

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

COIMBATORE | SUNDAY 7 | MARCH 2021

WEATHER



Max: 37°C
Min: 20°C
Rainfall: Nil

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Maasi 23
Tithi: Navami
Star: Moolam
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
Yamagandam: 12 noon to 1.30 pm

PRAYERS

Fajar: 5.11 am
Zohar: 12.25 pm
Asar: 3.41 pm
Maghrib: 6.19 pm
Isha: 7.29 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.19 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.22 AM
MOONRISE TODAY 1.18 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 12.55 PM

CORONA COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+18,606)	(+98)
1,12,10,502	1,57,791

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+562)
TN: 8,54,554 12,517

WORLD CONFIRMED CASES

11,68,73,540

DEATHS

25,95,251

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info

MP: Two killed in brawl at BJP MLA's birthday bash

Damoh (MP): Two persons attending the birthday bash of a BJP MLA in Madhya Pradesh Damoh's district have been killed over some dispute, police said on Saturday. The incident occurred around 10 pm on Friday at Banwar village under Nohata police station area after a dispute among the attendees of the function, Damoh Superintendent of Police Hemant Chouhan said.

Six BJP activists injured in bomb attack in Bengal

Kolkata: Six BJP activists were injured, two of them critically, in an alleged bomb attack by the rival TMC workers in West Bengals South 24 Parganas district, police said on Saturday. Family members of those injured alleged that a few members of the local Trinamool Congress hurled bombs at them while they were returning home in Gosaba .

COUNTER

POINT



A well balanced list... 30% of tickets for sitting MLAs, 10% for women, 20% for actors, 10% for former cops and remaining for criminals!

No change in stand, willing for talks, farmers say on 100th day

New Delhi, March 6: Farmer leaders on Saturday said the protesting unions stand firm on their demand of a complete repeal of the three agri laws and asserted that they are ready for talks with the government, but that should be held without conditions. Earlier, thousands of farmers blocked the Kundli-Manesar-Palwal Expressway at some places in Haryana to mark the completion of 100 days of their agitation at the

Delhi borders. Darshan Pal, a senior member of the Samkyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) which is spearheading the going protest, said farmer unions stand firm on the demand of repeal of three agri laws. "Our demand remains the same which is the repeal of three new agricultural laws. We are ready to resume talks with the government, but it should be held without any precondition," Mr Pal said. In January, the govern-

ment had proposed to suspend the three contentious farm laws for 1-1.5 years and set up a joint committee to find an amicable solution in the interest of the farming community. Another senior leader Kulwant Singh Sandhu said the SKM has called a meeting on March 9 to decide the next course of action to intensify their ongoing agitation. "Everyday, more people are joining the farmers' protest. —PTI



G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 6

Former Union minister Pon Radhakrishnan was officially re-nominated by the BJP to contest in the April 6 bye election for the Kanyakumari Lok Sabha constituency, which fell vacant following the demise of Congress MP H. Vasanthakumar in August, 2020.

The BJP will part with two of the 20 Assembly seats it has got to contest as an alliance partner of the AIADMK to former actresses of Tamil cinema, it is learnt. The two parties clinched the deal late on Friday night.

While Khushboo is said to have been named for Chepauk-Triplicane, to which the DMK may nominate Udhayanidhi Stalin who attended the interview for aspirants on Saturday, Gauthami may be fielded in Rajapalayam.

The prominent party leaders contesting the polls could be state president L. Murugan (Rasipuram), former IPS officer Annamalai (Kinathukadavu), Vanathi Seenivasan (Coimbatore-South), Karuppu Muruganandham (Thiruvavur), Karthiayini (Vellore) and Nainar Nagendran (Tirunelveli), party sources said.

In Chennai city, the BJP is likely to field K.T. Raghavan (Mylapore), Dolphin Sridhar (Velacherry) and



Supreme Court to resume hybrid hearings

New Delhi, March 6: The Supreme Court, which is hearing cases through video-conferencing since March last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, will commence hybrid physical hearing from March 15.

The apex court has issued the standard operating procedure (SOP) for the hybrid physical hearings.

The top court has been hearing cases through video-conferencing since March last year due to the pandemic and several bar bodies and lawyers have been demanding that physical hearings should resume immediately. "On an experimental basis, and as a pilot scheme, the final hearings/regular matters listed on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays may be heard in the hybrid mode, as may be decided by the bench, considering the number of parties in a matter as well as the limited capacity of the courtrooms; all other matters, including those listed on Mondays and Fridays, shall continue to be heard through video/tele-conferencing mode," said the SOP issued by the apex court. —PTI

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CPI's Raja says BJP a threat to constitution



WORLD | 5

Biden urged to veto India, SA jab draft

SPORT | 8

Sindhu in cruise mode, enters final



■ **BJP to contest in 20 Assembly seats, Kanyakumari byelection**

AIADMK concedes LS seat to BJP

Congress in pact with DMK, to get 25 seats

G BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 6

In a late night development on Saturday, the Congress clinched an electoral deal with the DMK to contest in 25 seats in the April 6 Assembly elections after days of dilly dallying.

The formal pact would be signed on Sunday morning, AICC secretary in-charge of Tamil Nadu, Dinesh Gundu Rao, told the waiting media as he emerged from DMK president M.K. Stalin's house after holding the final round of talks.

All through the day, the Congress chose to keep mum on the issue even as interviews to select candi-



dates for the election went on at the TNCC headquarters in Chennai and Mr Stalin and other DMK office-bearers, too, were busy with their interviews. However, it is learnt that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi called up Mr Stalin and had a word with him, following which the Congress team, comprising Mr Rao, TNCC president K.S. Alagiri and Congress Legislature Party leader K.R. Ramasamy, went to meet DMK leaders for negotiations.

Vinoj P. Selvam (Harbour), other than Khushboo.

The other potential candidates are H. Raja (Kariakal), Kesavan (Kanchipuram), Chakravarthy (Tiruttani), Karventhan (Palani), Elumalai (Chidambaram), Dhanikaivel (Thiruvannamalai), Narendran (Hosur) and Silva Muruga Adithan (Thoothukudi).

The BJP is also likely to reward V.P. Duraisamy, who defected from the DMK

to join the party by giving a ticket to his son Prem to contest from Athur, the sources said.

With the Congress yet to name its candidate for Kanyakumari Lok Sabha seat, the BJP is taking it very seriously with national leader and Union home minister Amit Shah campaigning in Nagercoil town on Sunday for Mr Radhakrishnan.

The BJP's regular nomi-

nee for the constituency (earlier known as Nagercoil) since 1991, Mr Radhakrishnan has been nominated for the ninth time by the party.

Mr Shah, who will reach Nagercoil from Thiruvananthapuram will start his campaign after offering worship at the famous Suseendram temple and leave the town by 2 pm.

In the agreement on the seat sharing that was signed by AIADMK coordinator O. Panneerselvam, co-coordinator Edappadi K. Palaniswami, BJP national general secretary C.T. Ravi and party's state unit president, the AIADMK has agreed to extend full support to Mr Radhakrishnan in the by-election, to be held along with the Assembly polls.

Meanwhile, BJP leader Karu Nagarajan said in a statement that the party manifesto was ready and that state party leaders would start campaigning immediately to ensure the victory of its candidates.

The DMKD, which had been asking for 25 seats, expressed the hope that an amicable settlement would be reached soon as they had climbed down from their earlier demand, while the Tamil Maanila Congress leader G.K. Vasana was closeted with Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami at his house.

MDMK TO CONTEST 6 SEATS, AGREES TO DMK SYMBOL

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 6

The MDMK signed an agreement with the DMK on Saturday to contest the April 6 Assembly election in six seats and to fight the polls in the DMK's symbol 'rising sun', while two of the prominent allies, the Congress and the CPI, may have to wait till Monday to resume talks.

MDMK general secretary Vaiko, who broke away from the DMK in 1994 to form his own party, had been insisting that his party would only use its own symbol, 'the spinning top,' but gave in to pressure from the DMK to choose its symbol for his candidates.

Since the DMK is holding a grand public meeting near Trichy on Sunday, the leaders would not be available in Chennai for further talks at least for a day.

■ **P2**

● **Congress invited to join MNN alliance**

PAGE 2



Pak PM Imran Khan wins trust vote in National Assembly

Islamabad, March 6 : Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Saturday comfortably won a trust vote in the National Assembly, boycotted by the Opposition, days after the ruling party's high-profile candidate suffered an embarrassing defeat in the hotly-contested Senate elections.

Khan secured 178 votes in the 342-member lower house of Parliament during a special session called after he voluntarily sought a trust vote following the defeat of his finance minister Abdul Hafeez Shaikh in Wednesday's elections to the upper house. The floor test took place without the Opposition as the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) — an alliance of 11 parties — boycotted the voting, making it easier for Khan to secure the required numbers. Khan decided to take a vote of confidence after Shaikh was defeated in the Senate election by former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani. —PTI

Suwendu to take on Didi in Nandigram

Kolkata, March 6: With the BJP on Saturday announcing Suwendu Adhikari's candidature from the Nandigram seat, the stage is set for the battle royale between him and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in the most high-profile constituency in the upcoming West Bengal assembly elections.

Nandigram, the cradle of the anti-land acquisition movement that catapulted Ms Banerjee to power in 2011, will witness her once protegee Mr Adhikari taking on her on April 1, in the second of the eight phases of polling.

The 66-year-old TMC supremo, while announcing the party's candidate list on Friday, reaffirmed her name from Nandigram. She had declared in January that she will contest the seat in Purba Medinipur district.

The BJP announced the names of a majority of its candidates for the seats going to polls in the first two phases of the elections on March 27 and April 1.

For 50-year-old Mr Adhikari, the contest in Nandigram will be a fight for his political survival as he had vowed to defeat Ms Banerjee by over 50,000 votes in the seat or quit politics.

Mr Adhikari had won the Nandigram seat in the 2016 assembly election, while another TMC candidate emerged victorious from the constituency in 2011. He quit the TMC and resigned as MLA last year to join the BJP after having differences with the ruling party in the state. Ms Banerjee, on the other hand, will contest the Nandigram seat for the first time after relinquishing her Bhowanipore constituency in Kolkata. She has rented a house in Nandigram and will campaign from there.

Six states told to ramp up testing

New Delhi, March 6: The union government has asked states and Union territories witnessing a surge in new Covid-19 cases and high active caseload to continue with the strategy of 'test, track and treat' that had yielded rich dividends at the height of the pandemic and accelerate vaccination for priority population groups in districts reporting higher infections on mission mode.

In a meeting held Saturday, they have been asked to collaborate with private hospitals to open up vaccination time-table for a minimum of 15 days and maximum of 28 days at a time.

They have been asked to increase the share of RT-PCR tests in districts dependent on high levels of antigen testing, refocus on surveillance and stringent containment of those areas in selected districts which are seeing cluster of cases and carry out an average close contact tracing of mini-

mum of 20 persons per positive case.

Union health secretary Rajesh Bhushan and NITI Aayog member (health) Vinod K. Paul on Saturday interacted with health secretaries and mission directors of the National Health Mission of Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and the Union territories of Delhi and Chandigarh, the Union health ministry said.

"These states and UTs have in the recent past seen increased positivity and increased number of daily positive cases," it underlined. They reviewed the ongoing public health measures of surveillance, containment and management of Covid cases in wake of the steep rise in daily new cases and the high number of active caseload being reported from these eight states and UTs, the ministry said in its statement. —PTI

Pope Francis, Iraq's top Shiite cleric hold historic meeting

Plains Of Ur (Iraq), March 6: Pope Francis and Iraq's top Shiite cleric delivered a powerful message of peaceful coexistence Saturday, urging Muslims in the war-weary Arab nation to embrace Iraq's long-beleaguered Christian minority during an historic meeting in the holy city of Najaf.

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani said religious authorities have a role in protecting Iraq's Christians, and that they should live in peace and enjoy the same rights as other Iraqis. The Vatican said Francis



Pope Francis (right), meets with Iraq's leading Shiite cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf, Iraq, on Saturday.

thanked al-Sistani for having "raised his voice in defense of the weakest and

most persecuted" during some of the most violent times in Iraq's recent histo-

ry. Al-Sistani, 90, is one of the most senior clerics in Shiite Islam and his rare but powerful political interventions have helped shape present-day Iraq.

He is a deeply revered figure in Shiite-majority Iraq and his opinions on religious and other matters are sought by Shiites worldwide.

The historic meeting in al-Sistani's humble home was months in the making, with every detail painstakingly discussed and negotiated between the ayatollah's office and the Vatican. Early Saturday, the 84-year-

old pontiff's convoy, led by a bullet-proof Mercedes-Benz, pulled up along Najaf's narrow and column-lined Rasool Street, which culminates at the golden-domed Imam Ali Shrine, one of the most revered sites in Shiite Islam.

He then walked the few meters (yards) to al-Sistani's modest home, which the cleric has rented for decades. A group of Iraqis wearing traditional clothes welcomed him outside. As a masked Francis entered the doorway, a few white doves were released in a sign of peace. —PTI

SHORT TAKES

Farmers' union pledges support to DMK

DC CORRESPONDENT

TIRUCHY, MARCH 6

The Tamil Nadu Vivasayegal Iyakkam has announced its support to the DMK-led alliance in the assembly elections. Announcing this, Iyakkam's state president Deivasigamani said at a press conference at Tiruchy on Saturday, after their state and district office-bearers' meeting, that a resolution to this effect was adopted at the meeting. Deivasigamani said they hope that if the DMK comes to power its government would protect the interest of the farmers. Another reason for their support to the DMK, he said, was the farmers of Tamil Nadu were fed up with the ruling AIADMK's attitude towards the ryots in the last five years.

Chennai Customs to help with poll vigil

Chennai, March 6: The Chennai Customs has been roped in for crucial poll duty ahead of the Assembly Elections in Tamil Nadu. The department has already rolled out flying squads, surveillance and sea and road patrolling teams to stop the flow of smuggled goods. Customs teams will keep an eye on the airport and seaports as well as warehouses in three districts including Chennai.

"The teams are vested with the responsibility of conducting checks of vehicles in transit and verification of warehouses to curb illegal activities for effectively ensuring free and fair conduct of the poll process," a press release from Chennai Customs read. Anyone wishing to pass on information regarding suspicious smuggling and other illegal activities can call 044-25246800 or 044-2525422.

