBA for Retail Individual Investors ("RILs") and SBI Shareholders Bidding in the SBI Shareholder Reservation Portion (Up to ₹ 2,00,000) applying through Registered Brokers, DP & RTAs. Retail Individual Investors and SBI Shareholders Bidding in the SBI Shareholder Reservation Portion (Up to ₹ 2,00,000) also have the option to submit the application directly to the ASBA Bank (SCSBs) or to use the facility of linked online trading, demat and bank account. ASBA has to be availed by all the investors except Anchor Investors. For details on the ASBA and UPI process, please refer to the details given in ASBA form and abridged prospectus and also please refer to the section "Offer Procedure" beginning on page 404 of the Red Herring Prospectus. The process is also available on the website of AIBI and Stock Exchanges in the General Information Document. ASBA bid cum application forms can be downloaded from the websites of BSE Limited ("BSE") and National Stock Exchange of India Limited ("NSE"), and together with BSE, the "Stock Exchanges" and can be obtained from the list of banks that is available on the website of SEBI at www.sebi.gov.in. List of banks supporting UPI is also available on the website of SEBI at www.sebi.gov.in. HDFC Bank Limited has been appointed as Sponsor Bank for the Offer, in accordance with the requirements of the SEBI circular dated November 1, 2018, as amended.

Risks to Investors

- The six merchant bankers associated with the Offer have handled 46 issues in the past three financial years, out of which 17 issues closed below the issue price on listing date.
- There are no listed peers in India engaged in Issuer's line of business.
- The Price/Earnings ratio based on diluted EPS on a restated consolidated basis for FY19 for the Issuer at the upper end of the Price Band is 80.06 and is higher as compared to the NIFTY 50 index Price/Earnings ratio of 27.50 (as on February 20, 2020).
- Average cost of acquisition of Equity Shares for the Selling Shareholders is in the range of ₹28.69 to ₹81.19 per Equity Share and the Offer Price at upper end of the Price Band is ₹ 755 per Equity Share.

OPENS ON MONDAY, MARCH 02, 2020
CLOSES ON (FOR QIB BIDDERS) WEDNESDAY, MARCH 04, 2020
CLOSES ON (FOR ALL OTHER BIDDERS) THURSDAY, MARCH 05, 2020

In case of a revision in the Price Band, the Bid/Offer Period will be extended for at least three additional Working Days after such revision of the Price Band subject to the Bid/Offer Period not exceeding a total of ten Working Days. In cases of force majeure, banking strike or similar circumstances, our Company and the Selling Shareholders, in consultation with the BRLMs, may for reasons to be recorded in writing, extend the Bid/Offer Period for a minimum of three Working Days, subject to the Bid/Offer Period not exceeding ten Working Days. Any revision in the Price Band and the revised Bid/Offer Period, if applicable, will be widely disseminated by notification to the Stock Exchanges, by issuing a public notice, and also by indicating the change on the respective websites of the BRLMs and at the terminals of the Syndicate Members and by intimation to Designated Intermediaries and the Sponsor Bank.

