





## SHORT TAKES

**On Women's Day, free entry for women to protected sites: ASI**

**New Delhi:** Women visitors, both foreign and Indian, will be allowed free entry to all centrally protected monuments on March 8 to mark International Women's Day, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) said in an order on Saturday. There are 3,691 centrally protected monuments under the ASI. "The Director General, ASI, has directed that no fee shall be charged from all women visitors (both domestic and foreign) at all ticketed centrally protected monuments/archaeological sites and remains specified in the Second Schedule of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Rules, 1959 on March 8, 2021, on the occasion of International Women's day," the order stated. The order has been issued in exercise of the powers conferred under Rule 6 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Rules, 1959. — PTI

**Body of civil defense staffer found**

**New Delhi:** The body of a 22-year-old civil defense staffer, bearing multiple gunshot injuries, was found in north Delhi's Bawana on Saturday, police said. The deceased has been identified as Shashi Kadyan, a resident of Katewara village in Bawana, they said. Kadyan's body was found lying near Jogi Wada Chowk, Deputy Commissioner of Police (outer north) Rajiv Ranjan Singh said. Prima facie, it appeared to be a case of personal enmity, the DCP said. A case under Section 302 (murder) of the IPC was registered at Bawana police station and the body was sent for postmortem, police said. An investigation was underway and police were checking the CCTV footage of the area to identify the accused persons, they added. — PTI

**Multi-level puzzle car parking opened**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MAR. 6

Delhi BJP President Adesh Gupta, MP Meenakshi Lekhi and SDMC Mayor Anamika on Saturday inaugurated automated multi-level puzzle car parking at Firoz Gandhi Marg in Lajpat Nagar-3. The newly constructed car parking facility will accommodate 264 vehicles at a point of time. Praising the SDMC, Mr Gupta said that the Civic Agency has been making all efforts to construct automated car parkings in its area. These parkings are being constructed in areas where there is an urgent requirement of parking lots. Recently the Civic Agency has inaugurated a fully automated car parking in Green Park area and today it has delivered another parking with a capacity of 264 vehicles in Lajpat Nagar. He said that despite facing a financial crisis, SDMC is achieving new goals. He said that earlier he had seen a parking lot of similar design in Mumbai and now with the efforts of SDMC, witnessing the same in New Delhi.



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

■ Session from tomorrow, Budget to be tabled on Mar. 9

**Delhi Budget likely to be 'biggest so far': Sources**

**New Delhi, Mar. 6:** The annual Budget of the Delhi government is likely to be "the biggest so far" and have provisions to promote patriotism, sources said.

The Budget session of Delhi Assembly, scheduled to begin from March 8, will have no question hour. The Budget for financial year 2021-22 will be tabled in the House on March 9, they said.

"The annual Budget for 2021-22 is going to be the biggest in the history of Delhi government. It is also likely to have provisions to promote patriotism," said a source in the government.

The AAP dispensation had presented ₹65,000 crore Budget for 2020-2021 fiscal that was around 10 per cent more than that of 2019-20.

Sources said the Budget is also expected to have some new announcements besides measures to speed up various projects and schemes delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The government is likely to come up with announcements to celebrate the 75th Independence Day. The Kejriwal government is also likely to come up with its roadmap for Delhi by the time the country celebrates its 100th Independence Day, sources said.

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**PATRIOTISM FLAVOUR**

● The government is likely to come up with announcements to celebrate the 75th Independence Day. The Kejriwal government is also likely to come up with its roadmap for Delhi by the time the country celebrates its 100th Independence Day, sources said.

● Later this month, the government is likely to launch a 75-week long celebrations leading up to platinum jubilee of India's Independence, they said

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BJP MLA and Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Ramvir Singh Bidhuri alleged that the AAP government was "violating" rights of the legislators by not having question hour in the Budget Session.

"We have raised the matter with the Assembly Speaker and plan to meet the Lt Governor also to seek his intervention to restore question hour," he said and alleged that the AAP government was running away from its responsibility of answering the MLAs' questions.

"All MLAs, including those of the ruling party, require answers to questions that people of their constituency have from different departments. We have not been given time

to give notice for questions this time," Bidhuri claimed.

Sources said the question hour was shelved because the budget session was called with less than 15 days time available to inform the MLAs about it. "The members of the House need to file questions 12 days prior to tabling of the answer, which is not available this time," they said.

Bidhuri said, the MLAs are to be notified 15 days before calling of the session, but they were informed about the Budget session as late as Thursday, exactly four days before it begins.

The Leader of Opposition demanded that the government extends the session for a week to allow the MLAs get answers during the question hour.

The Budget session will conclude on March 16. — PTI

**Noida schoolboy jumps to death from 15th floor flat due to skin complexion**

**Noida, Mar. 6:** A Class 11 student, who was allegedly battling depression due to his physical looks and skin complexion, jumped off his 15th-floor apartment and died on Saturday in Noida, police said.

The local Sector 49 police station was alerted around 5 am about the incident, which took place in a high-rise building in Sector 78, according to officials.

The parents of the 17-year-old boy were living separately. His mother

lives in Gurgaon, while father, who works in a multinational company (MNC), was staying here in Noida, they said.

"His parents informed the police that their son had been battling depression due to his physical features and skin complexion. He had talked to them about his complexity because of his looks in the past also," Sector 49 station house officer (SHO) Sudhir Kumar told PTI.

The body was sent for post-mortem after the

incident and no complaint has been made by the family, the SHO said.

"Teenagers and people in their early 20s could suffer from 'body dysmorphic disorder', a mental health condition in which one cannot stop thinking about one or more perceived defects or flaws in their appearance," Dr Kunal Kumar, head of department psychiatry in Sharda University and Medical College, said. — PTI

**HC asks 3,499 undertrial prisoners to surrender on expiry of bail term**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MAR. 6

The Delhi High Court has directed 3,499 undertrial prisoners, who were granted interim bails to de-congest jails here amid the Covid-19 pandemic, to surrender on expiry of their period.

The decision of the court was based on the recommendation of the high powered committee (HPC) constituted on the direction of the Supreme Court to decongest jails to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

A bench of justices Siddharth Mridul and Talwant Singh said it was "not inclined" to further extend the period of interim bail granted to these undertrial prisoners (UTP) under various criteria laid down by the HPC in its several meetings.

"It is therefore directed that all the 3,499 UTPs granted interim bails under the various criteria laid down by the HPC, who have not obtained regular bails from their court concerned, or any other superior court to its court con-

cerned, shall surrender before the jail superintendent (S) upon the expiry of the period of their interim bail commencing from March 7," the bench said in its order passed on March 3 and made available on Saturday.