DMK wraps up interviews

DC CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI, MARCH 6

The DMK wrapped up its marathon interview for selection of candidates for the April 6 Assembly elections on Saturday with the party President M K Stalin and Youth Wing secretary Udhayanidhi Stalin appearing on the last day.

A total of 7,200 aspirants had filed applications, expressing desire to contest from the 234 constituencies, and all of them were called for interviews that happened at the party headquarters, Anna Arivalayam, for five days.

For Kolathur constituency, the lone application was from M K Stalin, the sitting MLA, while eight applications were received for Chepauk-Triplicane, one of them being Udhayanidhi Stalin. The candidates are expected to be announced on Wednesday and the manifesto released on Thursday after the conclusion of the party's mega public meeting on Sunday at Trichy.

Almost all the prominent leaders of the party, including former Ministers and MLAs, have sought tickets from their bastions and several party members have sought a ticket for the first time.

Since the seat-sharing talks have run into a roadblock with the CPM and Congress not yet finalizing their agreements, the DMK is yet to decide on the number of seats it could contest.



G. Babu Jayakumar

Just spamming

The midnight announcement on the AIADMK and BJP finalizing its seat sharing added to the eeriness that had already come to shroud the ongoing talks between the various political parties in the State to firm up their alliances. So when BJP State President L Murugan, who was one of the signatories of the pact, landed at a hotel in Trichy at 3.30 am the next morning, that is about five hours after finalizing the accord, and spoke to a Tamil television channel around 6 am, it was rather spooky.

To make things more

intriguing, Murugan left Trichy around 8 am purportedly to go to Thiruvannamalai. For those not familiar with the lay of the land, this is it: You can reach Thiruvannamalai from Chennai in four hours, covering the 198 km distance. But when you go to Trichy, travelling over 330 km, and then go to Thiruvannamalai which is 223 km away, you would have done a total of 553 km. The interview that happened in between could have been done from Chennai itself at the same time as the channel is based there. Well, mysterious are

Stalin, after addressing a mega public meeting on Sunday at Tiruchirappalli, would resume campaign on March 12 from Salem, home to Chief Minister K Palaniswami and cover Dindigul and Madurai the next day. It is part of his sixth phase of 'Stalin in your constituency' campaign

Cong invited to join MNM alliance

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC

CHENNAI, MARCH 6

Will the Congress, which is disillusioned with the DMK's low offer of seats, break the long lasting alliance and drift towards the Makkal Neethi Maiam of actor Kamal Haasan?

This was the question that many people were asking after MNM general secretary C K Kumaravel invited the Congress to join his party.

The Congress should come to us, said Kumaravel, adding that both the parties had the same DNA. 'We can bring about a change together and it would be good for the Congress,' he told the media at his party office.

To a question he said that talks were being held with several parties at various levels, while Kamal Haasan, told a campaign meeting at Kolathur on Friday night that the Congress should realise that the DMK was the BJP's 'B Team.'

While the BJP wanted to have an India without the Congress, the DMK was ensuring that the Congress would be done

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away with, thus implementing BJP's agenda, Haasan said

When Haasan cut short his campaign tour and returned to his party office on Saturday afternoon to hold talks with the other functionaries, it gave rise to a speculation of the Congress moving towards the MNM.

However, in the Congress camp there was no indication on aligning with the MNM. Though several meetings were held at the 'TNCC headquarters to find a way to come out of the impasse caused by what was seen as an adamant stand of the DMK, there was no talk of embracing the MNM.

Though a good section of party workers and functionaries expressed their anger over the situation in which the TNCC leader-

ship had landed the party, none of them ever had the MNM as an alternative.

While many agreed that the alliance with the DMK and also the other parties in the coalition would help the party winning more seats, they only wanted to negotiate with the DMK for a decent number.

Even those who angrily suggested snapping ties with the DMK if it did not climb down from the high ground, only wanted the Congress to go it alone and field candidates in all the 224 constituencies. If the party contested the election on its own, it could improve on its future prospects, they said.

TNCC leaders, on their part, put up a brave front, saying that all issues would be sorted out and the alliance would be saved. Some party workers, who had been taking part in the meetings at Sathyamurthy Bhavan, where interviews for ticket seekers were also being held, fear that their leaders may settle for the peanuts being offered to them just for the sake of saving the alliance.

Coonoor, seat of swinging fortunes

B. RAVICHANDRAN | DC

COONOOR, MARCH 6

The Coonoor assembly constituency in Nilgiris is a seat of swinging fortunes. Nilgiris has three assembly segments. Gudalur being a reserved constituency, only Ooty and Coonoor segments are available for the aspirants in the general category to contest the elections.

While it is widely presumed that BJP will contest from Ooty in the AIADMK-led alliance and Congress will fight again from the DMK fold for Ooty, now, the bigwigs and ticket aspirants in both the Dravidian majors

are trying hard to get the Coonoor ticket.

The data shows that after 1980 the DMK and AIADMK won here in almost alternative elections, except between 2006 and 2011, as the DMK romped home in 1980, 1989, 1996, 1998(bypoll), 2006 and 2011 polls while the AIADMK won here in 1984, 1991, 2001(TMC in AIADMK alliance) and in 2016 elections.

In 2016 election, DMK heavyweight and district secretary B.M. Mubarak lost here to AIADMK's Ramu alias Shanti Ramu, who switched over to the AIADMK from the DMK a few months before the

election. Now, quite a lot of party cadres in both the DMK and AIADMK are showing interest in contesting from this constituency.

There is speculation that B.M. Mubarak will once again be given the ticket because of his good ties with the DMK first family. In the AIADMK circles, the names of incumbent MLA Shanti Ramu, district secretary Kappchi Vinodh, former minister Budhichandran, former Rajya Sabha member K.R. Arjunan, and former district secretary and young turk Bala Nandhakumar are doing the rounds.



District call centre with toll free number 1950 (including Kancheepuram and Thiruvallur) functioning at district election office at Chennai corporation on Saturday.

— DC

CPI's Raja says BJP a threat to constitution

DC CORRESPONDENT

TIRUCHY, MARCH 6

Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretary D. Raja has said the forthcoming election to a few state assemblies including Tamil Nadu is attaining great significance as the BJP is posing a grave threat to the Indian constitution as well as the democratic set-up.

Addressing a press conference on the sidelines of the CPI's state council meeting at Tiruchy on Saturday, he accused that the BJP is also attempting to make the country religion-oriented. He said the BJP government at the

He wanted the outcome of the elections to the Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Puducherry and Assam assemblies should commence the fall of the anti-people BJP government at the Centre

Centre was handing over the public sector undertakings to the corporates.

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He said Tamil Nadu is

known for its social Justice and equivalence and so the BJP and RSS cannot execute their agenda in Tamil Nadu. The people of Tamil Nadu will reject those who ally with the BJP. He further said the AIADMK government in Tamil Nadu had miserably failed to protect the rights of the Tamilians.

CPI's Tamil Nadu secretary R. Mutharasan said they are not particular about the number of seats and their main aim is to defeat the communal forces. It will be decided after consultations in which constituencies the party will field its candidates.



Greater Chennai corporation education department organises 100 per cent voting awareness programme at Thiru. Vi. Ka. Nagar constituency, Perambur, on Saturday

— DC

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Tiruchy Rock Fort, criticised Vellamani Natarajan for his failure to fulfill his 2016 election promise of erecting a rope care facility to the Rock Fort.

Vellamandi Natarajan, renominated by the AIADMK for the seat in the April 6 assembly election, is pitted against Inigo Irudayaraj, an outsider and founder of 'Christuva Nallinakka Iyakkam'. Though his candidature is yet to be announced by the DMK, Irudayaraj commenced his canvassing by meeting the Christian leaders and other popular figures besides organising sports events to attract the youth voters.

The DMK campaign will be intensified after the proposed state-level mega public meeting of the DMK in which party president M.K. Stalin will address the voters at Siruganur near Tiruchy on Sunday.



Amit Shah in Tamil Nadu and Kerala today

New Delhi, March 6: Senior BJP leader and Home Minister Amit Shah will be on a day-long political tour of the poll-bound states of Tamil Nadu, where he is set to launch a door-to-door campaign, and Kerala on Sunday.

A party statement said Shah will also address the valedictory function of the BJP's "Kerala Vijay Yatra" in Thiruvananthapuram, besides attending several programmes in the two southern states. Besides launching "Vetri Kodi Eandhi" (people outreach programme for poll victory) at Suchindram in Kanyakumari, Shah will also hold a roadshow in the constituency where the BJP is also contesting the Lok Sabha bypoll due to the death of the sitting Congress MP. Former union minister Pon Radhakrishnan is its candidate. The BJP is contesting the state assembly polls in alliance with the ruling AIADMK. Assembly elections in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, besides Puducherry will be held in a single phase on April 6. —PTI

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DMK leaders are waiting for Congress return

From P1 The CPM representatives, who visited the DMK office for discussions on Saturday morning, said that they would be getting back after taking the views of their party functionaries. From the Congress, however, there was no word of confirmation on accepting the seats offered by the DMK, while sources in the DMK said that their leaders were only waiting for the Congress to return to the negotiating table.

SHORT TAKES

Tension at hospital after nurse's death

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUCHY, MARCH 6

Tension prevailed for a while at a private eye hospital at Tennur in Tiruchy city on Saturday, after the relatives of a staff nurse laid a siege to the hospital in protest against her suspicious death.

According to the agitators, the nurse pursued her nursing course in the nursing college run by the hospital, did nursing job and stayed in the hospital hostel. She got married to a relative four months ago.

In the meantime, the hospital authorities rang up her relatives that she died and her body was placed at the mortuary of the Mahatma Gandhi memorial government hospital here.

Sundaramoorthy, assistant commissioner of police, Srirangam, assured the agitators to wait till truth comes out after the receipt of the post-mortem report. He promised action against the guilty persons and restored normalcy.

Protest to arrest special DGP in Pudukkottai

DC CORRESPONDENT
PUDUKKOTTAI, MARCH 6

Members of the Pudukkottai district unit of the CPI(M) affiliated to All India Democratic Women Association led by their secretary Ms Salomi staged a demonstration in front of the collectorate at Pudukkottai on Saturday. They demanded immediate arrest of special Director General Of Police (Law and order) Rajesh Das for his alleged involvement in the sexual assault case connected with a woman police officer recently.

Spurious liquor blending unit unearthed in Kanchi; counterfeit notes valued at ₹11, 64,000 seized

P.A JEBARAJ / SINDHIYA
SAMUEL | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 6

Kanchipuarum PEW (Prohibition Enforcement Wing) unearthed a spurious liquor blending unit at Thimmasamuthiram, Sharadha Nagar, Kanchipuram district on Saturday. The police also seized counterfeit currencies valued at Rs 11, 64,000 from the premises. The incident shocked the authorities, as the seizure was made ahead of TN

Assembly elections. A probe has been initiated to find whether the seizure has to do anything with any political parties in the state.

According to the official PEW sources, as per the instruction of special DGP (Enforcement), under the supervision of IGP (Enforcement), under the monitoring of SP (Enforcement), the Enforcement and CIU team headed by DSP, PEW, Kancheepuram searched and unearthed a spurious

liquor Blending Unit at Thimmasamudram in Kanchipuram district.

Two persons, Thulasi and Kalaiyaran, who were present in the premises were arrested by the officials. The officers have launched a search for one Nanda alias Nandakumar, who is absconding.

Fake government labels, alcohol meter, empty bottles, rectified spirit, Hologram stickers and two vehicles were seized during the raid.

In this regard, a case was

registered in Kancheepuram PEW Cr.No.200/2021 u/s 4 (1) aaa 4 (1) A TNP ACT r/w 6, 11 RS Rules, 2000 & 468, 471 & 420 IPC.

In addition to this, the team also seized counterfeit notes from within the premises. All the currency notes were of denomination of Rs 2000 and Rs 500. The officers also seized the Machines used for making the fake currency notes.

The police estimated that the fake currency had a face value of ₹ 11, 64,000.

“We have intensified the investigation. We are hopeful of cracking the entire network involved in circulation of counterfeit notes,” said the police. The case is under investigation.

The officials have also initiated an investigation to check if the currencies are printed to distribute among the voters ahead of TN elections.

The election commissioner himself has pointed out that Tamil Nadu is a very sensitive state when it comes to expenditure.

Suburban train services disrupted due to railway signal failure

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 6

The sudden disruption of suburban train services between Chengalpet - Tambaram - Chengalpet and Chennai Beach - Tambaram - Chennai Beach for more than an hour during the rush hour on Saturday morning put thousands of rail passengers to hardship.

A major signal failure on the railway line near Tambaram railway station

Following this, trains from Chennai Beach to Tambaram and vice versa and trains from Chengalpet to Tambaram and vice versa were stopped en route and passengers walked along railway tracks to reach the nearest stations to find alternative means of transport

on Saturday morning left several commuters stranded at various stations.

Railway officials said the signal failure forced

them to stop services on the stretch at the prime time, affecting mostly office-goers and students.

Following this, trains from Chennai Beach to Tambaram and vice versa and trains from Chengalpet to Tambaram and vice versa were stopped en route and passengers walked along railway tracks to reach the nearest stations to find alternative means of transport.

Construction of a new

3rd broad-gauge railway line between Chennai Tambaram-Chengalpattu was in progress. Due to which the main cable for the railway signals was cut off near the Tambaram railway station at 8 am, the sources said. This has also affected the express train services from the southern districts.

Those who had to go to offices and educational institutions were stranded for a long time without

trains as they did not receive any notice regarding the resumption of the railway services. Irked commuters then boarded buses and share autos.

Trains resumed after more than an hour and a half after the signal failure was rectified at 9.40 am.

It may be noted that, recently, on February 25, the train services between Tambaram and Pallavaram were disrupted for 3 hours.

<<<<

Visitors look at the new arrivals of books at 44th edition of the annual Chennai book fair at YMCA grounds organised by the Book Publishers and Sellers Association of India. — DC

Police aspirant gets reprieve

DC CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MARCH 6

Coming to the rescue of an aspiring candidate to the post of Grade-II police constable, who was denied appointment for non-disclosure of a criminal case against him, the Madras high court has directed the authorities to appoint him as Grade-II constable within 45 days.