The Offer is being made in terms of Rule 19(2)(b) of the Securities Contracts (Regulation) Rules, 1957, as amended, (the "SCRR") read with Regulation 31 of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2018, as amended ("SEBI ICDR Regulations"). The Offer is being made through the Book Building Process, in compliance with Regulation 61) of the SEBI ICDR Regulations, where not more than 50% of the Net Offer will be Allocated on a proportionate basis to Qualified Institutional Buyers ("QIBs") (the "QIB Category"), provided that our Company and the Selling Shareholders in consultation with the BRLMs, may allocate up to 60% of the QIB Category to Anchor Investors, on a discretionary basis (the "Anchor Investor Portion"), of which one-third shall be reserved for domestic Mutual Funds, subject to valid Bids being received from domestic Mutual Funds at or above the price at which Equity Shares are allocated to Anchor Investors. Further, 5% of the QIB Category (excluding the Anchor Investor Portion) shall be available for allocation on a proportionate basis to Mutual Funds only and the remainder of the QIB Category shall be available for allocation on a proportionate basis to all QIBs (other than Anchor Investors) including Mutual Funds, subject to valid Bids being received at or above the Offer Price. Further, not less than 15% of the Net Offer shall be available for allocation on a proportionate basis to Non-Institutional Investors and not less than 35% of the Net Offer shall be available for allocation to Retail Individual Investors, in accordance with the SEBI ICDR Regulations, subject to valid Bids being received at or above the Offer Price. All Bidders (other than Anchor Investors) shall mandatorily participate in the Offer through the Application Supported by Blocked Amount ("ASBA") process, and shall provide details of their respective bank account (including UPI ID for Retail Individual Investors and SBI Shareholders Bidding in the SBI Shareholder Reservation Portion (Up to ₹ 2,00,000), using UPI Mechanism) in which the Bid Amount will be blocked by the SCSBs or the Sponsor Bank, as the case may be. Anchor Investors are not permitted to participate in the Anchor Investor Portion through the ASBA process. For details, see, "Offer Procedure" on page 404 of the RHP.

Bidders/Applicants should note that on the basis of PAN, DP ID and Client ID as provided in the Bid cum Application Form/Application Form, the Bidders/Applicants may be deemed to have authorised the Depositories to provide to the Registrar to the Offer, any requested Demographic Details of the Bidders/Applicants as available on the records of the depositories. These Demographic Details may be used, among other things, for any correspondence(s) related to the Offer. Bidders/Applicants are advised to update any changes to their Demographic Details as available in the records of the Depository Participant to ensure accuracy of records. Any delay resulting from failure to update the Demographic Details would be at the Bidders/Applicants' sole risk. Bidders/Applicants should ensure that PAN, DP ID and Client ID and the UPI ID, as applicable, are correctly filled in the Bid cum Application Form/Application Form. The PAN, DP ID and Client ID provided in the Bid cum Application Form/Application Form should match with the PAN, DP ID and Client ID available in the depository database, otherwise, the Bid cum Application Form is liable to be rejected. Bidders/Applicants should ensure that the beneficiary account provided in the Bid cum Application Form is active.

Contents of the Memorandum of the Company as regards its Object's; For information on the main objects and other objects of our Company, see "History and Certain Corporate Matters" on page 167 of the RHP and Clause III of the Memorandum of Association of our Company. The Memorandum of Association of our Company is a material document for inspection in relation to the Offer. For further details, see the section "Material Contracts and Documents for Inspection" on page 478 of the RHP.

Liability of the members of the Company: Limited by shares.

Amount of share capital of the Company and Capital Structure: The authorised share capital of our Company is divided into 1,500,000,000 Equity Shares of face value ₹ 10 each constituting ₹ 15,000,000,000. The issued, subscribed and paid up share capital of our Company is ₹ 9,323,342,780 divided into 932,334,278 Equity Shares of face value of ₹ 10 each. For further details, see "Capital Structure" on page 78 of the RHP.

Names of initial signatories to the Memorandum of Association of our Company and the number of Equity Shares subscribed by them: The initial signatories of the Memorandum of Association are State Bank of India and Mr. Om Prakash Setia who

subscribed to one Equity Share each of face value of ₹ 10 each of our Company. The liability of the members of the Company is limited. For details of the main objects of the Company as contained in the Memorandum of Association, see "History and Certain Corporate Matters" on page 167 of the RHP.

Listing: The Equity Shares offered through the Red Herring Prospectus are proposed to be listed on the BSE and NSE. We have received in-principle approvals from the BSE and NSE for the listing of the Equity Shares pursuant to letters dated December 6, 2019 and December 16, 2019, respectively. For the purpose of the Offer, BSE is the Designated Stock Exchange. A signed copy of the Red Herring Prospectus has been filed with the RoC and the Prospectus shall be filed with the RoC in accordance with Section 26(4) of the Companies Act, 2013. For details of the material contracts and documents available for inspection from the date of the Red Herring Prospectus up to the Bid/Offer Closing Date, see "Material Contracts and Documents for Inspection" on page 478 of the RHP.