It added that as the 3,499 UTPs were admitted to interim bails on different dates, so the period of their interim bails will expire with efflux of time on different dates and there was no requirement to fix any specific date for their surrender.

The high court while refusing to extend the interim bails considered the observations and recommendations made by the committee, the improved situation of Covid-19 in Delhi-NCR and the resolution passed by the HPC on February 17 of not recommending further extension of interim bails to 3,499 UTPs.

It also took into consideration the March 1 directions of the Supreme Court whereby 2,318 prisoners granted interim bails by trial courts.

— PTI

**Principals, experts welcome decision to form Delhi school board**

**New Delhi, Mar. 6:** School principals and educationists on Saturday said the Delhi government's decision to form a separate education board for the city at par with international standards will bring in aspects of best global practices and promote research and skill-based studies.

However, the All India Parents' Association opposed the setting up of the Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE), saying it will "lower the standard of education" and claimed that most of the biggest schools in the country are under the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).

Currently, schools in Delhi are either affiliated to the CBSE or the Indian School Certificate Examination (ICSE).

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday announced setting up of the DBSE which he said would be based at par with international standards to prepare "fiercely patriotic

and self-dependent students" through focus on understanding and personal development.

To start with, 20-25 Delhi government schools will be affiliated to the DBSE from the 2021-22 academic session, Kejriwal said, hoping that all state-run and private schools will come under the new board within four to five years.

There are around 1,000 Delhi government schools and about 1,700 private schools, most of them affiliated to the CBSE, in the city.

Welcoming the Delhi government's decision to form the DBSE, the principal of MRG School, Rohini, Priyanka Barara, said with the introduction of this board, students' assessment will get a qualitative outlook and this will definitely be helpful for their future.

"We are looking forward to understand more about the aspects of the DBSE, and its management criteria," she said.

President of the Delhi

Parents' Association Aprajita Gautam said with the formation of the DBSE, the pressure of competing with students of national education boards will reduce for students in schools here.

"The aim should be to create a healthy relationship between students and education. There should not be any fear of exams and study. The Delhi Board of School Education will also reduce the dropout rate of students by decreasing the fear of education in them," Gautam said.

Educationist Sunita Gandhi said that the DBSE can play a "decisive role" in the evolution of the school ecosystem in the country as it has "modern day components such as international practices, focus on innovation and research, entrepreneurship, skill-based development and employability

Education Policy and the DBSE is likely to set a benchmark for other boards," she said.

Principal of Modern Public School, Shalimar Bagh, Alka Kapur, said that the focus of the new board on children's personality development will play a crucial role in their lives.

"While giving his statement, CM Kejriwal has also mentioned that the focus will not be on learning by rote but on understanding (of concepts) and personality development, which play a crucial part

in every child's life. I think this is great news," she said.

The COVID-19 induced situation and lockdown "made us all realise that mental health should never be neglected in any way, shape, or form and I believe that with this change (forming of DBSE), we may move towards an extraordinary future for children as well as schools," Kapur said.

Raising concern on a separate board for the national capital, All India Parents' Association national president Ashok Agarwal said that the decision will not be in the favour of students.

"At a time when most of the biggest schools in the country are under the CBSE and there is a rush in schools to get CBSE affiliation, the decision of the Delhi government to form a Delhi education board and bringing all government schools out of the CBSE is neither in favour of the public or students," he said. — PTI

**Covid: 37% rise in home isolation cases in Delhi**

*Steady increase in containment zone count in 1 week*

**AGE CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI, MAR. 6

With the national capital registering an upsurge in Covid-19 cases, there has been a rise of over 37 per cent in the number of people under home isolation here and a steady increase in the count of containment zones in the last seven days.

The positivity rate also rose to 0.53 per cent on March 5 from 0.36 per cent on February 27, according to official figures, which also showed that the number of containment zones on March 5 stood at 591, an increase of 46 from 545 on February 27.

Delhi recorded 312 Covid-19 cases on Friday, the highest number of daily incidences in nearly one-and-a-half months while three more fatalities pushed the death toll in the city to 10,918.

It was also a significant jump from 261 cases registered on Thursday.

A total of 585 cases were reported on January 1 and 384 on January 4. The daily count had dropped to 306 on January 11 and risen again to 386 on January 12, according to official data shared by the Delhi health department.

The numbers had started to come down in February and on February 26, 256 cases were recorded, the highest daily count in that month.

On February 27, 243 cases were recorded, while the number of containment zones stood at 545. As on that day, 627 people were under home quaran-

**321 Covid cases in city in 24 hrs, positivity rate 0.60%**

**New Delhi, Mar. 6:** Delhi recorded 321 new Covid-19 cases on Saturday, the second consecutive day in March on which the daily count crossed the 300-mark, while the positivity rate rose to 0.60 per cent amid a sudden surge in incidences, as per data shared by the health department.

On Friday, three new fatalities and 312 fresh cases were registered, the highest count in nearly one-and-a-half months.

It was also a significant jump from 261 cases registered on Thursday.

On Saturday, one more fatality was recorded, taking the death toll to 10,919, according to the latest health bulletin.

A total of 585 cases were reported on January 1 and 384 on January 4. It had dropped to 306 on January 11 and risen again to 386 on January 12, according to official figures.

The numbers had start-

ed to come down the next month and on February 26, 256 new cases were recorded, the highest daily count in February.

The number of active cases stood at 1,779 on Saturday, while the positivity rate rose to 0.60 from 0.53 per cent on Friday.

Health experts and doctors have attributed this "sudden rise" in the number of cases to complacency among people, not following COVID-19-appropriate behaviour and "assuming all is well now".

The total number of tests conducted on Friday stood at 53,062, including 28,685 RT-PCR tests and 24,377 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said.

The number of people under home isolation on Saturday rose to 879 from 863 on Friday, the bulletin said, adding that over 6.28 lakh people have recovered till date. — PTI

On February 9, 13, 17, and 25, and March 2 the death count recorded on all days was zero. On February 9, no fatality from the coronavirus infection was registered in Delhi for the first time in that month and after a gap of nearly nine months.

Delhi had recorded 94 fresh Covid-19 cases on February 16, the lowest in over nine months. However, after a week on February 24, the number more than doubled to 200 and increased further to 220 on February 25 and 256 on February 26.

Health experts and doctors have attributed this sudden rise to complacency in people, not following of Covid-19 appropriate behaviour, and assuming all is well now.

Observing the trends and rise in the number of

time in Delhi. On February 28, the daily cases had dropped to 197, with a positivity rate of 0.34 per cent, but the number of containment zones rose to 556 and home isolation cases jumped to 691.

