

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

ANANTAPUR | SUNDAY | 21 MARCH 2021

WEATHER

Max: 38.0°C
Min: 19°C
RH: 23%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy sky. Misty morning. Max/Min temp. 38/19 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Shuddha Saptami till 7.09 am
Star: Mrigasira till 7.20 pm
Variyam: 4.27 am to 6.11 am (Monday)
Durmuhurtam: 4.47 pm to 5.35 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6.00 pm
HJRI CALENDAR
sha'ban 7,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.08 am
Zohar: 12.05 pm
Asar: 4.11 pm
Maghrib: 5.47 pm
Isha: 7.02 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.32 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.28 PM
MOONSET 00.58 PM
MOONRISE 11.42 AM

COUNTER POINT



Psst! It's our party 'moneyfesto'... ₹2,000 note inside!

MODI: GROWTH OF BENGAL DOWN FOR 50 YEARS

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 20

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday branded West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress as a *patshala* (school) teaching "brutality, extortion, cut-money, syndicate and anarchy." Referring to the global outage of some popular social networking applications on Friday night, Modi also said that the state's development has been down for half-a-century and requested people to give "one chance" to the BJP in the ensuing Assembly election with a promise that he would devote his "life" for public welfare.

Modi said, "Many of you know last night WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram remained down for 50-55 minutes. People became impatient and worried. Questions cropped up in their mind. Though it was only for 50-55 minutes, everyone kept thinking about what happened. While some things on social media were down for 50-55 minutes worldwide, in Bengal development has been down for the last 50-55 years. So was the trust, dreams and resolve. I can understand your impatience."

■ Report on Page 5



NATION | 5

Anil set ₹100cr target for Waze: Former CP

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SPORTS | 8

India beat England to claim series 3-2

TABLOID

Tollywood turns holy?



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Title triumph



Indian cricket team poses with the trophy after winning the T20 cricket series against England, at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad, Saturday. — PTI

SEC moves HC for CBI probe Justice Raghunandan Rao recused himself from the case

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

State Election Commissioner (SEC) N. Ramesh Kumar on Saturday moved the Andhra Pradesh High Court seeking a CBI probe into leaking of a series of privileged communication between him and Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan.

A single judge bench headed by Justice R. Raghunandan Rao heard the petition on the same day. However, the justice recused himself from the case saying he knew Ramesh Kumar in person

and could not thus take up hearing of the SEC's case. In his petition, the commissioner pointed out that his communications to the Governor from January to March this year on several issues had got leaked, including to the media.

This, he contended, is illegal, arbitrary and violative of Articles 14, 19 and 243 K of the Constitution of India.

Ramesh Kumar made Union home secretary, AP chief secretary, Governor's principal secretary, CBI, panchayat raj minister P. Ramachandra Reddy, municipal administration minister Botsa Satyanarayana and others respondents in the case.

The commissioner recounted that he had sent to the Governor a series of communications pertaining to issue of notifications for conduct of polls to both rural and urban local bodies, their deferment due to prevalence of Covid-19, subsequent resumption of election process, completion of polls to gram panchayats and urban local bodies, apart from comments of two ministers for making adverse remarks against him (Ramesh Kumar).

He said that such letters between the State Election Commissioner and Governor are part of privileged communications. Their leakage had severely hampered the functioning of the two constitutional bodies.

The issue, thus, had to be dealt with an iron fist, he maintained. Recusing himself, Justice Raghunandan Rao directed that the court registry take case to the notice of Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami for deciding on hearing of the case.

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CBFC recognises film studio in AP for approval of movies

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

In a pointer to development of Telugu film industry in Andhra Pradesh, Central Board of Film Certification has approved a film studio in AP for issuing required documents to a film for getting the censor board certification.

Telugu cinema director Dileep Raja pointed out that hitherto, lab letters and duration certificates were available only at film studios and laboratories in Hyderabad. But now, the same facility has been extended to Pedaravuru Film Studio in Tenali mandal of Guntur district.

● Pedaravuru Film Studio in Guntur district will now be able to issue documents necessary for getting a film approved by Central Board of Film Certification.

● Hitherto, lab letters and duration certificates were available only at film studios and laboratories in Hyderabad.

Dileep Raja explained that whenever a film gets completed, it is essential that it get a censor certificate before its release. Duration certificate and lab letter are necessary before a film could be sent to the Central Board of Film Certification for

receiving the censor certificate.

The necessary documents can now be issued by Pedaravuru Film Studio too to get censor certificate for new films, the cinema director informed.