Allowing a petition filed by Manikandan, Justice S.Vaidyanathan set aside an order of the Superintendent of Police, Salem district and made it clear that if, for any other reasons other than the non-disclosure of criminal case, the petitioner is not found to be suitable, it is for the authority concerned to decide the case in accordance with law.



According to the petitioner, though a criminal case was registered against him and a trial was conducted before the Judicial Magistrate, Sankagiri, he was honourably acquitted of all charges. Since he was acquitted from the said criminal case honourably, he did not disclose the factum of the criminal case at the time of application

to the post of Grade II constable. However, to his shock and surprise, the Superintendent of Police refused to consider him for appointment to the said post, he added.

The judge said it was no doubt true that the petitioner involved in a criminal case and subsequently he was honourably acquitted from the charges by the trial court. This court has also not lost sight of the proposition laid down by the Supreme Court that even after disclosure of the criminal background, it was for the employer to consider the nature of the offence, acquittal, etc., If the acquittal was on the basis of benefit of doubt, certainly, the petitioner has no case and he was unfit to get the appointment in the police department

due to his dubious character. Similarly, if a person was acquitted based on the compromise memo, then also no leniency can be shown to the petitioner, in the light of various pronouncements of the Supreme Court and employer can straightaway reject the candidature, the judge added.

“I find much force in the contention of the counsel for the petitioner, in as much as a reading of the judgment of the trial court dated January 12, 2012 unfolds the fact that the petitioner was exonerated from the criminal charges, honourably and not on the ground of benefit of doubt and therefore, the judgment of this court was squarely applicable to the case of the petitioner herein”, the judge added.

Pandemic gives a leg-up to TB eradication drive

T. SUDHEESH | DC
CHENNAI, MARCH 6

The Covid-19 pandemic, which led to a new lifestyle wearing masks and avoidance of public spitting, will be boon for the tuberculosis eradication drive set for the state government against 2025 by the union health ministry.

Saravanan Chinnaraj, senior technical officer, state TB cell, told DC that they had introduced a district-wise prevalence tuberculosis survey in the state in association with the National Institute for Research in Tuberculosis- ICMR. The survey will be carried out in 143 clusters along with 37 clusters covered in the national TB prevalence survey, across Tamil Nadu in a year. Five teams will be involved in the survey. Each team will cover 6 to 7 districts. The survey is funded by the National Health Mission and the state government. The findings of the survey will help to formulate different strategies towards TB elimination in different districts based on the district-specific inputs.

“The pandemic has brought in many behavioural changes among the public that helped us stop public spitting, sneezing and coughing to a great extent. These habits are the main reasons for spreading of TB. Apart from this, the reduced environmental pollution due to lockdowns will be a major boost for TB eradication mission in the state. We have decided to conduct a detailed discussion on this matter on March 24, the World TB Day”, he said.

“To sensitise the rural people about the importance of getting treatment in the early stages, the project intends to launch the war against TB in the state by looking for people with TB. Providing preventive therapy, controlling TB transmission by routinely using efficient tools for early and accurate diagnosis and making sure the right supportive programmes are in place,” he added.

The Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme, started in 1997, was implemented in 2002 in Tamil Nadu which is the first state to implement nutritional support through direct benefit transfer under Nikshay Poshan Yojana in the country from April, 2018. It aims at diagnosing and caring for TB cases. The drug-sensitive patients are treated using fixed drug combinations through the directly observed treatment strategy.

The state has also implemented programmatic management of drug-resistant TB services since 2009 which aims at early diagnosis of drug-resistance TB cases and treating them with appropriate regimen. Drug-resistant TB cases are managed at 7 nodal drug-resistant TB centres and 24 district drug resistant TB centres. New TB drugs, namely Bedaquiline for adult TB patients and Delamanid for pediatric TB patients, have been introduced in Tamil Nadu for the first time in the country for drug-resistant TB patients. As many as 276 patients are currently being treated with Bedaquiline.

“The pandemic has brought in many behavioural changes among the public that helped us stop public spitting, sneezing and coughing to a great extent. These habits are the main reasons for spreading of TB. Apart from this, the reduced environmental pollution due to lockdowns will be a major boost for TB eradication mission in the state. We have decided to conduct a detailed discussion on this matter on March 24, the World TB Day”

Captivating survival thriller not to be missed

ANBIRKINIYAL

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

CAST: KEERTHI PANDIAN, ARUN PANDIAN, PRAVEEN RAJA

DIRECTION: GOKUL

RATING: 3.25/5

When you remake a blockbuster film, comparisons are inevitable. And imagine remaking the gritty Malayalam sleeper hit thriller Helen, which was critically acclaimed in Tamil. However, director Gokul has retained the core essence of the original and delivered an engrossing affair.

Anbirkiniyal aka Anbu (Keerthi Pandian), in her mid 20s is an easy-going girl who wants to go to Canada to find a nursing job. Her aim is to ease out her widower dad Sivam (Arun Pandian), an insurance agent from his financial troubles. Sivam dots on Anbu and the duo bond

FILM REVIEW



strongly. She attends IELTS coaching classes and then works in a restaurant inside a plush mall. She is in love with a boy Charles (Praveen Raja) who is in search of a job. When Sivam comes to know of Anbu's love affair, he gets furious and that leads to a verbal spat between the two. The same night, Anbu goes missing. What happened to Anbu?

Keerthi Pandian, though

relatively a newcomer, nails her character of a bubbly, lovable girl transformed into a mature woman with ease. She shines every bit after she gets trapped inside the freezer room and expresses well her struggle to survive the situation. Her interaction with a rat is touching. Arun Pandian's style of dialogue delivery somewhat doesn't gel with the proceedings. However, since Arun Pandian and Keerthi are real-life dad and daughter, their onscreen relationship looks natural and relevant. Praveen Raja and others play effective foils.

The film takes some time to warm up as the characters get established. The second half works wonderfully well with Gokul keeping the thrilling episode intact. The nerve-racking moments inside the freezer room are captured masterfully.

Mahesh's visuals and musical support from Javed Riaz are in sync with the big picture. Overall, a film not to be missed!

MIRUGAA

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

CAST: SRIKANTH, RAAI LAXMI, DEV GHILL

DIRECTION: J.PARTHIBAN

RATING: 2.5/5

Films where animals play the central character have always either been fascinating if it's an adventure genre or frightening if it is a crime thriller. Mirugaa falls in the second category. The film directed by J.Parthiban, a former assistant of ace Bala has a man-eating tiger (CG generated) essaying a crucial role.

The movie plot revolves around a serial killer John (Srikanth) who is full of strange ideas. He uses his handsome appearance and the best of the mannerisms to woo rich single women, lead a parasitic life and finally finish them off and run away with the booty.



Meanwhile, a woman Subadhra (Vaishnavi) at one point caught him red-handed when he tried to escape with a lump sum of cash and jewels from a lady who fell prey to him. Peeved with her dad's decision of making her widowed elder sister Lakshmi (Raai Laxmi) the sole legal heir of the family's huge wealth, Subdhra now wants to bump off the latter. She blackmails John and assigns him the job of looting money from Lakshmi. John comes to Ooty as Aravind and with his gimmicks, he lands a job at Lakshmi's tea estate. Soon, she falls for him and marries him. In a turn of events, Aravind is exposed and the rest is all about Lakshmi's struggles

lust. Accordingly, he sends his wife to her dad's place in the pretext of some work. What happens to Mariam on a heavy rainy night and its repercussions forms the remainder of the film.

It is Selva's world and he writes characters that are peculiar and eccentric. SJ Suryah's Ramsay also is no different. Suryah as a weird psychopath is terrific, and the actor with his funny expressions, body language and voice modulations (including his melodrama akin to Sivaji Ganesan) nails it. Regina Cassandra sans makeup looks beautiful. She gets a meaty role and delivers a knockout performance. Nandita in a role with grey shades does her bit adequately. All other supporting characters pitch in their bit.

While the first half exudes the Selva brand with its distinct narration, post interval, the screenplay is somewhat inconsistent and stretched and you feel disengaged. The climax is underwhelming.

The songs and background score of Yuvan Shankar Raja and cinematography by Arvind Krishna aid the film's proceedings. Thanks to a few standout moments here and there, the film is worth a watch at least once.

“The pandemic has brought in many behavioural changes among the public that helped us stop public spitting, sneezing and coughing to a great extent. These habits are the main reasons for spreading of TB. Apart from this, the reduced environmental pollution due to lockdowns will be a major boost for TB eradication mission in the state. We have decided to conduct a detailed discussion on this matter on March 24, the World TB Day”

Engaging in parts

NENJAM MARAPPATHILLAI

ANUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

CAST: SJ SURYAH, REGINA CASSANDRA, NANDITA

DIRECTION: SELVARAGHAVAN

RATING: 2.75/5

Nenjam Marappathillai, the long pending horror thriller from Selvaraghavan made at a time when such a

genre just started in K'town (2015-16) has finally hit the marquee last Friday. It is a bit formulaic and involves a beautiful girl who is harmed and killed brutally and she returns as a ghost and on a revenge spree. But what makes NM stand out is Selva's smart execution with his edgy writing style.

Mariam (Regina Cassandra), who grows up at a Christian orphanage is a God-fearing kindhearted person who spends all her earnings on the inmates of



the home. She lands a plum job of babysitting a four-year-old child Rishi, son of rich couple Ramsay aka Ramasamy (SJ Suryah) and Shwetha (Nandita Sweta). The moment Ramsay sees Mariam, he starts lusting

for her and makes advances. However, Mariam rejects every attempt. Ramsay, known for his scheming ways (he becomes rich by cheating his boss and marrying his daughter Swetha), hatches a plan to satiate his

IN BRIEF

SARPANCH IN ODISHA DISQUALIFIED

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 6

A sarpanch from Odisha's Ganjam district has been declared disqualified from his post for not knowing Odia and having two wives and six children.

According to the 1994 Odisha Gram Panchayat Act, a person is ineligible of holding any position in a gram panchayat if he or she does not know how to write and speak Odia, have more than two children and illegally has more than one husband/wife. Such a person cannot contest any post too.

P Simadri was elected as the sarpanch of Agastinuagam gram panchayat under Chhatrapur block of Ganjam district during the panchayat polls held in the year 2017. He had won by defeating his nearest rival Niwasi Gouda.

However, after losing the polls, Gouda had filed a petition at the Civil Judge Senior Division Court in Chhatrapur challenging his disqualification as sarpanch of Agastinuagam gram panchayat on the grounds of not having the knowledge of Odia language, having two wives and six children.

After the hearing was over, Gouda's lawyer, Srikanth Mishra said, "Based on the statements of four witnesses, two from each side, the Chhatrapur Civil Judge Senior Division disqualified the standing sarpanch Simadri for not knowing Odia. The Court has also directed the District Collector to take further action in this regard," Mishra added. "I had filed the petition against Simadri after the panchayat elections in 2017. My three and half years of legal battle is over now as he has been disqualified from his post by the court for violating the Odisha Gram Panchayat Act. The court has also sent notice to the district collector and communication officer to take further action as the post will be lying vacant after Simadri's dismissal," said Gouda.

Battle Royale on the cards in Nandigram

Former protege to take on West Bengal Chief Minister

From Page 1

Both Ms Banerjee and Mr Adhikari were prominent figures of the anti-land acquisition movement in Nandigram in 2007. The little-known rural area changed the political landscape of West Bengal after witnessing one of the bloodiest movements against the government's land acquisition for industrialisation.

After years of peace, Nandigram, with 70 per cent Hindus and 30 per cent Muslims, however, is now witnessing political and communal polarisation, with the latter firmly backing the TMC that had controlled the area for the last decade-and-a-half.

The constituency comprises two blocks -- Nandigram-I and Nandigram-II -- with the first having 35 per minority population and the second almost 15 per cent.

Mr Adhikari, a bachelor, is the heir apparent of the powerful Adhikari family of Purba Medinipur district. He has taken over the political legacy of his father, Sisir Adhikari, a three-time TMC MP.

One of his younger brothers, Dibyendu Adhikari, is the sitting TMC MP from Tamluk, while another brother Soumendu recently joined the BJP after he was removed from the post of administrator of Kanthi Municipality.

Suvendu was baptised into politics as a student leader in the late 80s. He became a Congress councillor in Kanthi Municipality in the 90s.

He and his father joined the TMC in 1999, a year after it was formed after breaking away from the Congress.

Mr Adhikari had twice



Former Trinamul Congress MP Dinesh Trivedi joined the BJP on Saturday, weeks after he announced quitting his Rajya Sabha membership on the floor of the House deploring "violence" in poll-bound West Bengal. He joined the BJP in the presence of its president J P Nadda, and Union ministers Piyush Goyal and Dharmendra Pradhan (not seen in the picture) besides other leaders.

- PTI

unsuccessfully contested elections -- the 2001 assembly and the 2004 Lok Sabha polls.

He first won the assembly elections in 2006. After becoming one of the prominent figures of the Nandigram anti-land acquisition movement, there was no looking back for him.

In 2009 and 2014, he had won the Lok Sabha polls from the Tamluk seat. However, in 2016, ms Banerjee nominated him from the Nandigram assembly constituency and inducted him into her cabinet.

But Ms Banerjee's nephew Abhishek's meteoric rise in the TMC did not go down well with Mr Adhikari, and he felt sidelined in the party. In December last year, he switched over to the BJP.

- PTI

CONG SAYS SUSHMITA WITH PARTY AMID DIFFERENCES OVER SEAT-SHARING

Guwahati, Mar 6: The Congress on Saturday said that its women's wing chief Sushmita Dev was with the party, dismissing reports in a section of the press that she has resigned amid differences over seat-sharing. The reports of Dev's resignation came amid differences with leaders over seat-sharing with AIUDF.

"It has been brought to the notice of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee that a speculative news about resignation of President, All India Mahila Congress Ms Sushmita Dev is doing the rounds on television and web portals. We want to make it clear that Ms

Sushmita Dev has not resigned from the party," party spokesperson Bobbeeta Sharma said.