On March 1, while the cases dropped to 175, the positivity rate increased to 0.44 per cent with 596 containment zones and 739 people under home iso-

lation. The daily cases since then have seen an upward trend, rising from 217 on March 2 to 312 on March 5. In this period, the containment zones' count increased from 562 to 591, while the number of home quarantined people jumped from 777 to 863, as per the official data.

Observing the trends and rise in the number of

**Notice to Le Meridien hotel for continuing trade activity**

**New Delhi, Mar. 6:** The New Delhi Municipal Council has issued a show-cause notice to the Le Meridien Hotel for allegedly operating restaurants, lodging house and other licensable trade activities in its premises despite the civic body rejecting its application for renewal of health and trade licenses in January this year.

The NDMC has issued the show-cause notice to Tarun Thakral, executive director of CJ International Hotels Ltd, as to why restaurants, lodging houses and other trade activities at the hotel should not be sealed and sought a reply within seven days.

The validity of the earlier licenses had expired on March 31, 2020, after which CJ International Limited had reapplied through the online portals of NDMC and MHA, which was rejected in January this year, the NDMC said.

The NDMC has issued the show-cause notice to Tarun Thakral, executive director of CJ International Hotels Ltd, as to why restaurants, lodging houses and other trade activities at the hotel should not be sealed and sought a reply within seven days.

In the notice dated March 1, the NDMC said it had rejected the hotel's application for renewal of health and trade licenses in January this year. However, the business allegedly continued to operate.

"You are hereby directed to show cause why the various restaurants, lodging house and other licensable trade activities in the premises of Le-Meridien Hotel where

licenses have expired should not be sealed/operations stopped as per the Section 333 of NDMC Act, 1994 within 7 days, failing which the NDMC would take the requisite action as prescribed in the NDMC Act without any further intimation," the notice read.

The validity of the earlier licenses had expired on March 31, 2020, after which CJ International Limited had reapplied through the online portals of NDMC and MHA, which was rejected in January this year, the NDMC said.

"The NDMC has rejected the application of CJ International Limited (Le-Meridian) for renew-

al of their health/trade license vide letter dated 20/01/2021 on account of fact that there is an unauthorized construction in the building besides expiry of license deed.

"The health license cannot be sought for the premise that itself is illegally constructed and liable for demolition under the provisions of the NDMC Act," the NDMC said.

The civic body in its letter in January had rejected the renewal application citing an "unauthorized construction" in the premises and had directed the hotel to "close the operation of all licensable trade activities".

— PTI

**₹546cr scam in construction of flyover by NDMC, alleges AAP**

**New Delhi, Mar. 6:** AAP leader Durgesh Pathak on Saturday alleged a ₹546 crore "scam" in the construction of a flyover by the BJP-ruled North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC). The cost of construction for the flyover was fixed at Rs 175 crore but it went up to Rs 724 crore by the time it was completed, he claimed.

The Delhi BJP, however, rejected the allegation saying this is cost escalation due to the repeated delays in the construction work on account of court cases and other reasons and not a scam.

The Aam Aadmi Party is indulging in manipulative politics to malign the civic body, it said.

Speaking at a press conference, Pathak claimed that an audit report of the municipal corporation has exposed a "scam" of ₹546 crore in the construction of the Rani Jhansi flyover.

The decision to construct this flyover was taken in 1995 and the construction was completed in 2018, he said.

"The tender processes and the cost of the flyover project were fixed at ₹175 crore. But the flyover was completed at a cost of ₹724 crore, which means that BJP leaders indulged in corruption of around Rs 546 crore in this project," the AAP leader alleged.

The Shastri Park flyover was constructed at a cost of ₹250 crore against the estimated ₹302 crore in just 1.5 years under the Arvind Kejriwal model, he added. Pathak said the 54-page audit report lists 70 objections regarding the Rani Jhansi flyover project.

Dismissing the AAP leader's allegations, Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said the two-decade delay escalated the cost of construction of the Rani Jhansi flyover from the planned ₹175 crore to ₹724 crore. "Everybody knows that this flyover project repeatedly got stuck and delayed due to court cases, compensation claims and other humanitarian reasons," he said. — PTI



## SHORT TAKES

## TMC's Shibpur MLA quits party

**Howrah:** Upset over not being nominated this time, TMC's Shibpur MLA Jatu Lahiri announced on Saturday that he has resigned from the party. Talking to reporters, Lahiri said that despite being a "loyal soldier" of the TMC he was ignored by chief minister Mamata Banerjee. "More than not getting the nomination, I am hurt that an outsider having no links with the electorate has got the nomination just days after being inducted into the party. It seems we are not required by the TMC anymore. I am leaving the organisation," he said. TMC has nominated former cricketer Manoj Tiwari for the Shibpur seat in Howrah. Lahiri, a veteran politician, also hinted that he may join the BJP. However, BJP sources said that there was no information about Lahiri joining the party. — PTI

## TMC MLA Sonali hints joining BJP

**Kolkata:** Sonali Guha, once a close aide of Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee and a four-time MLA of the party, on Saturday hinted at joining BJP after she was denied a ticket for the coming assembly poll in West Bengal. The TMC MLA, who represented Satgachia seat for the past four terms, had broken down on Friday immediately after getting the news that she was not being given the party ticket this time. Ms Guha said she will speak to BJP national vice-president Mukul Roy and decide her future course of action. "I wish to be given a honourable post, be acknowledged as a political personality," Ms Guha said without elaborating. She said, "May God give Mamata didi good sense and counsel. I have been with her from the beginning. I have to think about my future moves. I cannot sit idle being a political person". — PTI

## Bengal: More central forces to be deployed

**Kolkata:** At least 415 companies of central forces will be deployed for the first phase of polling on March 27 in West Bengal, a senior official said on Saturday. So far, 200 companies of CAPF, including 30 companies of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and five companies each of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), have reached the state, he said. "The rest 215 companies of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) will be reaching the state in the next couple of days. These forces will be deployed in the assembly constituencies, which will be going to the polls in the first phase," the official said. — PTI

## LOOKOUT NOTICE AGAINST TMC'S BIJAY MISHRA

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

The CBI has issued a lookout notice against Bijay Mishra, brother of Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Binay Mishra, who is a close confidant of party MP Abhishek Banerjee, in a cattle-smuggling case. According to sources, the Central probe agency is also considering approaching Interpol to get a Red Corner Notice (RCN) issued against Binay Mishra, who has not joined the probe. The final decision in this regard will be taken by the high ranking officials of the agency in a day or two, they added. "A lookout notice has been issued against Bijay Mishra, the brother of TMC leader Binay Mishra," sources said without divulging further details. The agency has also summoned two senior officers of the West Bengal police on Monday for questioning in connection with the case, they said. The CBI named Binay Mishra as a co-accused in its supplementary chargesheet filed in the cattle-smuggling case last month. Binay Mishra is reportedly very close to West Bengal chief minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee, sources claimed. In its chargesheet filed before a special CBI court in West Bengal's Ansansol, the agency has already shown Binay Mishra as absconding.