He further said editing, dubbing, re-recording and other post production facilities should be available to get the lab letter and duration certificate.

All these facilities are now available at the Pedaravuru Film Studio. Dileep Raja said Pedaravuru is the only film studio in 13 districts of AP, which has been given such recognition by Central Board of Film Certification.

All rural PHCs to work 24x7 in AP

1,145 rural PHCs function from 9 am to 4 now

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

In a move that is bound to be welcomed from most quarters, Andhra Pradesh will soon be running all primary facilities in each and every rural primary health centre (PHC) 24x7.

State health authorities issued an order recently revising the operational timings of PHCs. Accordingly, they will function from 9 am to 4 pm in the first shift and from 2 pm to 9 pm in the second and doctors will be available on call from 9 pm to 9 am the next day. Each PHC will have two medical officers.

At present, the nearly 1,145 PHCs in rural areas function from 9 am to 4 pm. Meanwhile, nearly 500 of them are already working 24x7 as they are located in agency and highly inaccessible areas to attend to emergency cases of the tribal population.

The purpose behind this is to ensure medical care to patients suffering with non-communicable diseases like hypertension, diabetes and other health issues. Staff nurses will work in

BIRRD HOSPITAL TO HOLD MEDICAL CAMPS ACROSS AP

DC CORRESPONDENT NELLORE, MARCH 20

The TTD would offer free medical services to the people across the state through their BIRRD Hospital (Balaji Institute of Surgery, Research and Rehabilitation for the Disabled). TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy disclosed this while inaugurating a mega medical camp at Markapuram in Prakasam district on Saturday.

■ Full report on Page 3

three shifts from 8 am to 2 pm, 2 pm to 8 pm and from 8 pm to 8 am.

Authorities maintain that the move is aimed at reducing the burden on referral hospitals like community health centres and district hospitals.

State health director Dr T. Geetha Prasadini said

"As part of initiating reforms in health care, the state government has taken a decision to revise the timings of PHCs so that primary health care will be available all through the day."

Meanwhile, some medical officers while pointing out that with only two of them posted in a PHC, they wondered what would happen to the alternate shift if one of them goes on leave. They also pointed out that if the medical officers are to be available on call from 9 pm to 9 am, then it is inevitable that they remain at their workplace. They lamented that with no residential accommodation and lack of transport facility, it becomes difficult for them to attend to emergency cases, especially late in the night. Doctors and nurses expressed concern over security and safety late in the evenings in remote areas.

AP Government Doctors Association convenor Dr D. Jayadheer said "We are discussing with our colleagues on practical difficulties we may face due to the revised timings. We will take them to the notice of the government."

Didn't see India, China war: US

PAWAN BALI AND SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 20

US secretary of defence Lloyd James Austin said on Saturday that the United States never thought that India and China were on the threshold of a war during their military stand-off in Ladakh.

He also said that he had discussed the issue of human rights of minorities in India with Cabinet ministers in the Modi government and added that "partners need to be able to have those kinds of discussions."

"We have never considered India and China were on the threshold of a war," Austin said during a press conference.

To a question whether he had spoken with Prime Minister Narendra Modi about "violations of human rights especially against Muslim minorities in the Northeast", Austin replied: "I did not have an opportunity to talk with him about that. I did have a conversation with other members of the Cabinet on this issue."

Austin pointed out that US President Joe Biden has said that human rights and rule of law are important to the United States of America. "We always lead with our values. As a democracy that's pretty important to us. India is a democratic country and you treasure your values as well. There are a number of things that we can and will work on together," he said.

Sources said that Austin on Saturday told external affairs minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar in an hour-long meeting that "as the two largest democracies in the world, human rights and values are important to us and we will lead with these values".

Jaishankar "agreed and emphasised that a strong relationship between the two democracies was not only important for both countries but for the rest of the world", sources said.

Austin said that India is an important partner amid the rapidly shifting international dynamics. "US-India relationship is a stronghold of a free and open Indo-Pacific region," he said.

KTR TO LEAD TEAM TO VIZAG OVER STEEL PLANT

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 20

TRS working president and IT minister K.T. Rama Rao stated that he would shortly lead a team of his Cabinet colleagues to Visakhapatnam to support the ongoing agitation against the privatisation of Vizag Steel Plant.

Rama Rao gave this assurance to Andhra Pradesh Telugu Desam legislator Ganta Srinivasa Rao when the latter met him at his chambers in the Assem-bly here on Saturday.