Earlier, Dev barged out of a Congress meeting on the selection of candidates at a city hotel, party sources said. Her supporters also demonstrated against Congress leaders who favoured allotting more seats to AIUDF in the Barak Valley. However, sources close to Dev said that though there were differences she was sure that those would be resolved soon. The Congress-led 'Mahajoth' has AIUDF, BPF, CPI(M), CPI, CPI(ML) and the Anchalik Gana Morcha as its constituents.

- PTI

CDS BRIEFS MODI ON DISCUSSIONS IN COMMANDERS CONFERENCE

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

Prime minister Narendra Modi on Saturday addressed the valedictory session of the three days Combined Commanders Conference of top commanders of Army, Navy and Air Force at Kevadia, Gujarat.

The Prime Minister was briefed by the Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat about the discussions during the Conference. The Prime Minister expressed his appreciation for the structure and agenda of the Conference. He particularly appreciated the inclusion of Junior Commissioned Officers and Non Commissioned Officers in the Conference.

Speaking to the highest civilian and military leadership of the National defence system, Prime Minister conveyed his strong appreciation for the resolute dedication shown by the Indian Armed Forces over the past year, in the context of the Covid pandemic and the challenging situation on the northern border, said a statement issued by PMO.

He stressed the importance of enhancing indigenisation in the national security system, not just in sourcing equipment and weapons but also in the doctrines, procedures and customs practiced in the armed forces. He emphasized the need to optimise manpower planning in both military and civilian parts of the national security architecture. He also called for a holistic approach, focused on breaking down civil-military silos and on expediting the speed of decision making.

2 killed in BJP MLA's birthday party in MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
with agency inputs
BHOPAL, MAR 6

Two people were killed in a group clash at the birthday party of local BJP MLA Dharmendra Singh Lodhi in Madhya Pradesh's Damoh district, police said on Saturday.

The incident took place in the village of Banwar at around 10 pm on Friday, Damoh district superintendent of police Hemant Chouhan said.

According to the police, a group clash broke out during the birthday bash of Jaberia MLA, leading to the death of two people.

While Arvind Jain, said to be the MLA's representative, died of gunshot, Yoginder Singh Rajput, an invitee at the party, was lynched.

On the other hand,

Damoh district Congress president Ajay Tandon accused the police of failure in maintaining the law and order.

"The incident occurred in the birthday party of BJP MLA Dharmendra Singh Lodhi at a time when the district is under high security due to the arrival of President Ram Nath Kovind," Tandon said. The President is on a two-day visit to Madhya Pradesh beginning Saturday. He is scheduled to arrive in Jalhari village in Damoh district at 9.30 am on Sunday, from where he will go to Sangrampur village to attend 'Janjatiya Sammelan' organised by MP Tribal Welfare Department.

While the BJP MLA could not be reached for reaction, state BJP secretary Rajneesh Agrawal said he was unaware of the incident.

"The incident has nothing to do with the BJP. The law will take its own course," he said.

INDIA RECORDS 18,327 COVID CASES; OVER 1.9 CRORE VACCINATED SO FAR

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

As many as 18,327 new Covid-19 cases and 108 deaths were reported in India in the last 24 hours, the union health ministry informed on Saturday.

The country's overall cases tally has reached 1,11,92,088, including 1,80,304 active cases while the toll has mounted to 1,57,656.

A total of 22,06,92,677 samples have been tested for Covid-19 up to March 5. Of these, 7,51,935 samples were tested on Friday, as per the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

According to the health ministry, a total of 1,94,97,704 people have been vaccinated against coronavirus so far.

Maharashtra reported 10,187 new Covid-19 cases and 47 deaths in the last 24 hours. Total number of cases rose to 22,08,586, death toll stood at 52,440.

Similarly, Punjab reported 1,179 new Covid-19 cases, 644 recoveries

and 12 deaths on Saturday. Total cases stood at 1,87,348.

Rajasthan reported 233 new Covid-19 cases and 114 recoveries in the last 24 hours. No new death reported during this period. Total cases are 3,21,356. Covid-19 cases continue to rise in Tamil Nadu which reported 562 cases, including 243 cases in the capital Chennai. Four deaths took the toll to 12,517.

As many as 2,791 new Covid-19 cases, 16 deaths & 3,517 recoveries were reported in Kerala on Saturday. Active cases at 42,819, death toll 4,287 and recovered cases stand at 10,27,826. A total of 61,764 samples were tested for Covid-19 in the last 24 hours, said Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan.

Meanwhile in Punjab, curfew to remain imposed in Jalandhar between 11pm and 5am in view of rising cases of Covid-19, according to the district administration.

Delhi recorded as many as 321 fresh cases.

US defence secretary to visit India later this month

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

US secretary of defence Lloyd Austin will be visiting India this month in first high profile visit from President Joe Biden administration.

In recent years there has

been greater US and India cooperation in the defence sector.

Mr Austin is expected to meet defence minister Rajnath Singh, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Last year, India and US

● **AS PER** the experts, BECA will allow India to buy armed drones from US which will be fed with the data.

signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA) which takes the mil-

itary cooperation between the two countries to the next level.

BECA is last of the four basic agreements which US signs with its close strategic and defence allies. US and India have already signed three other foundation agreements which are

General Security Of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). BECA will allow sharing of

military grade geo-spatial data in real time to India by US which will be help Indian military to launch precise missiles and drone strikes.

As per the experts, BECA will also allow India to buy armed drones from US which will be fed with the data.

Ambani case: BJP reiterates demand for probe by NIA

SONU SHRIVASTAVA | DC
with agency inputs
MUMBAI, MARCH 6

A day after the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government handed over probe related to explosives planted near Mukesh Ambani's house to Anti Terrorism Squad, the BJP reiterated its demand for the NIA probe.

While the MNS demanded that a sitting judge should be appointed to investigate the case.

Meanwhile, the Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut admitted that it was important for the "image and prestige" of the Maharashtra government to find out the truth behind the mysterious death of Mansukh Hiren, who was said to be the owner of the vehicle abandoned outside Ambani's house.

In a tweet, the BJP leader and in charge of Maharashtra CT Ravi said, "Mansukh Hiren, owner of the Scorpio that was packed with gelatin sticks and parked near Mukesh Ambani's Antilla has been found dead in mysterious circumstances. Is it Suicide or Murder? Will Maharashtra Vinashak Aghadi CM @OfficeofUT order for a NIA probe to let truth come out? (sic)"

Expressing suspicion on assistant police inspector (APD) Sachin Vaze, MNS leader Sandeep Deshpande said that Sachin Vaze had joined Shiv Sena in 2008. "The officer, who has been inclined towards a particular party, cannot conduct a fair probe. This creates suspicion among the people," he said. Mr Deshpande also asked whether the ATS, which is efficient, conduct conduct a fair probe into when there is a

lot of political pressure.

The MNS leader also questioned why all the important cases are being given to Sachin Vaze?

"Therefore, under a supervision of sitting High Court judge, the investigation should be conducted into this whole case," he added.

The Sena spokesperson and Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Raut said that it is unfortunate and shocking that Mansukh Hiren had lost his life. There is also suspicion that whether it is a suicide or a murder.

"What are the reasons behind his death? Who are the responsible for it? Truth should be found out by the home department as soon as possible as it would be better for the image and prestige of this government," Mr Raut said.

Opinion on Mansukh Hiren's death reserved in autopsy report

Opinion on likely cause of the death of Mansukh Hiren, who is said to be the owner of the vehicle with explosives found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence in Mumbai last month, is reserved in his postmortem report on Saturday, a Thane police official said. Viscera of Hiren has been sent to a forensic laboratory in Mumbai for analysis, he said.

The body of Hiren (46) was fished out of a creek along the Mumbra-Reti Bunder road in neighbouring Thane on Friday morning, police had said.

The postmortem report received on Saturday mentioned that there are no visible external injuries on Hiren's body, the official said.

CUB OF TIGRESS AVNI RELEASED INTO WILD AFTER 2 YEARS

Nagpur, Mar 6: female cub of tigress Avni, who was shot dead after being declared a man-eater in November 2018, has been released into the wild in the Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) of Maharashtra's Nagpur district after over two years of "re-wilding" efforts, authorities said.

This adult tigress, now named as PTRF-84, was released on Friday, Chief Conservator of Forests and Field Director of the PTR said in a release.

This female cub of Pandharkawada tigress Avni (PKT-1), was housed in the in-situ enclosure at Titralmangi of the PTR since December 2018.

She was reared/re-wilded as per the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), it said. She is approximately 3.2 years old.

She had been brought to the PTR as an orphaned cub on December 22, 2018, following a rescue operation. After that, she was housed in 5.11 hectares of enclosure for over two years, the release added.

An expert committee supervised her entire rewilding experiment and as per its decision, a proposal was sent to the NTCA for her release, which was approved, it said.

Before her release, the tigress was radio-collared with the help of scientists from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII).

- PTI



Farmers during Kisan Ekta Morcha to mark the 100th day of the ongoing protests against the new farm reform laws, at KMP Expressway near Kundli in Haryana on Saturday.

- PTI

Pinarayi targets Union min in smuggling case

Thiruvananthapuram, March 6: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday hit out at Union minister V. Muraliedharan over his remarks on the gold smuggling case, alleging that smuggling of gold through diplomatic baggage began after the BJP leader from the state took over as Minister of State for External Affairs.

Mr Vijayan claimed Mr Muraliedharan, on multiple occasions, had said the

baggage seized by the Customs was not a diplomatic one. "We have heard a minister of state who is in charge of the Union ministry of external affairs. He is said to be in charge of the Middle East. Is there any estimate of how much gold has been smuggled since he became a minister? Didn't the smuggling of gold through the diplomatic channel start after this minister took charge? Does this minister have anything to

do with the person who persuaded the accused to say that the smuggling was not in diplomatic baggage?" Mr Vijayan asked at a press conference here.

The CPI(M) in Kerala had alleged Mr Muraliedharan had all along been insisting that the bag in which 30 kg of gold was seized by customs officials at the international airport here on July 5 last year was not diplomatic cargo. Referring to the stand

taken by Mr Muraliedharan on the issue of smuggling of gold through diplomatic baggage, Mr Vijayan said, "When the finance minister said in Parliament that the gold was smuggled in a diplomatic baggage, why did this minister of state repeatedly take an opposite view? It is the same minister who is now wielding the sword of Customs against the state government," Mr Vijayan said.

The Chief Minister's statement targeting Mr Muraliedharan came a day after the Customs, probing the gold smuggling case, claimed key accused Swapna Suresh has made "shocking revelations" against him, assembly Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan and some ministers on dollar "smuggling" involving UAE consulate officials. He said the agency was trying to "defame" state ministers.

- PTI

SHORT TAKES

**6 UKRAINIANS
DIE, DOZENS HURT
IN BUS CRASH**

Warsaw: A bus carrying dozens of Ukrainian citizens rolled off an embankment into a ditch in Poland, killing six people and injuring 41, Polish media reported on Saturday.

The accident occurred around midnight on the A4 motorway near the town of Jaroslaw, which is in south-eastern Poland near the border with Ukraine. *TNV24*, a private all-news station, reported that the bus had a Ukrainian license plate and was travelling with 57 Ukrainian citizens, including two drivers.

A large rescue operation involved dozens of firefighters, paramedics and helicopters to transport the injured to hospitals. There was no immediate cause given for the accident. Ukrainians travel for work to Poland, a European Union state on Ukraine's western border.

**LANDMINE BLAST
KILLS 1, SEVERAL
HURT IN CROATIA**

Zagreb: A landmine blast killed one migrant and injured several others in a central Croatia area infested with the explosive devices, left over from the country's 1990s war, police said on Friday.

The accident occurred when a group of illegal migrants entered mine-infested woods near Saborsko, close to the Bosnia border, on Thursday, police said in a statement.

One young man was killed when he stepped on the explosive device and other migrants were injured in the blast, it added.

Police found the mine victims soon after the accident. Another ten migrants, who left the scene of the accident immediately, were rescued from the area after an hours long search on Friday.

Four of those hit by the blast were hospitalised, one with life-threatening injuries.

Police did not reveal the migrant's nationalities but a hospital in nearby Ogulin said two of the injured were Pakistanis.

**ITALY SEEKS
LIFER FOR U.S.
COP KILLERS**

Rome: Italian prosecutors on Saturday requested life sentences for a pair of young US citizens accused of murdering an Italian policeman two years ago while holidaying in Rome.

Officer Mario Cerciello Rega, 35, died from knife wounds in July 2019 after he and a colleague, both in plain clothes, had a nighttime confrontation with Finnegan Lee Elder and Gabriel Natale-Hjorth.

Elder has admitted stabbing Cerciello multiple times with an eight-inch combat knife, but has said he and Natale-Hjorth were jumped by men they thought were drug dealers.

"It was an aggression, a violent, deadly, disproportionate attack," prosecutor Maria Sabina Calabretta told a court in Rome, as quoted by the *AGI* news agency.

Describing him as "a good man," she said Cerciello "could have done little to defend himself even if he had been armed, which he was not," and said the defendants had the "sole intention to kill."

**PROTESTS OVER
DEFAMATION
LAWS IN THAI**

Bangkok: Hundreds marched in Bangkok and lit ceremonial fires in front of a courthouse on Saturday to protest Thailand's draconian royal defamation law and the jailing of several prominent pro-democracy activists.

The protesters are part of a youth-led movement that kicked off last July calling for an overhaul to Premier Prayut Chan-O-Cha's government and a scrapping of the country's military-scripted constitution.

They are also demanding the abolition of a lese majeste law which shields the kingdom's ultra-powerful King Maha Vajiralongkorn and the royal family from defamation, and carries penalties of up to 15 years per charge.

The law has been broadly interpreted to cover anything perceived as negative towards the royals, effectively muzzling critics — which is why the movement's calls for reforms have sent a lightning bolt through Thai society.

As protesters marched to Bangkok's criminal court, they chanted "Prayut, Get Out!" and "Abolish 112" — the penal code section of the lese majeste law.

Mount Etna volcano spews lava

Lava flows down from the crater of Indonesia's most active volcano Mount Merapi, seen from the tourist site of Grojogan Watu Purbo in Sleman Regency near Yogyakarta early on Saturday.