## Mithun Bengal's BJP CM face?

Mithun Chakraborty, Akshay Kumar likely to share stage with PM Modi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, MARCH 6

Two famous Bollywood actors, Mithun Chakraborty and Akshay Kumar, are likely to share the stage with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his mega campaign rally for the upcoming West Bengal Assembly election on the Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata on Sunday as crowd-pullers to make it a gala show.

Mithun is reaching Kolkata on Saturday night, said BJP national vice president Mukul Roy. BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya also echoed Mr Roy. Both kept Mithun's purpose of meeting Mr Modi and the venue of their meeting secret.

BJP sources, however, indicated that Mithun, who has a vast popularity across the state, may join the saffron party in Mr Modi's presence to become its chief ministerial candidate with a Bengali face and star image against the two-time CM and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee who had earlier made him a Rajya Sabha MP of her party in April 2014.

If Mithun joins the BJP and contests the polls as Bhoomiputra (son of the soil) or even takes part as a star in the saffron party's campaign, it is bound to be a major surprise to the ruling TMC and other parties also since he had to resign as a parliamentarian citing health issues in December 2016 and stayed away from politics after his name surfaced in the multi-crore Saradha chit fund scam for his alleged role as a brand ambassador of the company in exchange of a lump sum amount, which he however returned later in the face of the Enforcement Directorate's questioning. His proximity to the BJP, however, came to light after RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, apparently in search of a CM candidate with a Bengali face, visited him at his residence in Mumbai last month following his visit to the RSS headquarters in October 2019.



Members of Left Front and Congress party during a protest rally against the hike in fuel prices in Kolkata on Saturday.

## AIADMK &amp; DMK yet to close deal with key allies

**Chennai, March 6:** The DMK on Saturday moved forward in its ongoing seat-sharing exercise with allies by giving six seats to MDMK though a deal with the Congress and CPI(M) was elusive, while the ruling AIADMK's negotiations with MDMK remained inconclusive.

The MDMK would, however, contest on the rising sun symbol of its partner DMK according to the pact inked today by the leadership of both parties.

This is the first time the MDMK would face the Tamil Nadu Assembly election together with the DMK since it was founded in 1994 after Vaiko was ousted from the then M Karunanidhi-led DMK.

Mr Vaiko, when asked if his party has given a list of preferred constituencies to DMK, said 'no'.

On agreeing to contest on the 'rising sun' symbol, which is a 'change of

heart,' he said it was due to practical reasons.

The MDMK chief had previously said his party would contest on a separate symbol.

A party would be allotted a single, common symbol by the Election Commission only if it contested from at least 12 constituencies and if not, there was a possibility of separate symbol in each of the six segments, he said.

To avert such a scenario and considering practical aspects like less number of days to campaign, the party decided to contest on the rising sun symbol, he said.

He hit out at the 'Sanathana forces,' a reference to the BJP, and praised Stalin as a very capable leader for the post of chief minister.

The DMK has allotted 23 seats to allies. MDMK, Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi and CPI have got six each, the IUML three and Manithaneya

Makkal Katchi two.

After the second round of talks, CPI(M) state secretary K.

Balakrishnan said the number of seats indicated by the DMK for allocation to his party was not agreeable and hence they have conveyed their preference. He hoped for a resolution soon on seat sharing with DMK.

Asked if his party could get more than the six seats earmarked by the Dravidian party for its ideological sibling CPI, he said there was no question of comparison with any other party.

The Marxist party leader said negotiations with the DMK centred around the allocation for his party and not a word had been spoken by them on what was set part for others.

The AIADMK allocated 20 seats to BJP succumbing to pressure from it, he alleged and compared the ruling party-led combine to a 'scrap' shop. — PTI

## Assam polls 2021: Congress releases list of 40 candidates

**New Delhi, March 6:** The Congress on Saturday announced a list of 40 candidates for the Assam Assembly polls, with its state unit chief Ripun Bora contesting from Gohpur and senior leader Debabrata Saikia from Nazira.

The party also fielded Rana Goswami from Jorhat, Subhramitra Gogoi from Sibsagar, Rajkumar Nilanetra Neog from Dibrugarh and Sibnath Chetia from Digboi.

The Congress-led 'Mahajoth' or grand alliance has AIUDE, BPF, CPI(M), CPI, CPI(ML) and the Anchalik Gana Morcha as its constituents.

The elections to the 126-member Assam assembly will be held in three phases, beginning on March 27. Tea workers' tribe MLAs of Congress, Rupjyoti Kurmi will contest from Mariani, and Roselina Turkey from Sarupather. — PTI

## Vijayan: Customs dept being used to campaign for BJP

**Thiruvananthapuram/Kochi, March 6:** Declaring a war on the BJP-led NDA government over the Customs probe against top CPI(M) leaders in connection with dollar smuggling, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Saturday lashed out at the central agency, alleging it was being used for carrying out a campaign for the BJP and Congress in the poll-bound state. A day after the gold smuggling case, claimed key accused Swapna Suresh has made "shocking revelations" against him, assembly Speaker P Sreedharakrishnan and some ministers on dollar "smuggling" involving UAE consulate officials, Vijayan said the agency was trying to "defame" state cabinet members in connection with the case.

The Customs, in a statement filed in the Kerala high court on Friday, said "She (Suresh) has stated with clarity about smuggling of foreign currency at the instance of the Hon'ble chief minister and the Hon'ble Speaker with the help of the Consulate."

Responding to the allegations, Vijayan said to serve the narrow political interests of the party ruling the centre, the customs exploited the particular mental condition of Suresh who was in their custody.

"The investigating agency cannot go ahead without evidence. Forgetting this, the Customs (gave the report in the high court) like a political statement," Vijayan said, referring to the statement given by



Pinarayi Vijayan

Suresh to a court in Kochi under Section 164 of the CrPC and to the Customs under Section 108 of the Customs Act.

"As the elections are approaching, the central probe agencies are attacking the state government in a more vigorous manner. They have taken up the campaign against the Left government and has been executing the agenda of the BJP and the Congress party," the senior CPI(M) leader said. He cited the Customs investigation into the gold smuggling case and the Enforcement Directorate probe against the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB). "They want to destroy KIIFB, which has been proved as a development alternative to the whole country," he said.