Rama Rao had while campaigning for the Legislative Council elections had extended his solidarity with the agitating VSP workers. Srinivasa Rao had tendered his resignation from his Visakhapatnam (North) Assembly seat on February 6 in support of the agitation. However, it is still pending with the AP Assembly Speaker.

In an informal chat with mediapersons after the meeting, Srinivasa Rao said he had met Rama Rao to thank him for extending his support to the agitation by the steel plant's joint action committee.

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IN BRIEF

APHC RESERVES ITS
VERDICT ON CONDUCT
OF ZPTC, MPTC POLLSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

Andhra Pradesh High Court reserved the verdict on conducting the elections for ZPTCs/MPTCs.

A single-judge bench headed by justice D.V.S.S. Somayajulu heard the petition seeking direction from the State Election Commission to complete the deferred election to the ZPTCs/MPTCs virtually here on Saturday.

Petitioner's counsel V.R.N. Prasanna submitted to the court that it was the bounden duty of the State Election Commission to conduct elections to the ZPTCs/MPTCs.

Advocate-General S. Sriram argued that the SEC should conduct polls for these bodies. SEC's counsel N. Ashwani Kumar argued that the SEC was an independent body and should be given the liberty to exercise its mind to take a decision to notify the election date for ZPTCs/MPTCs.

The court said that as no decision was taken, the petition was premature and required no interference at this stage and reserved the case for orders.

STATE BJP KICKS UP
ROW WITH POSTS ON
FB ON NAIDU, JAGANDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

Andhra Pradesh BJP kicked up a row by posting controversial remarks on Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, on its Facebook page.

It commented that former chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and present Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy owned the Central schemes initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and fixing their stickers on them.

The posting reads, "Then Chandrababu-Now Yesu Babu, affixing their stickers on Modi schemes," in an oblique reference to both former CM N. Chandrababu Naidu and the present CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

PANABAKA APPEALS
TO CADRE TO WORK
FOR HER SUCCESSDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 20

Former Union minister and TD nominee for Lok Sabha by-election Panabaka Lakshmi have called upon the TD cadres to work for the party's success in the ensuing by-election to the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat. She told them to highlight the failures of the ruling party through an extensive campaign. She took part in the coordination meeting of Sarvepalli constituency, part of the Tirupati parliament segment, at NTR Bhavan in Nellore on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, she said that the YSRC government's failure to secure Special Category Status despite tall claims on the subject was part of the AP Reorganisation Act.

ELECTIONS TO
BAR ASSOCIATIONS
BY MONTH-ENDDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL MARCH 20:

Andhra Pradesh Bar council has issued a notification to conduct the elections for local Bar associations at all districts by the end of this month.

On Saturday, the Kurnool district BAR Association has appointed two senior advocates S. Manohar and M. Sreenivasa Reddy as election officers to conduct the elections smoothly and transparently. The new committees would be functioning from April 1, he added.

Election Officer M. Sreenivasa Reddy said that the Kurnool District Bar Association (KDBA) elections would be conducted on March 30 as per the AP Bar council's instructions. Nomination filing will be on March 24 at the KDBA office in the District Court premises, and withdrawal is on March 25. Appeal by the contestants to the Bar Association members will be conducted on March 26, he added.

The polling will be held on March 30, and the counting of votes will be completed the same day. The newly-elected office bearers will be declared on the evening of March 30 immediately after completion of counting progress, stated the election officer.

High Court clears way for
Rajampet civic body polls

Authorities have modified enhancement of wards from 20 to 29

DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MARCH 20

Kadapa district authorities have re-divided wards within Rajampet municipality following orders of the Andhra Pradesh High Court.

Elections for municipalities in the state, which concluded recently, could not be held in Rajampet as there was a stay issued by the High Court. The court stay followed a petition that enhancement of the number of wards from 20 to 29 had not been done properly. The High Court has since ordered that the wards be divided in a proper manner.

Rajampet is the only municipality in Kadapa district, which has not had elections since last two times. The town, a major panchayat, had

● Elections for five panchayats that were proposed to be merged with Rajampet municipality too were held in the recently concluded GP elections. Rajampet civic body did not witness any elections during the recently concluded civic polls too, as the case has remained pending in the court.

been upgraded into nagar panchayat in 2005. That was the only time elections were held for the municipality. Later, in 2019, the nagar panchayat was upgraded into a Grade-2 municipality by merging five panchayats into the civic body. Since then, elections have not been held for Rajampet municipality as some people petitioned the court contending that the merger of panchayats into the civic body was arbitrary.