— AFP

Protesters return to Myanmar streets

Yangon, March 6: Anti-coup demonstrators took to the streets of Myanmar on Saturday, a day after a United Nations envoy urged the Security Council to hear the nation's "desperate pleas" and take swift action to restore democracy.

The country has been in turmoil since a February 1 coup ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from power, triggering a massive uprising from hundreds of thousands opposed to the new junta.

Security forces have in

response initiated an increasingly brutal crackdown on demonstrators, killing more than 50 people since the coup.

But protesters rallied again on Saturday, from the dusty roads of northern Lashio — where young protesters stared down police behind homemade shields — to central Loikaw city in view of Myanmar's eastern mountains.

"Our revolution must win," chanted protesters in Loikaw, who included civil servants such as teachers in their green

and white uniforms.

The country's vital sectors have been crippled by an ongoing "Civil Disobedience Movement" — a campaign urging civil servants to boycott working under a military regime. The impact has been felt at every level of the national infrastructure, with shuttered hospitals, empty ministry offices, and banks unable to operate.

On Saturday, state-run media announced that if civil servants continued to boycott work, "they will be

fired" with immediate effect from March 8.

But protesters in Myanmar continued to defy authorities, gathering across commercial hub Yangon as police deployed tear gas, stun grenades and rubber bullets to disperse them.

In Tamwe township, soldiers prowled empty streets looking for protesters — even using a sling-shot to shoot projectiles at residential buildings.

Activist Maung Saungkha said the movement would persist — even

as security forces continued to step up enforcement tactics — as many remember the repression under the previous junta.

"In our past revolutions, we never won... this time we must fight to win," he said.

"We must fight together with the younger generation to get victory," Myanmar's ruling generals have shown no sign of heeding calls for restraint despite mounting international pressure, including targeted sanctions by Western powers.

— AFP

**Pak PM Imran
wins trust vote**

Islamabad, March 6: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Saturday comfortably won a trust vote in the National Assembly, boycotted by the Opposition, days after the ruling party's high-profile candidate suffered an embarrassing defeat in the hotly-contested Senate elections.

Khan secured 178 votes in the 342-member lower house of Parliament during a special session called after he voluntarily sought a trust vote following the defeat of his finance minister Abdul Hafeez Shaikh in Wednesday's elections to the upper house.

The floor test took place without the Opposition as the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) — an alliance of 11 parties — boycotted the voting, making it easier for Khan to secure the

required numbers.

Khan decided to take a vote of confidence after Shaikh was defeated in the Senate election by former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani. The Opposition demanded the Prime Minister's resignation after the debacle. Addressing the House after securing the trust vote, the 68-year-old cricketer-turned politician thanked all lawmakers from his party and allies for supporting him.

Earlier, foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi earlier tabled a single-point resolution that the House reposes confidence in Prime Minister Khan. Speaker Asad Qaiser announced the result, saying Prime Minister Khan had been elected to the post with 176 votes following the 2018 general elections.

— PTI

**US, EU hail 'fresh start' with
truce in planemaker feud**

Washington, March 6: Washington and Brussels hailed an opportunity to restore frayed ties as US President Joe Biden and EU leader Ursula von der Leyen on Friday suspended tit-for-tat trade tariffs in a longstanding aircraft dispute.

The truce in the 16-year-old transatlantic dispute over subsidies for rival planemakers Boeing and Airbus represents a significant ratcheting back of the aggressive trade policies pursued by former US president Donald Trump.

Following a phone call on Friday, Biden and von der Leyen's announced a four-month suspension of billions of dollars in punitive import tariffs, in what the White House said was an opportunity "to repair and revitalise the US-EU partnership."

"I was glad to speak to



Biden and von der Leyen's announce a four-month suspension of billions of dollars in punitive import tariffs, in what the White House said was an opportunity 'to repair and revitalise the US-EU partnership.'

— AFP

President Biden this afternoon — the first of many exchanges and the start of a good personal partnership," von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, said. "President Biden and I agreed to suspend all our tariffs imposed in

the context of the Airbus-Boeing disputes, both on aircraft and non-aircraft products, for an initial period of four months." The call was the European Union chief's first with Biden since he came to office.

— AFP

India ties changed life in Afghanistan

SRIDHAR
KUMARASWAMI | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

It will be very difficult for the Taliban to capture power through force in Afghanistan even if there is a total absence of foreign troops due to the presence now of a well-trained professional Afghan National Army unlike what happened in 1996, Afghan

sources have said, adding that a lot has changed in the country since the Taliban were driven out of power two decades ago.

Sources also said that Afghans cherished their deep friendship with India which has already carried out several major development works in the war-torn country that have changed the lives of ordinary Afghans for the better.

Sources indicated that one major difference between the mid-1990s and the situation now is the emergence of Afghan women in all walks of life as equal stake-holders in the future of their country. Sources pointed out that even during the Afghan peace process talks in Qatar's Capital Doha, Afghan women journalists boldly interacted with

Taliban representatives, seeking to know the vision that the insurgent outfit has for the country now. The Afghan Government in Kabul too seems determined to safeguard the precious gains especially in the field of women's empowerment made in the past several years and is determined not to compromise on that.

The assessment of the

Afghan Government now seems to be that even the Taliban have realised that much has changed from the horrific times when they ruled the country with extreme brutality from 1996 to 2001. The assessment seems to be that the Taliban can secure a role in governing Afghanistan only through the peace process and not through brute force anymore.

SPACE | STUDY Engineers studying possible routes for longer rover voyages on surface of Mars**Mars rover Perseverance goes for a 'spin'**

Washington, March 6: The Mars rover Perseverance has successfully conducted its first test drive on the Red Planet, the US space agency Nasa said on Friday.

The six-wheeled rover travelled about 6.5 meters (21.3 feet) in 33 minutes on Thursday, Nasa said.

It drove four meters forward, turned in place 150 degrees to the left, and then backed up 2.5 meters, leaving tire tracks in the Martian dust.

"This was our first

chance to 'kick the tires' and take Perseverance out for a spin," said Anais Zarifian, Perseverance mobility test bed engineer at Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

Zarifian said the test drive went "incredibly well" and represented a "huge milestone for the mission and the mobility team."

"We're going to do some longer drives," she added. "This is just the beginning." Nasa engineers said they were

studying possible routes for longer rover voyages on the surface of Mars.

Perseverance deputy mission manager Robert Hogg said engineers were also preparing for the first flight of a helicopter drone carried by the rover.

Hogg said the rover team was working out flight zones and hoped to conduct the first flight in late spring or early summer.

He said the mission had not experienced any major problems so far. "It's all just minor stuff,"

he said. "Everything we've tried has worked beautifully." Perseverance was launched on July 30, 2020 and landed on the surface of Mars on February 18 on a mission to search for signs of past life on the Red Planet.

The rover's prime mission will last just over two years but it is likely to remain operational well beyond that.

Its predecessor Curiosity is still functioning eight years after landing on Mars.

— AFP



One of Perseverance's Hazard Avoidance Cameras (Hazcams) captured this image as the rover completed a short traverse and turn from its landing site in Jezero Crater.

— AFP

**Biden urged
to veto India,
SA jab draft****Senators say waiving rights on
vaccine would end innovation**

Washington, March 6: Four top Republicans Senator on Friday urged US President Joe Biden not to accept a proposal by India and South Africa to the World Trade Organisation to waive anti-Covid vaccine patents to boost its supply.

"India, South Africa and other countries are presenting a proposal at the World Trade Organisation to waive all intellectual property rights for any innovation related to Covid-19."

"The proponents of this scheme argue that if we just destroy the intellectual property developed by American companies, we will suddenly have more manufacturers producing Covid-19 vaccines," the group of four Republican Senators wrote in a letter to Bien.

In the letter, Senators Mike Lee, Tom Cotton, Joni Ernst and Todd Young urged Biden to reject the upcoming proposal at the WTO.

"But the opposite is true. By destroying the intellectual property of every American company that has worked on Covid-19 vaccines and treatments, we would be ending the progress — started under Operation Warp Speed — that led to the fastest development of life-saving vaccines in history," the Senators wrote.

They alleged that some countries believe that they would benefit from seizing America's intellectual property.

"But this is a mistake," they said.

"Waiving all rights to intellectual property would end the innovation pipeline and stop the development of new vaccines or boosters to address variants in the virus. It also wouldn't increase the supply of vaccines because of the tremendous time and resources needed to build new manufacturing plants and acquire the knowhow to produce these complex medicines," they said.

"Even if the waiver may temporarily result in a

**BIDEN COVID
RELIEF BILL HEADS
TO FINAL VOTE**

Washington, March. 6: US Democrats were on track on Saturday for a final vote on President Joe Biden's massive Covid-19 relief package after agreeing to scale back unemployment benefits, with passage increasingly likely in the evenly divided Senate.

With the sun rising in Washington, bleary-eyed senators continued their all-night session voting on nearly two dozen amendments and counting as they hammered out the \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill, which Biden insists will revive the pandemic-hit US economy.

Negotiations in the Senate had frozen the chamber's action for more than 10 hours Friday, before the Democrats reached a compromise with moderate Senator Joe Manchin, who had balked at the scale of the benefits.

"This agreement allows us to move forward on the urgently needed American Rescue Plan," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said.

Republicans have stood uniformly opposed to the giant package, but Democrats — who cannot afford to lose a single vote — united to beat back repeated efforts to derail the legislation.

— AFP

few copycats attempting to produce what American companies developed, it would introduce major quality control problems," the Senators said.

"As a global leader and a force for good, we can do a lot to help other countries overcome the virus. But destroying our rights to intellectual property wouldn't advance our mission of fighting the virus — it would make the problem worse, for America and for the world," they wrote.

— PTI



Amanda Gorman

**AMANDA GORMAN
SAYS FOLLOWED**

New York, March 6: African-American poet Amanda Gorman, who became a star after her reading at President Joe Biden's inauguration, has said a security guard claimed she looked "suspicious" and followed her as she walked home. "This is the reality of black girls: One day you're called an icon, the next day, a threat," she tweeted on Friday.

"He demanded if I lived there because 'you look suspicious.' I showed my keys & buzzed myself into my building. He left, no apology," she wrote. Gorman, whose Twitter account says she lives in Los Angeles, did not immediately reply for more information.

Gorman became an international sensation after reciting her original work "The Hill We Climb" at the inaugural, a poem inspired by the January 6 attack on the US Capitol. The 22-year-old Harvard University graduate was invited to perform in Washington after First Lady Jill Biden saw one of her readings.

She was the youngest poet ever to recite at a presidential inauguration, a role first given to Robert Frost by John F. Kennedy in 1961.

— AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

7 MARCH 2021



Shashi Warrier

Off the beaten track

Mirror, who's most civilised of 'em all?

A neighbour, an amateur historian, happens to be believe that all good things come from India. The other day he dropped in, waving a small book. "Look what I got!" he said. "It's the *Lekhapaddhati*!"

"What's that?" I asked. "It's a set of model documents and letters from more than a millennium ago," he said. "It tells you how they wrote charters and mortgage deeds and passports and other legal papers in those days. It's probably the first-ever manual on writing official documents, and it proves just how civilised India was!"

"India?" I asked. "As best I know, there was no India a millennium ago, just several hundred kingdoms in the area is that now India."

"Well, mostly Gujarat and bits of Rajasthan and bits of Madhya Pradesh," he said, making an effort to keep calm. "The areas ruled by the Chalukyas. Around Pattan, in modern Gujarat. Not the Chalukyas of the Deccan."

"Ahi!" I said. "And what do these papers show?" "You can tell a lot from them," he replied. "They tell you about the organisation of government, crops, harvests, things like that."

"Harvests?" I asked. "Of course," he replied, as if I were mildly challenged. "Taxes came after harvests. They had a fiscal year, but tax collection was flexible to account for variations in weather. And there's lots more. The documents cover the social hierarchy, and even family ties!"

"Family ties?" I asked, mystified. "Yes!" he replied. "See? This tells you how to write a letter to your son or your son-in-law. It tells you how a loving husband wrote to his wife, or an angry one!" He pointed out an entry in the table of contents that said, "A Letter of the Displeased Husband to His Wife."

"Does it tell an angry wife how to write her husband?" I asked. He paused. "Of course!" he said after he had taken time out to look through the contents.

"There was gender equality even in those days." He pointed out an entry that said, "A Letter of an Angry Wife to Her Husband." He handed me the book. "Here you are," he said. "See for yourself!" I took the book and flipped through the pages more or less at random, moving back and forth. There were two examples of documents about female slaves, one regarding a slave who had been captured and the other regarding a voluntary slave. "What's this about slavery?" I asked.

"It was the norm for those days," he said, shrugging. I found it hard to swallow the idea of a widespread norm because, as I remembered it, there wasn't much contact between faraway kingdoms. "Norm where?" I asked.

"Over most of the world," he said. "Europe. England of those days. Most of what we call the Americas now was far behind, as was Africa."

"Ahi!" I said. "You said something about gender equality... How come there's mention only of female slaves?"

"Well, they captured only women in raids," he said. "The men were all killed."

"What about boys?" I asked. "Male children?"

"We don't really know," he said.

"That seems fairly barbarous to me," I said.

"But that was how it was in those days!" he said, getting a little heated.

I didn't want to anger him so I let it slide and asked, instead, "What's this about voluntary female slaves?"

"It's actually a form of social security," he replied. "If bad weather or a natural disaster or a war or something left a woman with no assets, she always had the option of becoming a slave, with her owner being responsible for her well-being."

"And was there some way of ensuring that slaves were treated reasonably?" I asked.

"Two things," he said. "In the first place, we don't know. Second, it went on all over the place in those days. You see, slavery was probably better than begging or dying, which were the only two alternatives available."

I kept flipping the pages, and stopped when another interesting title caught my eye. "Letter to a Servant", it went. I couldn't help saying, "Well, if they taught their servants to read and write they must have been very civilised indeed!"

"Don't be silly!" he said. Apparently he knew what I was talking about. "The title of that letter is misleading. The servant is not a house servant but an employee in someone's business. It's not as if they taught their housemaids to read."

I checked. Sure enough, the letter was to a man who ran a part of the business, telling him not to do anything that would harm the business or let rascals into the premises. I said, "So they thought of office employees as personal servants. That doesn't seem very civilised!"