The Chief Minister criticised the Customs (Preventive) Commissioner Sumit Kumar who filed the statement in court in connection with the dollar smuggling case, saying the top officer, "who is not even a party to the matter in the High Court has filed the statement to defame the Left government, its ministers and the Assembly Speaker." — PTI

## 6 BJP activists hurt in attack in Bengal

**Kolkata, March 6:** Six BJP activists were injured, two of them critically, in an alleged bomb attack by the rival TMC workers in West Bengal's 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 from a marriage ceremony late Friday night.

Police, however, claimed that the accident happened inside the house of a BJP activist where the crude bombs which were being manufactured went off

accidentally.

"We have listened to the claims of the family members of those injured but it seems that they were manufacturing bombs when it exploded.

"We are investigating the matter and talking to the locals," the officer said when contacted over the phone.

Unconfirmed reports said that on Friday night, Gosaba witnessed clashes between TMC-BJP activists when bombs were hurled at each other, leaving six injured.

Nobody has been arrested in connection with the blast, the police officer added. — PTI

## 'Govt open to evaluate, explore cryptocurrencies'

**New Delhi, March 6:** Union minister Anurag Thakur on Saturday said the government is open to evaluate and explore new technologies, including cryptocurrencies, for improving governance. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself is a strong advocate of embracing technology in various aspects of governance, the minister of state for finance said while addressing an event organised by Entrepreneurs' Organisation - EO Punjab.



Anurag Thakur

"Let me say that we welcome innovation and new technology... blockchain is a new emerging technology. Cryptocurrency is a form of virtual currency. I firmly believe that we must always evaluate, explore and encourage

new ideas with an open mind," he said.

A High-Level Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) was constituted under the chairmanship of economic affairs secretary on digital currencies and it has submitted its report.

The government would take a decision on the recommendations of the IMC and the legislative proposal, if any, would be introduced in Parliament following the due process, he said while inviting suggestions and views on this issue.

Cryptocurrencies are digital or virtual currencies in which encryption techniques are used to regulate the generation of their units and verify the transfer of funds, operating independently of a central bank.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said the government is still formulating its opinion on cryptocurrencies and will take a calibrated position.

Reserve Bank of India governor Shaktikanta Das had last week said the apex bank has certain

"major concerns" over the impact cryptocurrencies may have on the financial stability in the economy and has conveyed the same to the government.

The RBI had virtually banned cryptocurrency trading in 2018 and had directed all entities regulated by the central bank to cease dealing in virtual currencies. The Supreme Court had also asked the Centre in 2019 to frame policies for crypto, and in 2020, struck down the curbs imposed by the RBI. — PTI

## Follow poll code provisions: EC to health ministry

**New Delhi, March 6:** Against the backdrop of a complaint by the TMC that the picture of the PM Modi on Covid vaccination certificates violates the model code, the EC has asked the health ministry to follow the provisions of the poll code in letter and spirit.

In a letter to the health ministry, the poll panel is learnt to have referred to certain provisions of the model code which bar the use of advertisement at the cost of the public.

Sources said that the panel has not referred to any individual or personalities but has asked the health ministry to follow the provisions of the model code in letter and spirit. A source said the health ministry may have to use filters so that the picture of the PM is not printed on certificates given to those who take the Covid vaccine in poll-bound West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry. — PTI

## Sarpanch axed for not knowing Odia, having 2 wives &amp; 6 kids

AKSHAYA KUMAR  
SAHOO  
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 6

A sarpanch from Odisha's Ganjam district has been declared disqualified from his post for not knowing Odia and for 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, has 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 2017. He had won by defeating his nearest rival Niwas Gouda.

However, after losing the polls, Mr Gouda had



P. Simadri

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

After the hearing was over, Mr Gouda's lawyer, Srikanth Mishra, said: "Based on the statements of four witnesses, two from each side, the Chhatrapur Civil Judge Senior Division Court disqualified standing sarpanch Simadri for not knowing Odia."

"The court has also directed the district collector to take further action in this regard," Mr Mishra added.

"I had filed the petition against Simadri after the panchayat elections in 2017. My three-and-half-year 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 Mr Gouda.

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## GOLD AUCTION NOTICE

The pledgors, in specific and the public, in general, are hereby notified that public auction of the gold ornaments pledged in the below accounts is proposed to be conducted at the Head Office at New Rajendra Nagar on 21/03/2021 from 12 Noon onwards. The Gold ornaments being auctioned have been pledged by various borrowers who have failed to close the loan accounts and redeem the pledged gold ornaments despite being notified by letters sent by the registered post. The list of pledges taken up for auction has also been displayed at the Head Office and the respective branches. Please note that the items remaining unauctioned shall be auctioned on any other date without further notice. Changes, if any, in the venue and date of auction shall be displayed at the venue on the date of auction mentioned above and no further notice regarding the change of date and venue shall be issued.

**BH-4645, 4647, 4648 JACOB ABRAHAM (IV), BP-3537 MUHAMMAD SALI, V.H., FB-132, 135 SANTHOSH KUMAR, S. HQ-12609 AKHIL KUMAR, B., 13038 ARUN THOMAS, JP-11364 LINCY ISSAC, 10429 JAMES RAJAN, 10593, 10782 MADHU P. NAIR, 10592 JISHA NAIR, MV-14757, 15456 DEEPU, S., PV-4247 ARUN THOMAS**

Persons wishing to participate in the above auction shall do so. Terms & Conditions Apply.

Date : 04/03/2021

S/d.  
Hony. Secretary



## SHORT TAKES

## Unwell Pragya flown to Mumbai

**Bhopal:** Bhopal MP and BJP leader Pragya Singh Thakur was on Saturday airlifted to Mumbai for treatment after she complained of uneasiness, her aide said. Ms Thakur complained of uneasiness around 3 pm and was taken to the airport from her residence here and rushed to Mumbai in a state aircraft, her aide Sandeep Shrivastava said. She was being admitted to Kokilaben Hospital in Mumbai, he added. Ms Thakur, an accused in the 2008 Malegaon blast case, had recently got exemption from daily appearance in the court in Mumbai on the grounds of ill-health and security issues. She had been admitted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi for some health issues after the recent Parliament session concluded and returned to Bhopal on March 1, Mr Shrivastava said. — PTI

## 20-yr-old kills kin, jumps to death

**Mumbai:** A 20-year-old man in Mumbai committed a suicide by jumping off the building after allegedly killing his father and grandfather on Saturday. According to the police, the incident took place in Vasant Oscar Housing Society in Mulund area around 9 am. The man has been identified as Sharud Mangle, his father as Milind (55), who was a motivational speaker, while his grandfather who was bedridden has been identified as Suresh (85). Police officials said, Sharud allegedly killed his grandfather and the father at their house before jumping off the sixth floor of the building. Police rushed to the spot on being alerted and found his body lying in front of the building. The bodies of his father and grandfather were recovered from their residence in the building.