Disclaimer Clause of SEBI: SEBI only gives its observations on the draft offer documents and this does not constitute approval of either the Offer stated in the specified securities or the offer document. The investors are advised to refer to page 378 of the RHP for the full text of the disclaimer clause of SEBI.

Disclaimer Clause of BSE (the Designated Stock Exchange): "It is to be distinctly understood that the permission given by BSE should not in any way be deemed or construed that the RHP has been cleared or approved by BSE nor does it certify the correctness or completeness of any of the contents of the RHP". The investors are advised to refer to page 384 of the RHP for the full text of the disclaimer clause of BSE.

Disclaimer Clause of NSE: "It is to be distinctly understood that the permission given by NSE should not in any way be deemed or construed that the offer document has been cleared or approved by NSE nor does it certify the correctness or completeness of any of the contents of the offer document". The investors are advised to refer to page 384 of the RHP for the full text of the disclaimer clause of NSE.

General Risks: Investments in equity and equity-related securities involve a degree of risk and investors should not invest any funds in the Offer unless they can afford to take the risk of losing their investment. Investors are advised to read the Risk Factors carefully before taking an investment decision in this Offer. For taking an investment decision, investors must rely on their own examination of our Company and the Offer, including the risks involved. The Equity Shares have not been recommended or approved by the Securities and Exchange Board of India ("SEBI"), nor does SEBI guarantee the accuracy or adequacy of the contents of the Red Herring Prospectus. Specific attention of the investors is invited to "Risk Factors" on page 28 of the RHP.

BOOK RUNNING LEAD MANAGERS			COMPANY SECRETARY AND COMPLIANCE OFFICER		
 Kotak Mahindra Capital Company Limited 1 st Floor, 27 BKC, Plot No. C-27, "G" Block, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai 400 051, Maharashtra, India Telephone: +91 22 4336 0000 E-mail: sbiCARD ipo@kotak.com Investor Grievance E-mail: kmcaddress@kotak.com Website: www.investmentbank.kotak.com Contact Person: Mr. Ganesh Rane SEBI Registration No.: INM000008704	 Axis Capital Limited Axis House, Level 1, C-2 Wadia International Centre, P. B. Marg, Worli, Mumbai 400 025 Maharashtra, India Telephone: +91 22 4325 2183 E-mail: sbiCARDs ipo@axiscap.in Investor Grievance E-mail: complaints@axiscap.in Website: www.axiscapital.co.in Contact Person: Ms. Simran Gadh SEBI Registration No.: INM00012029	 DSP Merrill Lynch Limited Ground Floor, 'A' Wing, One BKC, 'G' Block, Bandra Kurla Complex, Bandra (East), Mumbai 400 051, Maharashtra, India Telephone: +91 22 6632 8000 E-mail: dg_sbiCARD_ipo@bofa.com Investor Grievance E-mail: dg.india_merchants@bofa.com Website: www.ml-india.com Contact Person: Mr. Ahmed Kolsavala SEBI Registration No.: INM000011625	 HSBC Securities and Capital Markets (India) Private Limited 52/60, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Fort, Mumbai 400 001, Maharashtra, India. Telephone: +91 22 2268 5555 E-mail: sbiCARD ipo@hsbc.co.in Investor Grievance E-mail: investor.grievance@hsbc.co.in Website: https://www.business.hsbc.co.in/en-gb/in-generico-ipo-open-offer-and-buyback Contact Person: Ms. Sanjana Maniar SEBI Registration No.: INM000010353	 Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities (India) Private Limited Ceejay House, Level 11, Plot F Shivsagar Estate, Dr. Annie Besant Road, Worli, Mumbai 400 018, Maharashtra, India Telephone: +91 22 4037 4037 E-mail: sbiCARD ipo@nomura.com Investor grievance e-mail: investor.grievances@nomura.com Website: www.nomuraholdings.com/company/group/asia/india/index.html Contact person: Mr. Vishal Kanjani/ Mr. Sandeep Baid SEBI Registration No.: INM000011419	 SBI Capital Markets Limited* 202, Market Tower 'E', Cuffe Parade, Mumbai 400 005, Maharashtra, India. Telephone: +91 22 2217 8300 E-mail: sbiCARD_ipo@sbiCAPS.com Investor Grievance E-mail: investor.relations@sbiCAPS.com Website: www.sbiCAPS.com Contact Person: Mr. Sambit Rath/ Mr. Karan Savardekar SEBI Registration No.: INM000003531
REGISTRAR TO THE OFFER			COMPANY SECRETARY AND COMPLIANCE OFFICER		
Link Intime India Private Limited C-101, 1 st Floor, 247 Park, Lal Bahadur Shastri Marg, Vikhroli (West), Mumbai - 400 083, Maharashtra, India, Telephone: +91 22 4918 6200, Email: sbiCARD_ipo@linkintime.co.in, Website: www.linkintime.co.in, Contact Person: Shanti Gopalkrishnan, SEBI Registration No.: INR000004058			Ms. Payal Mittal Chhabra, Company Secretary and Compliance Officer; E-mail: investor.relations@sbiCARD.com Registered Office: Unit 401 & 402, 4 th Floor, Aggarwal Millennium Tower E-1, 2, 3, Netaji Subhash Place, Wazirpur, New Delhi 110 034, India; Tel: +91 (11) 6126 8100, Corporate Office: 2 nd Floor, Tower-B, Infinity Towers, DLF Cyber City, Block 2 Building 3, DLF Phase 2, Gurugram, Haryana 122 002, India; Tel: +91 (124) 458 9803. Website: www.sbiCARD.com, Corporate Identity Number: U65999DL1998PLC093849		