"Well," he said, shrugging, "it was the norm..." Then, flipping more pages, I found a chapter heading that went, "Ordeals as Usual". I looked it up and discovered matter-of-fact comments on ordeals to be used in the absence of evidence. After I read some bits about having people hold hot ploughshares in their hands I couldn't read any further so I handed it to him to read, which he did. When he was done, he looked up and said, "Well, it was what they did," he said, irritated. "Not just in those days but even today, when they put you in jail for sedition."

"But that's not fair, is it?" I asked.

He seemed to take umbrage, for he put the book in his bag and rose to leave, muttering something about spoilsports and traitors, and as I closed the gate behind him I wondered why I ended up more confused each time he came visiting.

Shashi Warrier has written fairy tales, thrillers, a semi-fictional biography, satires, and a love story. Besides writing, he teaches strategic communication at a business school.

Subhani



Freedom, conspiracy & other anti-national sins



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

Frankly, in my view, Freedom House, the Washington based global democracy watchdog, should be booked by our ever-vigilant government for sedition. The organisation has had the audacity to demote India from "free" to "partly free" in the rankings of its latest annual report. The government has rightly called the report "misleading, incorrect and misplaced". To call the world's largest democracy only "partly free" is incontrovertible evidence of an attempt to subvert our sovereignty and integrity, an international conspiracy directed against the Indian State. I think our law enforcing authorities should immediately file an FIR against the organisation and those who run it, and officially protest to President Joe Biden.

Anurag Kashyap and Tapsee Pannu should also reject this report forthrightly. If the income tax department has raided them, and unearthed hundreds of crores of discrepancies, it is only doing its job. Obviously, the raids have nothing to do with their being vocal critics of the government. Our tax sleuths are mandated to uncover such wrongs, and the investigation was a routine exercise in fulfilling it. It just so happens that there are no "discrepancies" to be found in those in Bollywood who happily sing praises of the government. Why can't Kashyap and Pannu just be like them?

The report should also be trashed by the hundreds of activists who protested against the CAA-NRC combine. If they are facing the might of the police, and many

are still languishing in jail, it is because their intent was not to invoke the right to dissent but to act as part of a planned conspiracy against the State. Journalists, who have had draconian laws slapped against them for reporting facts on the ground in UP and elsewhere, should also reject the report. Journalistic ethics demand "objective" reporting. No one should presume that they have the right to unnecessarily be critical of the government, because how can a government which has been duly elected not know what is in the best interests of the people?

Farmers protesting against the new farm bills must also junk the report. If some of the ruling dispensation called them Khalistanis, anti-nationals, stooges of Pakistan, and puppets in the hands of political parties determined to malign the government, there must be valid reasons to do so. Farmers cannot sit in peaceful protest for months on the borders of the capital of the nation, with many dying in the bitter Delhi winter, unless they are part of a "foreign hand" hatching a plot against the government. Now, the government has hard proof of such a plot. Climate activist, Disha

To call the world's largest democracy only 'partly free' is incontrovertible evidence of an attempt to subvert our sovereignty and integrity, a global conspiracy directed against the Indian State. Our authorities should file an FIR against the organisation...

Anurag Kashyap and Tapsee Pannu should also reject this report forthrightly. If the income tax department has raided them, and unearthed hundreds of crores of discrepancies, it is only doing its job... It was a routine exercise...

Nobody tells them what to do, and who to target. They may have been a "caged parrot" in the past. Not anymore.

All free citizens must be patriotic in ways approved by the government. For instance, any questioning of defence policy is tantamount to treason, and an insult to our brave soldiers. Those who are critical of the government become ipso facto critics of the nation, and those who are critical of the nation, are naturally anti-national. A democratic government must act strongly against such traitors.

Our former rulers, the British, had the following lines — still visible — engraved in stone at the North Block of the Central Secretariat in New Delhi: "Liberty will not descend to a people, a people must raise themselves to Liberty. It is a blessing which must be earned before it is enjoyed." How relevant these lines are today. How can India be accused of being only "partly free" when the real problem is that the people — and especially the Opposition — have not yet raised themselves to enjoy liberty? They must earn their liberty, behave "properly", watch what they write and speak, not protest about any and everything, learn to be patriotic citizens, and then the benevolent government can allow them the freedoms that it deems appropriate for them.

The writer, an author and a former diplomat, is in politics

Farmers protesting against the new farm bills must also junk the report. If some called them Khalistanis, stooges of Pakistan and puppets in the hands of political parties determined to malign the government, there must be valid reasons to do so.

LETTERS

AIADMK-BJP DEAL

As the wise saying goes - "It is better to be late than never" - the Tamil Nadu BJP has inked a pact with the AIADMK to contest in 20 select places of its supposed strongholds instead of wasting time in bargaining for 60 seats which could never be conceded by the major partner of the alliance. It is true that BJP has made its presence better felt in TN but it is still doubtful whether it can gain electoral advantage on its own strength. This is a hard truth though difficult to digest for that party. Hence prudence and correct assessment of the field situation had made BJP to finalise the seat sharing though with a little trace of disappointment. Now the task before the party is to enter the battle of the ballot with full vigour and determination to win seats.

S. Nagarajan Iyer, Coimbatore

DAMP SQUIB SASIKALA

FORMER AND late Chief Minister Jayalalithaa's aide VK Sasikala's sudden and surprise withdrawal from politics is set to alter the political dynamics and calculations ahead of the Tamil Nadu assembly elections (*Damp squib Sasikala*, March 5). The biggest gainer from her 'bolt-out-of-the-blue' announcement is of course the ruling AIADMK. However, one fails to understand why so much media attention is being drawn towards a person, who is a novice in politics, and one who has just returned from jail after serving a four-year term in custody in a disproportionate assets case. Certainly, the wheels of TN elections don't revolve around Sasikala alone. The juggernaut will roll on even without her, as there are lot of heavyweights in the fray this time too, and they will add to the election jamboree in the State.

R. Sivakumar, Chennai

LAUDABLE JUDGMENT

THE JUDGMENT by the Madras high court awarding ₹10 lakhs as compensation (to be paid by the correspondent, head master and physical training teacher) to the father of a child who died while undergoing corporal punishment of 'duck walk' in a government aided school in 2018 is laudable and should serve as 'a lesson' to the educationists/teachers. It is high time that it is understood that corporal punishment, being practiced in Indian schools as a tool to discipline and punish students, would only have a negative effect resulting in psychological problems and violent behaviour of students when they grow up. The teachers should realise that they have the responsibility to mould the character of a student through good methods of teaching, love and affection sans violence.

M.C. Vijay Shankar, Chennai

Mail your letters to editor@deccanmail.com

Anita Katyal
Political Gup-Shup



On Azad, Cong misfired twice; how's Tomar for new MP CM?

The Congress leadership was clearly worried when it first heard that some members of the "infamous" G-23 planned to participate in a public event in Jammu, ostensibly to honour senior leader Ghulam Nabi Azad who recently retired from the Rajya Sabha. The real purpose was to send out a message to Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Nehru-Gandhi scion Rahul Gandhi. Consequently, party general secretary Mukul Wasnik was tasked to contact Mr Azad and dissuade him from proceeding with the Jammu programme. It is evident Mr Wasnik's mission proved to be a failure. As a face-saver, the central leadership then issued orders to the party's Jammu workers to organise a special welcome for Mr Azad, suggesting that the party's central leadership had given its blessings to Mr Azad's programme. However, this move also backfired as it did not deter the leaders from speaking out, with Mr Azad going to the extent of praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This proved to be the proverbial red rag to a bull, and within two

days, party workers in Jammu who had publicly welcomed Mr Azad were out on the streets protesting against him for his remarks on Mr Modi.

Ever since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the coronavirus vaccine in the second phase of the immunisation drive, his ministers and Bharatiya Janata Party MPs have made a beeline to hospitals to get their shot. But that's not the end of the story. This has been followed by a full-throated campaign to publicise each minister's participation in the vaccination drive. Newspaper editors have been inundated with appeals from the publicity managers of these ministers and MPs with repeated requests that they publish the photographs of their bosses taking the shot. They are particularly keen that the photos appear in the Delhi newspapers even when a minister has taken the shot outside the capital. Among those who have rushed to the press with such a request included the ministry of external affairs, which was kept by their minister S. Jaishankar's photo

be published in Delhi.

It may appear far-fetched but there is a connection between the West Bengal election and Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's future. Both his detractors — BJP general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya and state home minister Narottam Mishra — have been entrusted with key responsibilities in West Bengal. While Mr Vijayvargiya is in charge of West Bengal affairs, Mr Mishra is responsible for election preparations in 48 Assembly segments of the poll-bound state. Needless to say, both these leaders are putting their best foot forward to ensure that the BJP scores well in the forthcoming elections. This will strengthen their case for a promotion in their home state — both leaders are eyeing the chief minister's post. But there is every possibility that the two hopefuls may be beaten to it by Union agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar, a hot favourite with both Mr Modi and home minister Amit Shah.

Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot and his bete noire Sachin Pilot set tongues wagging when they travelled together in a helicopter recently to address a series of meetings and mahapanchayats in the desert state. This was the second occasion in the recent past when the two political rivals put up a show of unity and appeared together on a public platform. This has led to speculation that Mr Gehlot has made his peace with Mr Pilot and that that the latter may return as deputy chief minister. The truth is that Mr Gehlot has an ulterior motive in extending an olive branch to his younger colleague. Four by-elections are to be held this month and the constituencies headed for polls have a large Gujar population. The chief minister needs Mr Pilot's help here as the latter has a large following among the Gujars. There is no telling how this story will unfold post-elections.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav has not been particularly active in the field after his party's disastrous perfor-

mance in the 2019 Lok Sabha election and an equally dismal showing in the previous Assembly poll. This had led to considerable disquiet in the party as its members felt that they would have to pay a heavy price for Akhilesh's laziness and that their opponents would seize this opportunity to expand their footprint. But the results of the last elections to the legislative council held out some hope for the Samajwadi Party cadres who are now professing their loyalty to Akhilesh Yadav. Their confidence in him flows from the party's victory in two legislative council seats from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constituency Varanasi. This is the first time that the Samajwadi Party won these seats in Varanasi, ousting the BJP after 10 years. This has given hope to the party's rank and file that all is not lost and it is the Samajwadi Party, and not the Congress or the Bahujan Samaj Party, which is cashing in on anti-incumbency against the Yogi Adityanath government.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

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

A dazzling adventure

Raya and the Last Dragon

CAST: Kelly Marie Tran, Awkwafina, Gemma Chan, Daniel Dae Kim, Benedict Wong, Jona Xiao
DIRECTOR: Don Hall, Carlos López Estrada
RATING: ★★★★★
Releases on Disney+ Hotstar

and Spine — who perpetually teeter on the edge of war. Sisu, the only remaining dragon, hasn't been seen in five centuries.

Raya (voiced by *Star Wars'* Kelly Marie Tran) is the young Princess of Heart. Her father (voiced by Daniel Dae Kim) is the Chief who hopes to unite all the territories. It doesn't go as planned, he's turned to stone, and Raya is set on a dangerous quest to track down the dragon who she believes is their last hope.

The film comes from the odd but inspired pairing of co-directors Carlos López Estrada (who made the Sundance breakout *Blindspotting*) and Disney veteran Don Hall (*Big Hero 6*) and was co-written by Vietnamese playwright Qui Nguyen and *Crazy Rich Asians* co-writer Adele Lim. The result is a sweet-natured and wonderfully imaginative fantasy adventure that has shades of *Indiana Jones* and is suitable for the whole family.

Raya gets off to a bit of a slow start but stick with it. Once she sets out on her mission, things pick up considerably thanks in no small part to the introduction of Sisu, played by Awkwafina, who

Raya gets off to a bit of a slow start but stick with it. Once she sets out on her mission, things pick up considerably thanks in no small part to the introduction of Sisu, played by Awkwafina, who doesn't try to disguise her wonderfully distinctive voice.

doesn't try to disguise her wonderfully distinctive voice. Raya discovers Sisu is not quite the hero she is looking for, but that's just part of the journey. Along the way their brood grows with others displaced and orphaned by the Druun and Raya must confront her main foe, a Princess from another land, Namaari (Gemma Chan) who is part of the reason things went awry in the first place.

The animation is both stunning and very computer generated. Sometimes extended shots of the humans talking can start to feel like the uncanny valley and it makes you miss the hand drawn elements of the form. But hand drawn animation also wouldn't be able to create the stunning vistas and astoundingly life-like water. It's a compro-

mise and *Raya* is undoubtedly a visual feast.

It's also the best kind of feminist film in that it's one that doesn't clobber you with the message. Raya is allowed to be awesome without the script shouting about it all the time and it's better for it. It does however hammer home a message about trust, which, you know, is fair enough. And it has chosen to have yet another middle-aged semi-dystopian female leader bedecked in all white with a severe gray haircut (Namaari's mom, voiced by Sandra Oh). It's not that it's inherently bad, it's just a lazy choice for a film that is otherwise so inventive. "Raya" is also notable for the simple fact that it features predominately Asian American voice actors — a first for Disney Animation. The animated *Mulan* had a fair amount too, but a lot were white actors voicing Chinese roles. Will that make a difference to the kids watching? Probably not at the moment, but down the line the authenticity will be appreciated.

Raya and the Last Dragon, a Walt Disney Pictures release, in theaters and on Disney+ Friday, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association of America for "Some violence, action and thematic elements." — AP



The disorientation of dementia

In Florian Zeller's *The Father*, Anthony, 80, in the grip of dementia, is a captain ready to go down with the ship. Overhearing his daughter and son-in-law contemplating a nursing home, he curses them as "rats" abandoning him. Pacing his London apartment in a bath robe, he mounts a noble resistance.

"I am not leaving my flat!" he shouts. But if the battle lines are clear for Anthony, little else is. Every time Anthony leaves a room, when he re-enters, the light has shifted, the furniture is rearranged and sometimes even the people are different. In staging and perspective, *The Father* mimics the disorientation of dementia. Anthony, a regally theatrical man played by Anthony Hopkins, is an actor who every time he takes the stage, the scene has changed before him. Timelines, settings and faces are all kaleidoscoped by a splintered memory. His ship — his flat — might not even be his.