## Mumbai teen girl jumps off high-rise

**Mumbai:** A 15-year-old girl allegedly committed suicide by jumping off the terrace of her 10-storey building in Dadar in Mumbai Saturday, the police said. The incident took place at around 2pm and may have taken place after the Class X student had a minor argument with her mother, though all angles are being probed to find the exact cause for this extreme step, the Dadar police station official said. "The girl stayed on the 7th floor of the building. She was rushed to KEM Hospital nearby where doctors declared her dead on arrival. No suicide note has been found. She collected the terrace keys from the wife of the housing society's chairperson claiming she wanted to dry clothes," he added. — PTI

## MYANMAR URGES MIZORAM TO SEND BACK 8 COPS

**Aizawl:** Myanmar has requested the administration in Mizoram to send back eight policemen, who have apparently crossed over to the northeastern state to take refuge, following last month's military coup in the neighbouring country, an official here said. Mizoram shares a 510-km-long porous border with Myanmar, where mass demonstrations are being held in protest against the declaration of a year-long emergency by the country's armed forces. According to Maria CT Zuali, the deputy commissioner in Champai district, her counterpart in Myanmar's Falam has sought the "handover of eight police personnel who fled the neighbouring country and entered India". "I have received a letter from the deputy commissioner of Falam district in Myanmar seeking the detainment and handover of eight police personnel to Naypyitaw as a friendly gesture," Zuali told PTI on Saturday. The letter, a copy of which was available with PTI, said that eight police personnel from Myanmar have escaped to India. "In order to uphold friendly relations between the two neighbouring countries, you are kindly requested to detain eight Myanmar police personnel who had arrived in Indian territories and handover to Myanmar," the letter undersigned by Falam district deputy commissioner Saw Htun Win stated. — PTI

## Guj court acquits 122 accused of being part of Simi

**Surat, March 6:** A court in Gujarat's Surat on Saturday acquitted 122 persons arrested under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for participating in a meeting organised here in December 2001 as members of the banned outfit Students' Islamic Movement of India (Simi).

The court of chief judicial magistrate A.N. Dave acquitted 122 persons arrested for being members of the banned outfit Simi, giving them the benefit of doubt.

Five other accused had died during the pendency of trial. In its order, the court said that the prosecution failed to produce "cogent, reliable and satisfactory" evidence to establish that the accused persons belonged to the Simi and had gathered to promote the activities of the banned outfit.

The court said the accused persons cannot be held guilty under the UAPA. As many as 127 persons were arrested by Surat's Athwalines police on December 28, 2001 under various sections of the UAPA for allegedly being members of the banned

■ **AS MANY** as 127 persons were arrested by the police on December 28, 2001 under various sections of the UAPA for allegedly being members of the banned outfit Simi and organising a meeting at a hall in Surat's Sagrampura to promote and expand the organisation's activities.

outfit Simi and organising a meeting at a hall in city's Sagrampura to promote and expand the organisation's activities.

The central government had through its notification dated September 27, 2001 banned Simi.

The accused belonged to different parts of Gujarat as well as from Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

In their defence, they said they did not belong to the SIMI and had gathered there to participate in a seminar organised under the banner of All India Minority Education Board.

They said they were in the city for religious and educational purposes to take part in a seminar in a peaceful manner. — PTI

## Grand old party marks 100 days of BJP's 'arrogance' Cong slams govt over farm protest

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

Steeping up attack attack on the Central government on the 100th day of the farmer protests, the Congress on Saturday said the period was a "black chapter" in India's democracy for the treatment meted out to the protesters and also marked 100 days of the ruling BJP's "arrogance".

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi hit out at the Centre over the farmers' protest and said nails were laid at Delhi's borders for those, whose sons risk their lives at the country's borders. I am a tweet in Hindi, Gandhi said, "Whose children sacrifice their lives at the border, nails are being put for them at the Delhi borders. Food providers want their rights while the government commits atrocities."

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi also echoed the sentiments of Mr Gandhi. She charged the government with "arrogance" and not heeding to the demands of the farmers. The Congress has officially demanded that the three "controversial" farm laws be taken back at once.

Congress spokesperson Pawan Khara said the protesting farmers have been braving all odds of nature and the might of the state for the last 100 days.

"They have braved all kinds of insults heaped upon them by the govern-

## Govt ready to amend agri laws, Opp. playing politics: Tomar

**New Delhi, March 6:** Agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Saturday said the government is ready to amend three new farm laws to respect the sentiments of protesting farmers, even as he attacked opposition parties for doing politics on this issue at the cost of agriculture economy and by hurting farmers' interest.

Addressing the 5th national convention of Agrivision here, the Union minister said the government has held 11 rounds of talks with farmer unions and has even offered to amend these laws.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh, are protesting at Delhi borders for over three months, seeking a repeal of these three legislations and a legal guarantee of the minimum support price (MSP).

ment and pro-government media. Today, what we are witnessing is an attempt to wipe out the narrative of the farmers, to wipe out the narrative of their protest from the media," he alleged addressing the national media in the capital. He further added, "The farmers have called

## Night curfew in 4 Punjab districts

Punjab has been witnessing surge in number of Covid-19 cases for nearly 4 weeks

**Chandigarh, March 6:** A night curfew was imposed in Punjab's four districts from Saturday to tackle a recent surge in coronavirus cases.

The orders came after Punjab chief secretary Vini Mahajan and director-general of police Dinkar Gupta held a meeting to review the coronavirus situation with all DCs, district police chiefs and civil surgeons through a video conferencing.

The districts where the night curfew has been imposed are Jalandhar, SBS Nagar, Hoshiarpur and Kapurthala.

The night curfew will remain in place in the districts from 11 pm to 5 am.

Jalandhar deputy commissioner Ghanshyam Thori had earlier in the day said the order will be effective from Saturday till further directions.

However, there will be relaxation for workers or staff working in factories which run on 24-hour shifts and also in cases of medical emergency.

These orders will not be applicable on people returning after travelling in buses, trains or flights.

The chief secretary in a tweet has urged people to get themselves vaccinated and to continue to follow the Covid-appropriate behavior.

Last month, the Punjab government had autho-



Isro chairman K. Sivan receives his first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine in Bengaluru on Saturday.