Investors can contact the Company Secretary and Compliance Officer or the BRLMs or the Registrar to the Offer in case of any pre-Offer or post-Offer related problems such as non-receipt of letter of Allotment, non-credit of Allotted Equity Shares in the respective beneficiary account, non-receipt of refund intimations and non-receipt of funds by electronic mode.

*SBI is proposing to participate as a Selling Shareholder in the Offer for Sale. SBI Capital Markets Limited ("SBI CAP") has signed the due diligence certificate and has been disclosed as a BRLM for the Offer. SBI and SBI CAP are associates in terms of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Merchant Bankers) Regulations, 1992, as amended (the "SEBI Merchant Bankers Regulations"). Accordingly, in compliance with the proviso to Regulation 21A of the SEBI Merchant Bankers Regulations and Regulation 23(3) of the SEBI ICDR Regulations, SBI CAP would be involved only in the marketing of the Offer.

Availability of RHP: Investors are advised to refer to the RHP and the "Risk Factors", beginning on page 28 of the RHP, before applying in the Offer. Full copy of the RHP is available on the website of SEBI at www.sebi.gov.in, websites of the BRLMs at www.investmentbank.kotak.com, www.axiscapital.co.in, www.ml-india.com, https://www.business.hsbc.co.in/en-gb/in-generico-ipo-open-offer-and-buyback, www.nomuraholdings.com/company/group/asia/india/index.html and www.sbiCAPS.com and the websites of BSE and NSE i.e. www.bseindia.com and www.nseindia.com, respectively.