Elections for five panchayats that were proposed to be merged with Rajampet municipality too were held in the recently concluded GP elections. Rajampet civic body did not witness any elections during the recently concluded civic polls too, as the case has remained pending in the court.

Jayaprakash Power Ventures
gets sole sand mining rightsDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

The Metal Scrap Trade Corporation (MSTC) Limited has selected Jayaprakash Power Ventures Ltd to undertake sand mining, storage and sales for a period of two years in a transparent and impartial manner.

The state government had announced an upgraded sand policy vide G.O.No.78, Department of Industries and Commerce (M.III), dated 12-11-2020.

Director of the department of mines and geology entered into a MoU on 04-01-2021 with M/s. MSTC Ltd to select the eligible agency for undertaking sand mining, storage and sales for a period of two years.

MSTC Ltd confirmed that M/s. Jayaprakash Power Ventures Ltd was the successful bidder as they announced the high-

● MSTC Ltd confirmed that M/s. Jayaprakash Power Ventures Ltd was the successful bidder as they announced the highest price for all three packages. The company is part of the Jaypee Group.

est price for all three packages. The company is part of the Jaypee Group. Officials informed that M/s Jayaprakash offered ₹477.50 crore for package-1, ₹745.70 crore for package-2 and for Package - 3, ₹305.60 crore.

The officials informed that under the existing policy, AP Government has earned a net income of ₹161.30 crore for the financial year 2019-20 and ₹380.00 crore for the current financial year (2020-21), up to February 2021. The upgraded sand policy is expected to generate about ₹765 crore per annum.

Jr docs strike work, seek
pending stipend paymentDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

Government junior doctors on Saturday launched a protest strike demanding the state government to release their stipend that has been pending for the last few months.

Junior doctors said that first year students were not getting their monthly stipend of ₹44,500 for the last five months while second year students, who get ₹46,500, and third year students getting ₹48,500, were not paid in the last three months.

They maintained that they have served a strike notice and would only attend emergency cases. They skipped duty at outpatient wards and did not go on rounds in wards.

Meanwhile, post-graduation students and house surgeons from several private medical colleges complain that though they are supposed to get paid monthly stipend on par with those from government medical colleges, their management was paying less. They alleged that some private managements' remit full stipend into their bank accounts for records and ask them to return part of the amount.

● Junior doctors said that first year students were not getting their monthly stipend of ₹44,500 for the last five months while second year students, who get ₹46,500, and third year students getting ₹48,500, were not paid in the last three months.

Regretting the extension of two months to complete their internship and get relieved by the Medical Council, many house surgeons alleged that private managements were threatening them if they don't serve their respective college for the extended period of internship.

Parents committee president and State BC employees president Dr Ala Venkateswaralu in a statement alleged that Katuri Medical College and hospital located in Guntur was paying stipend to PG students and house surgeons that was significantly less than what has been prescribed by the state government. Not only were they resorting to financial irregularities, many managements were threatening not to relieve house surgeons and withhold certificates unless they

are 32,526 listed voters. Among them, 15,775 are male voters and 16,743 are women.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, in-charge Rajampet municipal commissioner Perli Sessa Phani said the process of division of wards has already been completed with necessary modifications. The file has been sent for approval by the district collector. Presently, the file is with regional director of the Municipal Department. Later, following approval of district collector Chevuru Harikiran, the modified plan of dividing municipal wards will be sent to the Election Commission.

"SEC will then take necessary action to conduct elections in Rajampet," he said.

Officials informed that as the stockyard is being set up at the reaches, they can check the quality of the sand directly at the ramps, pay the money at the reach of their choice and take the required quantum of sand in vehicles arranged by them. The price will be uniform at every reach in the state and a price with the upper ceiling is determined regionally based on distance. Details of the phone numbers to complain about the higher rates will be made available to the public.

The officials further informed that there is no need to apply online for sand and there will be no involvement of the transport conglomerate or middlemen in sand supply. Those who cannot afford to arrange their own vehicles will have the option of obtaining sand through a transport conglomerate.

complete the extended two months of internship. Originally, it is slated to end by March 23. He turned critical against the college management for not releasing Covid-19 incentive to junior doctors even as the state government had released funds to the college for providing medical care to Covid-19 patients.

He said "We appeal to the NTR University of Health Sciences and AP Higher Education Regulatory and Monitoring Commission to inquire and take necessary action."