— PTI

rised deputy commissioners (DCs) to impose the night curfew in coronavirus hotspots if needed.

Punjab has been witnessing a surge in the number of Covid-19 cases for nearly four weeks.

Jalandhar reported 242 cases on Thursday, 134 cases on Friday and 154 on Saturday, promoting the district authorities to take this decision.

Jalandhar is at the second spot in terms of coronavirus cases after Ludhiana. It has so far reported 22,410 Covid-19 cases.

There are a total of 926 active cases in Jalandhar as of now, according to a medical bulletin.

SBS Nagar, Kapurthala and Hoshiarpur on Saturday reported 156, 85 and 137 cases, respectively. Punjab on Saturday

reported 1,179 fresh Covid-19 cases, taking the infection tally to 187,348 cases. Twelve more deaths took the fatality count to 5,910.

Punjab is among the five states that has been asked by the Centre to refocus on strict surveillance, containment and RT-PCR testing to check the growing number of cases. The other four states are Maharashtra, Kerala, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

Earlier, health officials had ascribed the upswing in the number of cases to non-adherence of Covid-19 safety guidelines like wearing masks and maintaining social distancing by people.

Earlier, the state government had lifted the night curfew from January 1 because of a decline in coronavirus cases. — PTI

## PM lauds forces' dedication on border in Covid times

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday lauded the "resolute dedication" shown by the Indian armed forces over the past year, in the context of the "challenging situation on the northern border" and while facing the coronavirus pandemic.

Addressing the valedictory session Combined Commanders Conference at Kevadia in his home state Gujarat, Mr Modi also asked the Indian military to develop as a "future force", an official statement said.

He was briefed by the Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat about the discussions during this year's 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 this year's conference.

Prime Minister 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 practised in the armed forces.

He emphasised the need to optimise manpower planning in both military and civilian parts of the National security architecture. He also called for



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with defence minister Rajnath Singh visits an exhibition by armed forces at Kevadia in Narmada district.

— PTI

## US DefSecy to visit India this month

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

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

In recent years there has been greater US and India cooperation in the defence sector.

Secretary Austin is

expected to meet defence minister Rajnath Singh, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Last year, India and the US signed the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation which takes the military cooperation between the two countries to the next level.

a holistic approach, focused on breaking down civil-military silos and on expediting the speed of decision making. He advised the Services to rid themselves of legacy systems and practices that have outlived their utility and relevance.

Taking note of the rapidly changing technological landscape, the PM high-

lighted the need to develop the Indian military into a "future force".

The Prime Minister pointed out that the country would be celebrating 75 years of its independence next year, and called upon the armed forces to use the occasion to undertake activities and initiatives that would inspire the youth of the country.

## Ambani case: BJP sticks to NIA probe

SONU SHRIVASTAVA  
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 (API) 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?



After the first all-female police unit, India now sends the first consignment of Covid-19 vaccines in Liberia.

— PTI

## Farmers mark 100 days of stir, block e-way

■ **Continued from Page 1** which is spearheading the agitation against the legislations.

Protesting farmers squatted on the expressway and criticised the Narendra Modi government for not withdrawing the farm legislations, which they called "black laws".

"Our agitation against the three farm laws will continue unless the Centre withdraws these laws. We

will not step back," said a protester in Sonipat.

Farmers held protest at the KMP Expressway near Mandoth village in Jhajjar district. Some people from nearby villages joined them.

"We are holding our protest in a peaceful manner, said a farmer, adding that they were also observing black day on Saturday. Farmer leader Balbir Singh Rajewal, while addressing a gathering on

the KMP Expressway, asked the Modi government to withdraw these laws.

Farmers claimed that their five-hour protest remained peaceful.

Sonipat superintendent of police Jashandeep Singh Randhawa said arrangements were made for traffic diversions. Heavy vehicles were diverted from Panipat and others from Ganaur to Delhi, said officials.

Traffic was also diverted from Murthal via Sonipat city to Narela and Bawana and from Bahadurgarh to Baghat, they said.

Officials said traffic resumed at KMP expressway after famers lifted their blockade at 4 pm.

In Palwal district also, farmers staged a dharna. At some places in Haryana, farmers even put up black flags atop roof of their houses as a mark of their protest

against the government for not withdrawing the farm laws.

The 136-km Kundli-Manesar-Palwal Expressway is also known as the Western Peripheral Expressway.

The 53-km Manesar-Palwal section was inaugurated by Union Minister Nitin Gadkari in 2016 and 83-km Kundli-Manesar section was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2018. — PTI



## THE ASIAN AGE

7 MARCH 2021



Shashi Warriar

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 Warriar 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 in 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...**

Ravi, all of some 21 years old, was rightly arrested for sedition for supporting the farmers, because her toolkit could well undermine the great Indian State. It appears Rihanna and Greta Thunberg are also part of this dangerous conspiracy. The ramifications of what is going on are huge, and require the authorities to take prompt and penal action. Stand-up comics, dalit activists, human rights advocates — even Election Commissioners who dare to right dissenting notes — must join hands to condemn this seditious report. They must accept that they have no right to question the government in a manner that diminishes its self-esteem, or that of its leaders. The tremendous work the government is doing for the people needs to be acknowledged. It is indecent to subject it to irreverent questioning. Right to Information activists, worried about the reducing ambit of the Act, must not worry. If the government wishes not to reveal certain things, which otherwise it must do, there must be very good reason for it. The security of the State is a very important matter. So is the image of our great nation.

Truly patriotic citizens should take umbrage at this attempt to call India only "partly free". We are a nation of completely free agencies. The CBI acts freely; so does the I-T department; so does the NCB; so does the CBDT; so does the NIA; and so does the media.

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

### TOO LATE IN THE DAY

One of the prime accused in the Kerala gold smuggling case, Swapna Suresh's so-called revelation that the smuggling of foreign currency was carried out at the behest of chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Assembly Speaker P. Sreeramakrishnan is startling. The NIA, despite its strenuous investigations, failed to record such a testimony. Swapna also alleged the CM had a close connection with the previous consul general of UAE, which is only to be expected given the number of workers the state sends out to the Middle Eastern country. One might venture that these claims have come too late to dent the LDF's chances in the forthcoming Assembly elections.

N.J. Ravi Chander  
Bengaluru

## DIDI'S FIERCE FEMMES

**WEST BENGAL'S** ruling Trinamul Congress on Friday stole a march on its rivals, the BJP and the Left-Congress-ISF alliance, by coming out with the party's full list of 291 candidates, bringing in 114 new faces in a bid to beat the decade-old anti-incumbency. Ten years on, with the Women's Reservation Bill still awaiting the nod, Trinamul's list has 50 women. However, why did the state FM, Amit Mitra, fail to get a ticket? He, along with Derek O'Brien and Mohua Moitra, was part of the brains trust of the party. But no answers on that count.