Availability of Bid-cum-Application Forms: Bid-cum-Application Forms can be obtained from the Registered Office of the Company, SBI Cards and Payment Services Limited, Tel: +91 (11) 6126 8100; the BRLMs: Kotak Mahindra Capital Company Limited, Telephone: +91 22 4336 0000; Axis Capital Limited, Telephone: +91 22 4325 2183; DSP Merrill Lynch Limited, Telephone: +91 22 6632 8000; HSBC Securities and Capital Markets (India) Private Limited, Telephone: +91 22 2268 5555; Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities (India) Private Limited, Telephone: +91 22 4037 4037; SBI Capital Markets Limited, Telephone: +91 22 2217 8300, at selected location of the sub-Syndicate Members, Registered Brokers, RTAs and CDPs participating in the Offer. Bid-cum-Application Forms will also be available on the websites of BSE and NSE and the Designated Branches of SCSBs, the list of which is available at websites of the Stock Exchanges and SEBI.

APPLICATIONS SUPPORTED BY BLOCKED AMOUNT (ASBA): Investors have to apply through the ASBA process. ASBA has to be availed by all the investors except Anchor Investors. For details on the ASBA process, please refer to the details given in ASBA Form and Abridged Prospectus and also please refer to the section "Offer Procedure" on page 404 of the RHP. ASBA Forms can also be downloaded from the websites of BSE and NSE. ASBA Form can be obtained from the list of banks that is available on the website of SEBI at www.sebi.gov.in.

Banker(s) to the Offer: Escrow Collection Bank/Public Offer Account Bank/Refund Bank: State Bank of India.

Sponsor Bank: HDFC Bank Limited

UPI: Retail Individual Investors and SBI Shareholders Bidding in the SBI Shareholder Reservation Portion (up to ₹ 2,00,000) can also bid through UPI mechanism. All capitalised terms used herein and not specifically defined shall have the same meaning as ascribed to them in the RHP.

Date: February 29, 2020
Place: New Delhi

SBI Cards and Payment Services Limited is proposing, subject to receipt of requisite approvals, market conditions and other considerations, an initial public offering of its equity shares and has filed the Red Herring Prospectus with the Registrar of Companies, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Haryana at New Delhi. The Red Herring Prospectus is available on the websites of SEBI, Kotak Mahindra Capital Company Limited, Axis Capital Limited, DSP Merrill Lynch Limited, HSBC Securities and Capital Markets (India) Private Limited, Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities (India) Private Limited and SBI Capital Markets Limited at www.sebi.gov.in, at www.investmentbank.kotak.com, at www.axiscapital.co.in, at www.ml-india.com, at www.business.hsbc.co.in/en-gb/in-generico-ipo-open-offer-and-buyback, at www.nomuraholdings.com/company/group/asia/india/index.html and at www.sbiCAPS.com, respectively. Investors should note that investment in equity shares involves a high degree of risk and for details refer to the Red Herring Prospectus, including the section titled "Risk Factors".

This announcement does not constitute an invitation or offer of securities for sale in any jurisdiction, including the United States. The Equity Shares have not been and will not be registered, listed or otherwise qualified in any other jurisdiction outside India and may not be offered or sold in any such jurisdiction, except in compliance with the applicable laws of such jurisdiction. The Equity Shares have not been and will not be registered under the US Securities Act of 1933 ("U.S. Securities Act") or any state securities laws in the United States and may not be offered or sold within the United States, except pursuant to an exemption from, or in a transaction not subject to, the registration requirements of the U.S. Securities Act and in accordance with any applicable United States securities laws. Accordingly, the Equity Shares are only being offered and sold (i) to "qualified institutional buyers" as defined in Rule 144A under the U.S. Securities Act in transactions exempt from or not subject to the registration requirements of the U.S. Securities Act; or (ii) outside the United States in offshore transactions in reliance on Regulation S under the U.S. Securities Act and the applicable laws of the jurisdiction where those offers and sales occur.

For SBI Cards and Payment Services Limited
On behalf of Board of Directors
Sd/
Company Secretary and Compliance Officer

Regd. No. H/SD/509/2018-20
Printed and Published by T. Venkateswarlu on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press situated at Plot No. 9 Aival Village, Vallabh Nagar Taluk, Medchal Malkajgiri Dist. Telangana and Published at 36, S.D. Road, Secunderabad-3. RNI Registration No. 3081/1957. Editor: Aditya Sinha

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