NTR University of Health Sciences registrar Dr K. Sankar said "If there are any irregularities with regard to payment of stipend in private medical colleges, we will call for remarks from them and take necessary action once we get any complaint. Moreover, the medical colleges' principals are having the discretion to extend the period of internship for house surgeons. In case some house surgeons failed to get exposure to non-Covid subjects, they have to take the extended two months period to complete their internship."



Minister Vellampalli Srinivas (centre) interacts with commissioner Prasanna Venkatesh (right) at the Civic issues meeting in Vijayawada on Saturday. Mayor R. Bhagya Lakshmi (left) is also seen. — DC

Drinking water top priority
of YSRC post winning VMCDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

After its landslide victory in the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC), ruling YSRC Congress has resolved to solve all civic issues of the civic body, starting with ensuring drinking water supply to the top commercial city on a war footing.

Post a meeting with the newly elected ruling party corporators on Saturday, endowments minister Vellampalli Srinivas Rao assured that booster pumps will be established to ensure adequate drinking water supply to even upland areas of Vijayawada, including localities on the hills.

YSRC GOVT TURNED
INDIFFERENT TO
PROBLEMS: TDDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

Telugu Desam spokesperson Syed Raffi on Saturday slammed the YSRC government for being indifferent to the problems of the poor and middle class sections of society in the wake of unchecked rise in the prices of essential commodities and rising poverty levels.

He alleged that the CM had promised to set up a ₹5,000 crore price stabilisation fund before the elections but had not fulfilled the promise.

Addressing a press conference here, Raffi claimed the YSRC government was busy targeting and harassing Opposition leaders with false cases. He alleged that the CM was putting all his focus on borrowing huge loans and using them to suppress the TD in the state.

Raffi said that marketing minister Kanna Babu was focused on encouraging gambling dens and selling sand and using abusive language against former CM Chandrababu Naidu. He alleged that the minister had not held a review meeting on the rising prices even once. Raffi alleged that the CM and his ministers address people's issues only at the time of elections. "It is clear that Jagan Mohan Reddy would pay attention to the price rise only when women come on to the roads in protest," he said.

The TD leader asked why the farmers were not getting remunerative prices for their crops while the same produce was being sold at very high prices in the market. Raffi accused the CM of following double standards as he was not trying to control the prices of petrol and diesel.

● Post a meeting with the newly elected ruling party corporators on Saturday, endowments minister Vellampalli Srinivas Rao assured that booster pumps will be established to ensure adequate drinking water supply to even upland areas of Vijayawada, including localities on the hills.

will also be a priority.

He pointed out that drainage works are already being implemented by I&T in many parts of the city. These will be expedited and completed at the earliest to avoid inconvenience for the people. He also directed authorities to improve parks within the city for

convenience of the people.

Srinivas Rao said he has instructed authorities to start works as per priority within each of the divisions, which had been neglected by the earlier municipal council dominated by Telugu Desam. He asked VMC commissioner V. Prasanna Venkatesh to ensure overall development of the city in all possible ways. The commissioner reiterated that drinking water for Vijayawada will be a priority.

Newly elected mayor Rayana Bhagyalakshmi said all elected corporators had met the officials for the first time, where they decided to work together for overall development of the city.

Kodali calls Naidu a
coward, 'Stay Babu'DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

Kodali Nani

Civil supplies minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao alias Nani has called Leader of Opposition N. Chandrababu Naidu a "coward" for not facing the court case to prove himself as not being corrupt in Amaravati assigned lands case.

The minister also referred to Naidu as "stay Babu" for his act of getting continuous stays from courts in every case. Nani maintained that the stay order on the CID probe will go and Chandrababu Naidu getting punished in the coming days is inevitable.

Addressing media here on Saturday, the minister recounted that Naidu has so far got stay orders in over 30 cases. However, the former chief minister has already been punished by the people's court following TD's debacle in 2019 assembly elections. People of the state have continued to show their distrust in Telugu Desam subsequently by giving landslide victories to YSRC in gram panchayat, municipal and corporation elections, which is a "severe punishment delivered by the public court".

Nani predicted, "People

will further confine Chandrababu to his house by voting YSRC in ZPTC and MPTC elections, apart from Tirupati by-poll too. Let Naidu hire any number of top lawyers paying whatever amount of money from his ill-gotten wealth," he declared.

The minister was also critical of Nara Lokesh who, he said, is politicising Visakhapatnam Steel Plant issue by blaming Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy. "The issue is not at all in the purview of state government," he pointed out.