Sankar Paul  
Chakdaha, West Bengal

## SPECTRUM FIASCO

**THIS REFERS TO** the edit, "Spectrum auction a failure?" The government's telecom policy and its reserve price are akin to killing a golden goose. It seems to be confused; on one hand, it has set a fanciful, unrealistic and unachievable reserve price and, on the other, after garnering a fraction of the expected value, it is surprisingly contented. The faulty working of base price indicates that it is detached from the ground realities even as the telecom players are already in the red and faltering. When an unfettered Internet is the bedrock of almost every enterprise under the sun, especially during the Covid era, it is the telecom sector which has salvaged the situation. It is time to completely revamp the telecom policy. There is no point in getting dressed up when there's nowhere to go.

Deepak Singhal  
Noida

## PANTHER PANT

**NO DOUBT,** the panther-like approach of Rishabh Pant, who was fortunate enough to score his first ton on our own soil and enabled our team to take a match-winning lead against England in the final Test paid dividends. But due credit should also be given to Washington Sunder, who patiently gave him company to stitch the century partnership. Sunder missed a well-deserved century by a whisker. Anyway, that's cricket. As for Pant, it is still too early to brand him as the next Dhoni or Gilchrist as his keeping is tardy. But his batting has enabled him to take the place of poor Wriddhiman Saha who was put out of action by an injury.

N. Mahadevan  
Chennai

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.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 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 Gujaris. 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



## 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

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 draftSenators say waiving rights on  
vaccine would end innovation

**Washington, March 6:** Four top Republican 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  
BY GUARD

**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



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 restaur-

ants 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 antisepic, 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 bekeeping 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 back-sides. 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 Jost, 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.

## Srinu, Sudha eye Tokyo qualifiers

**New Delhi:** India's top long-distance runners Srinu Bugatha and Sudha Singh will be aiming to attain the Tokyo Olympics qualifying mark during the sixth edition of the Ageas Federal Life Insurance New Delhi Marathon to be held here on Sunday.

At the eve of the event, the two elite athletes disclosed the tough training regimens that they have been going through with their sights firmly fixed on berths for the flight to Tokyo later this year. Srinu declared that he was aiming to clock the required under-2:11.30s timing to turn his dream into a reality.

Sudha, a former Asian Games gold medallist in 3,000 steeplechase, also said that she would be targeting the national marathon record of 2:30.00s set by O.P. Jaisha to break into the Indian squad.

## 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. It is Nagal's best performance on the ATP tour after entering the event as a qualifier. The gutsy show earned Nagal 45 main draw ranking points that will push him to 132 from the current 150th slot. Yet again Nagal's trademark inside-out forehand was at work as he put the Spaniard under the pump. — PTI

## 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 sixes 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. — AFP

**Brief scores: Sri Lanka 160/6** (Gunathilaka 56, Nissanka 37, Bravo 2-25) beat **West Indies 117** (McCoys 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 &amp; 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-yard 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, 2-10, 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

## Kohli lauds bench strength

**Ahmedabad, March 6:** India's supremely talented bench strength has made skipper Virat Kohli quite confident that the team will have a relatively smooth ride when the transition period dawns upon it in the next few years.

With the rise of several young players like Washington Sundar, Mohammed Siraj and the maverick Rishabh Pant, India have been on a roll both at home and abroad. On Saturday, the side humbled England 3-1 after clinching the fourth and final Test by an innings and 25 runs here.

This was after an embarrassing 227-run loss in the first Test.

"The comeback in Chennai pleased me the most. The first game was an aberration and England outplayed us. The toss played a crucial role and the bowlers weren't in the contest. We bowled and fielded with more intensity

## 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

and so the comeback was very heartening," Kohli said.

"Our bench strength is extremely strong and that's a good sign for Indian cricket. When the transi-

tion happens, the standards won't fall and Rishabh and Washy's partnership showed exactly that in a crucial juncture of the match," Kohli added. — 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 number 12 at the Yonex Thailand Open in January. "It's been a good win today for me and playing against Mia was a kind of a revenge because in Thailand I had lost to her, so it was very important for me and yeah really looking forward to the finals," Sindhu said.

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

The second seeded Indian will take on top seed and Rio Olympics gold medalist Carolina Marin in the summit clash on Sunday. It will be the first meeting between the two in over two years.

"Carolina is a good player so it won't be an easy match, I have to play my 100 per cent," Sindhu said.

Former champion Kidambi Srikanth, howev-

## SWISS OPEN



P. V. Sindhu

er, couldn't cross the semi-final stage as he went down 13-21, 19-21 to top seed and former world champion Viktor Axelsen.

World number 10 Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also bowed out after losing 10-21, 17-21 to sixth seeded Danish pair of Kim Astrup and Anders Skaarup Rasmussen in the last-four stage.

The Indian duo had a last four finish in their last event at Toyota Thailand Open in January. — PTI

## Man City up for Red Devils test

**London, March 6:** Manchester City have history in their sights as the runaway leaders bid to take a huge step towards the Premier League title in Sunday's showdown with fading challengers Manchester United.

City are 14 points clear of United with 11 games left and victory in the derby would effectively end their second placed rivals' faint hopes of catching them.

Pep Guardiola's side have been so dominant since the end of last year that it is the landmarks they can shatter on the way to a third title in four seasons that now hold the greatest interest.

They are unbeaten in 28 games and will set a new club record if they avoid defeat this weekend.

That could be the first of many milestones to fall for City, who are on an English top-flight record run of 21 successive wins in all competitions.

The only teams from the top five European leagues ever to record longer winning streaks in all competi-

tions are Bayern Munich (23) and Real Madrid (22).

City can edge closer to Bayern's tally if they clinch a 16th successive Premier League victory this weekend, which would also take them to the brink of their own record of 18 consecutive Premier League wins, a mark shared with Liverpool.

Guardiola's team are six wins short of equalling the world record for consecutive victories in all competitions by a top-flight side — set by Welsh team The New Saints in 2016.

City's incredible run is all the more remarkable given their troubled start to the season.

When they were held to a 0-0 draw at United in December, they were a point behind their rivals in ninth place and the death knell was ringing for their title hopes. But, aided by some clever tactical tweaks from Guardiola, including the use of full-backs Joao Cancelo and Kyle Walker as auxiliary attackers, they have been perfect since then. — AFP

## 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.