The Father, which opens in theaters Friday, is Zeller's directorial debut but he's a well-known French playwright and author who's here adapting his own play, one that's been put on around the world. (On Broadway, the father, named Andre, was played by Frank Langella. In London, it was Alfred Molina.)

Dementia is often seen on screen but usually from the viewpoint of an intimate watching their loved one recede away. Michael Haneke's *Amour*, with Jean-Louis Trintignant and Emmanuelle Riva, which likewise remained set within an elegant apartment, gazed with a cold, clear eye on a great love violently fading.

Haneke's film had larger reverberations because of its actors — both titans of French film approaching the end — and Zeller has likewise suggested — or rather insisted on — real-life echoes. Hopkins, 83, shares his character's name, and *The Father* could be taken as a late, self-aware wail from a magnificent performer. Zeller has also cast Olivia Colman as Anthony's care-taking daughter, Anne, and another Olivia, Olivia Williams, as who Anne sometimes appears to Anthony.

To me, these winks reinforced the feeling that "The Father" is a clever concept, not a profound film. Terrifically acted and finely crafted though it is, it's a brilliant but hollow exercise in perspective that calls more attention to its artful orchestration than it does life or loss.

And yet, few, if any films, have so fully illuminated the nightmare and confusion of dementia. Rather than gawk at it, "The Father" puts us smack in the middle of Anthony's personal hall of mirrors. We are just as unmoored as he is, left to figure out what's real and what's not as scenes are played and then, with shifting details, replayed: Anne coming home with chicken for dinner; her husband, Paul (Rufus Sewell), sitting with the newspaper; an interview with a prospective nurse (Imogen Poots).

In every encounter, Anthony struggles for comprehension. He's doubtful when facts don't line up, and outraged when he's contradicted. Sometimes, pangs of realization seem to flit across his face when he's at a loss he can't resolve. The stranger he finds in the apartment tells him he's Anne's husband. The flat, the man tells him, isn't his. His wristwatch (another pun) keeps going missing.

To see Hopkins play all these ever-fluctuating turns of mood is riveting. He has grasped, at least for a proud man like Anthony how one's ego keeps fighting a battle it doesn't know is already lost. The resentment for a reality that won't cohere. "What is this nonsense?" asks Anthony, furious. For an actor so intense, so rigorously unsentimental, this is his Lear.

Yet *The Father* often feels like a clinical puzzle to work out. By the time the fog clears — for us, not Anthony — and the splices of memory become synced, a final scene pushes *The Father* into territory beyond the simulation of Anthony's condition. A late scene brings a rush of heart-breaking clarity. It clears up the specifics of Anthony's situation while also pondering what, perhaps, there's still to cling to when everything else slips away.

The Father, a Sony Pictures Classics release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for some strong language, and thematic material. — AP

The Father

CAST: Anthony Hopkins, Olivia Colman, Mark Gatiss, Olivia Williams, Rufus Sewell
DIRECTOR: Florian Zeller
RATING: ★★★★★

In Truffle Hunters, an enchanting but beset world

The Truffle Hunters

CAST: Piero Botto, Sergio Cauda, Maria Cicciù, Aurelio Conterno, Enrico Crippa
DIRECTOR: Michael Dweck, Gregory Kershaw
RATING: ★★★★★

You've got to love a movie that credits its dogs before it does its executive producers.

The Truffle Hunters, Michael Dweck and Gregory Kershaw's exquisitely charming documentary about old Italian men who scavenge truffles and the dogs they're bound to, lists the canines with the appropriate respect in the end credits. Birba. Biri. Charlie. Fiona. Nina. Titina. Yari. These are some of the stars of *Truffle Hunters*, a profoundly lovely movie that delights in the noble scavengers of a dog-eat-dog world.

The Truffle Hunters, which is shortlisted for best documentary at the Academy Awards and which Sony Pictures Classics will release in theaters Friday, is

set in the northern Italy forests of Piedmont. Dweck and Kershaw, both cinematographers, film the truffle hunters — aging, sweet men practicing an ancient and secretive tradition — in painterly, pointillistic tableaux as they walk through autumnal forests, foraging with their dogs. They seep into the landscape.

The film, scored by composer Ed Cortes with retro Italian pop mixed in, conjures an otherworldly enchantment. In between backwoods trips where their dogs smell their way to the high-priced delicacies, the hunters live humbly in old country homes. Our main characters are never explicitly introduced, but we're drawn intimately into their world, as if we just passed through a magical portal. Aurelio, 84, dines with his companion, Birba, sitting on the table.

Carlo, 88, never seems to stop smiling, especially when he manages to get past his wife (who sternly believes him too old to truffle hunt at night) and slip into the woods with his dog, Titina. The younger, long-haired Sergio, a kindly but passionate soul, bathes with his pups — Pepe and Fiona — in a pink-tiled



tub. This, surely, is a gentle realm every bit as bewitching as Narnia.

But the hunters' earthy endeavor isn't as simple as it seems. Their way of life is a dying one. The rare white Alba truffle is increasingly hard to find because of effects on the soil connected to climate change. The hunters are often pressed for their secrets. "If tomorrow something happens, your wisdom would be lost," one man urges Aurelio. So sought-after are the truffles that their dogs are perpetually at risk of being poisoned by competitors.

Sergio, terrified of losing his, pounds on his drums for catharsis. Another hunter, intent on putting something down, hammers furiously at his typewriter. "Dogs are innocent," he writes.

The sense that the hunters — who are really in it for the dogs more than money or anything else — are, like their four-legged friends, innocents in a corrupt world only expands when the filmmakers follow the truffle food chain. Hagglng over prices by headlight, the hunters seem always lowballed by a well-dressed buyer. Higher up, still, are the Michelin-starred restau-

rants and auction houses that feast on the hunters' finds. This commercial world, miles removed from the muddy forests of Piedmont, is seen in *The Truffle Hunters* like an antiseptic, colorless modern life that has lost the taste of the simple and eternal.

Wonder and whimsy is back in the forest. *The Truffle Hunters* — surely among the greatest dog movies — even wryly occasionally shifts to a dog's point of view. We see — via dog cam — like one of the hunters' dogs when he's let out of the car and runs down a path, panting.

Just as last year's beekeeping beauty *Honeyland*, *The Truffle Hunters* is a richly allegorical documentary of a vanishing agricultural pastime. The truffles, weighed and sniffed at market, are delicacies. But the finer things rhapsodised here are not expensive rarities. What's worth savoring is natural splendor; the charms of tradition, and, above all, a good dog. Those things aren't delicacies, but they're fragile just the same.

The Truffle Hunters, a Sony Pictures Classics release, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for some language. — AP

Coming 2 America charms cut can't match the original

I'm Your Woman

CAST: Eddie Murphy, Arsenio Hall, Shari Headley, Jermaine Fowler, Leslie Jones, Tracy Morgan
DIRECTOR: Craig Brewer
RATING: ★★★
Streaming on Amazon Prime

Once upon a time, dear children, before you were born, they made a fairytale movie about a kingdom called Zamunda. *Coming to America*, starring Eddie Murphy at the height of his popularity and charisma, became a huge hit and a cult classic. In this film, dear children, Murphy played Prince Akeem — he didn't need to be called Prince Charming, because he was already so darned charming. We met him on the morning of his 21st birthday, awakening in his palace bedroom to a full orchestra, servants tossing rose petals at his feet, and gorgeous naked women servicing him in the bathtub until his royal appendage was deemed

clean.

Oops! Sorry, kids. Some parts of *Coming to America* didn't age very well. Including most of the stuff about women.

But 33 years and one #MeToo movement later, it's time for a reboot. The good news about *Coming 2 America*, directed by Craig Brewer, is that things have gotten better for women in Zamunda. Yes, it's still a patriarchy (more on that soon) and yes, there are still obedient royal bathers. But we don't see their naked breasts or backsides. There's also a bathtub gag involving the great Leslie Jones that flips the gender dynamic entirely and gratifyingly (especially for her).

And now, Prince Akeem is not a randy young heir but an established family man. Happily married for 30 years to Princess Lisa — the bride he found in Queens in the last film — he has three daughters, brave and feisty. The eldest wants to be his heir. A female heir? That's not done, in Zamunda. But the times, they are — or might be — a-changin'.

That's the good news. The bad news is that this sequel, despite (or perhaps because of) its nod to modern sensibilities, isn't nearly as funny or edgy



Paul Bates (from left), Leslie Jones and Jermaine Fowler in *Coming 2 America*.

as the original. It has seemingly everything — the original cast, some well-known newcomers, high-profile cameos — and eye-popping costumes by the great Ruth E. Carter (an Oscar winner for *Black Panther*). It has set

pieces and choreography and de-aging technology and overlaying plot lines. What it has less of, is fun.

Still, just like we go to college reunions 30 years later to recapture the magic, fans of the first will flock

to it on Amazon Prime. They likely won't be too disappointed. Especially because, despite the knowing references to urban gentrification, transgender offspring, Teslas and even unnecessary movie sequels, little has really changed.

Obviously Murphy is back, as producer and star. So is Arsenio Hall, as trusty sidekick Semmi (and a bunch of other roles). Also back: the stately James Earl Jones as King Jaffe Joffer; Shari Headley as Lisa (a seriously underwritten role); and Louie Anderson as Maurice. John Amos is back as Lisa's dad, still ripping off McDonald's. And of course the My-T-Sharp barbershop crew is back in Queens.

A new presence is the casually appealing Jermaine Fowler as Lavelle, Akeem's previously unknown son. Celebrity guests include a highly amusing Wesley Snipes as flamboyant General Izzi, leader of Nexdoria (next door); Tracy Morgan as Lavelle's uncle; and Jones as his uninhibited mother. Another *Saturday Night Live* face, Colin Hanks, makes the most of a brief cameo. Among notable musical appearances, Gladys Knight sings *Midnight Train From Zamunda*.

The plot follows a familiar trajectory, beginning in Zamunda and traveling to Queens to solve a major need. In this case, the need is not a bride, but a male heir. Akeem, who becomes king upon his father's death, learns he unknowingly sired a son during that Queens trip three decades ago (it was Semmi's fault!) He needs a male heir to cement his power. So he brings Lavelle, a ticket scalper who aspires to much more, back to Zamunda, along with Mom.

ters entirely, Lavelle falls not for his intended bride, Izzi's daughter, but for his royal barber, Mirembé, who aspires to her own shop one day (women don't own businesses in Zamunda).

But Lavelle needs to learn royal ways, and pass a "princely test" which includes facing down a lion. There's also the matter of Akeem's daughter, Meeka (a luminous KiKi Layne, not given enough screen time, who rightly deserves to be queen one day. Complicating matters entirely, Lavelle falls not for his intended bride, Izzi's daughter, but for his royal barber, Mirembé, who aspires to her own shop one day (women don't own businesses in Zamunda). — AP

SHORT TAKES

Pooja beats world champ, 9 in finals

New Delhi: Asian Championship gold medallist Pooja Rani (75kg) defeated world champion Atheyna Bylon of Panama in the semi-final bout as 9 Indians stormed into the finals of 35th Boxam International Boxing tournament in Castellon, Spain, on Friday. Pooja dominated her opponent from the beginning and looked unfazed throughout and assured a unanimous win. Other Women boxers joining Pooja in the final are debutant Jasmine (57kg) and Simranjit (60kg). However, it was a flawless day for the Indian male boxers as all 6 of them marched into the finals. CWG bronze medallist Mohammed Hussamuddin (57kg) continued his fine run and displayed technical superiority over Panama's Orlando Martinez to win 4-1. He will be facing Puerto Rico's Paul Rivera in the final.

NorthEast-Bagan play out 1-1 draw

Bambolim: Idrissa Sylla struck in the stoppage-time to help NorthEast United hold ATK Mohun Bagan to a 1-1 draw in the first leg of second semifinal of the Indian Super League here on Saturday. Antonio Habas was just minutes away from recording his maiden first-leg playoff win in the League when the second-half substitute struck in the fourth minute of injury time to cancel out David Williams' 34th-minute goal. The result also meant Khalid Jamil is still unbeaten in the competition and extended NorthEast's winning run to ten games. It was an end-to-end duel, but neither side was able to test the keepers much. It was NorthEast who enjoyed better possession.

Nagal out of Argentina Open

Buenos Aires: Playing fearless brand of tennis, India's Sumit Nagal ran world number 46 Albert Ramos-Vinolas close before exiting the ATP Argentina Open after suffering a three-set defeat in the men's singles quarter-final here. His relentless hitting kept Nagal in the match despite trailing 2-5 in the decider. Eventually errors at key moments spelled his ouster, losing 6-4, 2-6, 5-7 in the quarter-final that lasted two hours and 26 minutes.

Spinners help Lanka level series

St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda: Sri Lanka's spinners bamboozled world champions West Indies to claim a 43-run win in the second Twenty20 International on Friday. Having lost by four wickets in the opening game on Wednesday, in a game where West Indies skipper Kieron Pollard launched six successes in an over, the tourists successfully defended 160 on Friday to level the three-match series. West Indies were all out for 117 in the 19th over as Sri Lanka ended an eight-game losing streak in T20. Leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga finished with 3-17, off-break bowler Akila Dananjaya had 1-13. Wrist spinner Lakshan Sandakan took 3-10, including Pollard who made just 13. **Brief scores: Sri Lanka 160/6** (Gunathilaka 56, Nissanka 37, Bravo 2-25) beat **West Indies 117** (McCoy 23, Sandakan 3-10, Hasaranga 3-17).

Live on TV

BADMINTON

Swiss Open: Finals from 3.30 pm on Star Sports 2 HD, 3

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: West Brom vs Newcastle from 5.30 pm; Liverpool vs Fulham from 7.30 pm; **Manchester City vs Manchester United** from 10 pm; Tottenham vs Crystal Palace from 12.45 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1

Italian League: Roma vs Genoa from 5 pm; Verona vs AC Milan from 7.30 pm; Napoli vs Bologna from 1.15 am (Monday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

HOCKEY

FIH Pro League (women): Nigeria vs Germany from 9 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

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INDIA LORD IT OVER

Kohli & Co. crush England to make WTC final at Lord's

Ahmedabad, March 6: Axar Patel and R. Ashwin once again made a mockery of an eternally confused English batting line-up as India cantered into the inaugural World Test Championship final with a resounding innings and 25 run victory on the third afternoon of the fourth and final Test here on Saturday.

All India needed was a draw to book a Lord's date in June with New Zealand but Patel (24-6-48-5), in company of Ashwin (22.5-4-47-5), literally blew England away in a session and half for a paltry 135 in 54.5 overs to complete a 3-1 rout, ensuring that the Anthony De Mello Trophy will stay at the Cricket Centre in Mumbai.

It was another two-and-a-half-days finish but even the most partisan England experts like their former skipper Michael Vaughan have admitted that the 22-year strip had almost nothing to do with their side's abject surrender.

A case in point could be India's first innings score of 365 and a lead of 160 on the same track where England could cumulatively manage only 340 runs across two innings.

Atrocious application and unbelievably poor mindset while playing spinners cost the Englishmen dearly during the last three Tests and skipper Joe Root had little to offer in terms of explanation.

"We haven't matched India in the last three, and we need to keep learning and keep getting better for this experience and this series," admitted Root.

This was one Test match where Indians, even before a ball being bowled, created an illusion of a turning track. It was a ploy of playing with the minds of a team that was already deep into a negative zone.

There wasn't much turn but enough to ensure that the visitors wilted under pressure as Patel's series tally stood at highest for a newcomer (27) while man of the series Ashwin was peerless as ever with 32 scalps in his kitty. — PTI

GAVASKAR FELICITATED ON 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF TEST DEBUT

Ahmedabad, March 6: Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar was on Saturday felicitated by the BCCI on the 50th anniversary of his Test debut with Board President Sourav Ganguly saying that the batting legend and his then teammates played a key role in making "the game as strong as it is today".

The 71-year-old former skipper received a commemorative Test cap from BCCI secretary Jay Shah during the lunch break on day three of the fourth and final Test between India and England at the Narendra Modi Stadium here. Gavaskar is doing commentary for the match. "Celebrating 50 glorious years of the legendary former #TeamIndia Captain Mr. Sunil Gavaskar's



Sunil Gavaskar poses with the commemorative Test cap. — PTI

Test debut today," the BCCI tweeted. Shah also posted pictures of the brief ceremony on his official Twitter handle. Ganguly, also a former skipper, paid his tribute via twitter. — PTI



Axar Patel (right) and teammate Rishabh Pant pose with the trophy after winning the Test series against England at the end of their fourth Test in Ahmedabad on Saturday. India won the Test series 3-1. — AFP

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings: 205
India 1st Innings (overnight 294-7): S. Gill lbw b Anderson O, R. Sharma lbw b Stokes 49, C. Pujara lbw b Leach 17, V. Kohli c Foakes b Stokes O, A. Rahane c Stokes b Anderson 27, R. Pant c Root b Anderson 101, R. Ashwin c Pope b Leach 13, W. Sundar not out 96, A. Patel run out (Bairstow/Root) 43, I. Sharma lbw b Stokes O, M. Siraj b Stokes O. Extras (b10, lb6, nb3) 19. **Total (all out in 114.4 overs) 365.**
FOW: 1-0, 2-40, 3-41, 4-80, 5-121, 6-146, 7-259, 8-365, 9-365, 10-365.
Bowling: Anderson 25-14-44-3, Stokes 27.4-6-89-4 (nb1), Leach 27-5-89-2 (nb1), Bess 17-1-71-0 (nb1), Root 18-1-56-0.
England 2nd Innings: Z. Crawley c Rahane b Ashwin 5, D. Sibley c Pant b Patel 3, J. Bairstow c R. Sharma b Ashwin O, J. Root lbw b Ashwin 30, B. Stokes c Kohli b Patel 2, O. Pope st Pant b Patel 15, D. Lawrence b Ashwin 50, B. Foakes c Rahane b Patel 13, D. Bess c Pant b Patel 2, J. Leach c Rahane b Ashwin 2, J. Anderson not out 1. Extras (b4, lb8) 12. **Total (all out in 54.5 overs) 135.**
FOW: 1-10, 2-20, 3-20, 4-30, 5-65, 6-65, 7-109, 8-111, 9-134, 10-135.
Bowling: Siraj 4-0-12-0, Patel 24-6-48-5, Ashwin 22.5-4-47-5, Sundar 4-0-16-0.

NUMBERS GAME

INDIA'S FOURTH BIGGEST WIN OVER ENGLAND:

- India recorded their fourth biggest win against England by winning the fourth and final Test by an innings and 25 runs in Ahmedabad on Saturday.
- India's an innings and 75 runs victory at Chennai in 2016-17 is their biggest over England while an innings and 46 runs win at Leeds in 2002 is biggest in England. An innings and 23 runs victory at Mumbai in 2016-17 is India third biggest over England.
- Washington Sunder recorded his highest score in Tests by making an unbeaten 96 off 174 balls with 10 fours and one six. His previous highest was 85 (not out) in the first Test match of the series at Chennai.
- Ravichandran Ashwin took 32 wickets in the series and joins the great Sydney Barnes as the only bowler to twice take more than 30 wickets in a series of four matches or fewer. Ashwin took 31 wickets in the four-Test series against South Africa in 2015-16.

— S. PERVEZ QAISER

Bubble life is difficult: Ash

SHASTRI PRAISES PANT'S GAME-CHANGING INNINGS

Ahmedabad, March 6: India coach Ravi Shastri on Saturday said Rishabh Pant's game-changing hundred against England in the fourth Test here was the best counter-attacking knock that he has seen by a number six Indian batsman on home soil.

Pant notched up 101 off just 118 balls, playing a crucial role in India winning the match by an innings and 25 runs to close the series 3-1 on Saturday.

"He has worked like hell in the last three or four months and the results are showing. Yesterday's innings is the best counter attacking innings, I have seen in India by an Indian, especially at number six when the ball was turning," Shastri said.

"Nothing comes easy and he was told in no uncertain terms that he has got to respect the game a little more. He has got to lose some weight and work hard on his keeping. We know the talent he has. He is a genuine match winner and he has responded." — PTI

didn't have window panes opening also. For 14 days, or 20 days or 25 days to stay inside that without even opening the window panes can be quite taxing," he added.

Ashwin also highlighted the challenges of communication in the bubble, while crediting the team management for looking out for the players. — PTI

Sindhu in cruise mode, enters final

Basel, March 6: Olympic silver medallist P.V. Sindhu dished out a superlative performance to outclass Mia Blichfeldt of Denmark in straight games and enter the women's singles final of the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament here on Saturday.

Sindhu, the reigning world champion, beat fourth seeded Blichfeldt 22-20, 21-10 in 43 minutes to avenge her first-round loss to the Danish world no. 12 at the Yonex Thailand Open in January.

This is Sindhu's first final appearance since the World championships here in 2019.

On Friday night, former champion Kidambi Srikanth advanced to the men's singles semifinals after a straight game win over sixth seed Kantaphon Wangcharoen of Thailand.

World no. 10 Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag

SWISS | OPEN



P. V. Sindhu

Shetty also entered the semifinals of the super 300 event, continuing their good run following a last four finish at Toyota Thailand Open in January.

Fourth seed Srikanth beat Wangcharoen 21-19 21-15 in 44 minutes, while second seeds Satwik and Chirag saw off fifth seeds Ong Yew Sin and Teo Ee Yi 12-21, 21-19, 21-12 in the men's doubles competition on Friday night. — PTI

Preyesh, Nikkhil win national titles

Indore, March 6: Tamil Nadu's Preyesh Raj Suresh, living up to expectations, became the new sub-junior boys champion of the 82nd national table tennis championships on Saturday.

The cadet boys crown went to Nikkhil Menon from Tamil Nadu. He blanked out UP's Parth Prabhakar. Pryesh, the left-handed top-seed, beat Ankur Bhattacharjee of bengal 4-1, relying on his forehand winners and bringing variations in his pace and service. On the other hand, Ankur struggled to cope with the pressure of a 3-0 lead for his opponent. Service faults and net-cord interference, too, cost him what could have been a fighting final.

The Bengal boy finally gauged the pace well, slowed down to win the fourth game. In between, one could witness some good rallies between the two and appreciation from the sparse crowd on the final day.



Preyesh Raj

Results: Sub-Junior Boys: Preyesh Raj Suresh (TNNTA) bt Ankur Bhattacharjee (Ben) 11-6, 11-3, 9-11, 9-11, 11-8. **Semi-finals:** Preyesh Raj Suresh bt Shankhadip Das (Ben) 9-11, 11-7, 11-5, 11-9, 11-6, Ankur Bhattacharjee bt P.B. Abhinandh (TTTA) 12-10, 11-4, 11-7, 10-12, 11-6. **Cadet Boys:** M. Nikkhil Menon (TNNTA) bt Parth Prabhakar (UP) 11-2, 11-6, 11-5, 11-1. **Semi-finals:** M. Nikkhil Menon bt Guru Sanjith Vijay (TTFI) 11-3, 9-11, 11-7, 11-9, 11-9, Parth Prabhakar bt Arya Kataria (TTFI) 12-10, 11-8, 9-11, 11-8, 11-7.

CITY CLIPS

SRM rally to beat Indian Bank

SRM IST rallied from a game down to beat Indian Bank 20-25, 25-22, 25-21, 25-16 in the Dr.Rela Institute and Medical Centre 'A' Division Volleyball League at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium. **Results:** Customs bt ICF 25-23, 25-22, 25-22. IOB bt St. Joseph's Engineering College 25-20, 25-19, 25-22. SRM IST bt Indian Bank 20-25, 25-22, 25-21, 25-16.

Padmanaban sizzles in DRBCC win

Padmanaban's unbeaten 59 helped DRBCCC Hindu College beat Veltech Hightech by 10 wickets in the quarterfinal of the ninth Thiruvallur DCA inter-college T20 tournament.

Brief scores: QF: Veltech Hightech 75 in 18.3 Overs (M. Ravimayam 3/20, J. Prasanth 3/15) lost to DRBCCC Hindu College 76 for no loss in 8.2 Overs (Padmanaban 59 n.o.).

BCCI source reveals IPL 2021 to begin on April 9

New Delhi, March 6: The 2021 edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) will begin on April 9, exactly 12 days after the Indian cricket team completes its ongoing assignment against England, a BCCI source revealed on Saturday.

"We have provisionally decided that IPL will start on April 9 and end on May 30," a senior BCCI source said.

"The formal approval of dates and venues will be done during Governing Council meeting next week," the source added.

Considering the prevailing circumstances when efforts are being made to minimise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the BCCI has decided to host IPL matches in five cities — Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Delhi and Ahmedabad. — PTI

England's shortcomings cannot undermine India's big win



Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

India's 3-1 series win was a function of excellent all-round performances and collective self-belief. After losing the first match, the team was under enormous pressure. The rubber was at stake, and with it also a place in the final of the inaugural World Test Championship final, a matter of great prestige. In the event, India did it in style, winning the third Test in less than two days (by 10 wickets), and the fourth in under three by an innings. Victory can't get more comprehensive.

Nevertheless, England's slump after winning the first Test handsomely was a major surprise. For some reason Joe Root's team lost focus, confidence and stumbled unexpectedly and badly in the remaining three Tests.

If the tactic was to sit on the 1-0 lead and plan a stealth attack to win the series, it was ill-founded. In India, visiting teams have to not only get the combination and balance of their playing XIs right, but also must guard against slipping into a prolonged attritional or ultra-

defensive mode.

In 2012-3 series they won, England had Cook to bat long, and Pietersen to take the attack to the bowlers. This time, with Stokes mesmerized by Ashwin, there was overreliance on Root to play bulwark as well as aggressor. It didn't work beyond the first Test. England weren't terribly rich on players with experience of Indian conditions. A quirky rotation policy further robbed them of key players (Jos Butler) and was compounded by flawed selections, like 4 pacers in the day/night match on a spinner's track.

The biggest problem was the failure of the batting. Barring Joe Root (primarily in the first Test), Ben Stokes (all too sporadically) and Dan Lawrence in the fourth match, the batsmen floundered, showing

little technical skill, nerve, or conviction.

Instead, they viewed pitches with deep suspicion and surrendered abjectly at the first sight of seeing the ball turn or jump off the pitch. To an extent, criticism of the Motera pitch for the third Test was justified. A Test ending in less than two days, with neither side making more than 150 in their first innings, is a below par surface.

The collapse in both innings of the fourth Test however very little to do with the pitch. To be bowled out for 135 in the second innings in 54.5 overs on the same surface where India's last four batsmen put on 219 runs shows that the demons were more in the minds of the England batsmen.

England's shortcomings

cannot undermine India's superb effort though. Losing the first Test was a jolt. To recover from it so swiftly redounds to the ability and ambition of the players. There was obviously a lot of self and collective pride to be redeemed, and this was done handsomely.

From the standpoint of individual performances, Ashwin (32 wickets) and Axar (27) enjoyed a fabulous series, giving the batsmen no respite with their accuracy, control, spin, and in the former's case. These two will feature in the nightmares of England batsmen for a long while one reckons.

Rohit Sharma showed sublime form batting on difficult pitches. In defence or attack, his technique, balance, stroke selection, and elegance in

executing these was quite superb. A late bloomer in the five-day format, he's reaching his peak and is perhaps the most feared batsman — in white ball or red — in the world.

Washington Sundar, tagged as white ball specialist at the start of the season, has shown fine maturity and ability though only 21. He and Axar represent the richness and depth of talent of Indian cricket. Think of it, had Jadeja not been injured, one or both might not have played a single match. How to keep them out now will vex the team management!

The pick of the players for me is Rishabh Pant. He made 270 runs in the series (502 runs in the season), often coming in to bat with the team in crises and turning things around

with his chutzpah and bold strokeplay.

Through the season he's reeled off crucial half centuries — in Australia and in this series — and his swash-buckling century on Friday was the main reason why India were able to take a big first innings lead and win the fourth Test.

It's not just Pant's adventurous batting — always a threat to opponents — that has been of high value to the team. He's improved enormously as wicket-keeper too, as 8 catches and 5 stumpings in this series on difficult pitches testify. He may lack eye-catching finesse, but has worked on his fitness and flexibility, sharpened his reflexes, which has reduced the margin of error in his wicket-keeping. He's made himself indispensable.