Nani dared Lokesh to go and protest in Delhi against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and make the latter withdraw proposed privatisation of VSP. The minister asserted that the state government will stand by steel plant's employees who are protesting against the privatisation move.

2 MPs FROM AP SELECTED AS MEMBERS
OF COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC UNDERTAKINGDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

Two MPs from AP were selected as members of the Committee on Public Undertakings (2021-22) was announced on Saturday.

Krishna Devarayalu said that 14 MPs had got the appointment as members of the Committee. Krishna Devarayalu said he would work towards resolving issues of PSUs, staff, employees, and people in his term.

S-TIC | PROGRAMME

Incubation centres to come up on Visvesvaraya, Maulana Azad, NIT institutes campuses
Isro inks pacts with institutes to set up space incubation centresDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 20

Indian Space Research Organisation has signed bilateral memoranda of understanding with three prestigious institutes to set up space technology incubation centres (S-TIC) on their campuses.

The incubation centres will come up at the Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology, Nagpur

(western region), Maulana Azad National Institute of Technology, Bhopal (Central region), and National Institute of Technology, Rourkela (eastern region).

Isro Chairman Dr K. Sivan, also the secretary, department of space, briefed about S-TIC programme and encouraged students to explore their entrepreneurship skills in the space domain.

In his presidential

address, Dr Sivan said the S-TIC would provide opportunities for final year graduate and post-graduate students and research scholars as entrepreneurs. Projects of practical relevance linked to the space missions will be made available at the S-TICs. The research outcome will be translated into a proof-of-concept or prototype through industries within their region.

R. Umamaheswaran, scientific secretary, Isro, emphasised the need for interdisciplinary approach and teamwork among various discipline of science and technology for accomplishing the objectives of S-TIC. The setting up of the centres will be a major boost for space-related activities in these regions.

According to Isro, the S-TIC at VNIT Nagpur will

be the focal centre for the western region including Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Union Territories of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. The S-TIC at MANIT, Bhopal, will cover Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh and the S-TIC at NIT, Rourkela the states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and the Union Territory of Andaman & Nicobar.

Three S-TICs are already functioning. At the National Institute of Technology, Agartala (for the northeast), Dr B.R. Ambedkar National Institute of Technology, Jalandhar (northern region) and National Institute of Technology, Tiruchirappalli (Southern region).

Dr Sivan also released YUKTI-Sanchita 2021 (Youth Upgradation by Knowledge Transforma-

tion through Incubators - Sanchita), a compilation of 108 product development and innovative project proposals which can be referred to by academia, industry and start-ups to prepare a detailed proposal for execution of the projects.

Jiwan Kumar Pandit, associate director, Isro, thanked the participants from academic institutions for their participation.

SHORT TAKES

4 HELD FOR
ILLEGAL GANJA
TRANSPORTATIONDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 20

Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) officials seized 25 kg of Ganja while being transported illegally in an RTC bus. They apprehended four accused involved in the trading following a tip-off on Saturday.

SEB joint director Srilakshmi said that SEB officials led by SPO Pawan Kalyan, Naidupeta SEB circle inspector Jaleel Khan, sub-inspector Seshamma conducted checks in the bus following a tip-off.

The RTC bus, which was going towards Srikalahasti from Vizag, was intercepted near Naidupeta and found the ganja worth ₹15 lakh.

The team detained four accused travelling in the bus and grilled them.

They confessed that they were transporting the contraband to Chittoor district from Vizag. Besides ganja, SEB seized three mobile phones and a motorbike from the accused. A case was registered against the accused and produced in Naidupeta court.

'MANY SCHOOLS
CONVERTED TO
ENG MEDIUM'DC CORRESPONDENT
KADAPA, MARCH 20

Kadapa city mayor Kottamaddi Suresh Babu said that many municipal schools in Kadapa city have changed to English medium and teachers have recruited. He said strict measures would be taken if necessary, and all facilities would be provided at the municipal schools.

Earlier, Mr Suresh Babu was greeted by the former MLC Pochamreddy Subbareddy, Progressive State Teachers Union president Lekkala Jamal Reddy, finance secretary Ilias Reddy and other delegates. As he was elected as Kadapa mayor for the second time, they urged him to work to develop municipal schools.

Mr Suresh Babu assured them to develop all the schools in Kadapa city limits. He said that Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy is also very keen on the education department, and the renovation of school buildings under the Nadu-Nedu programme is being continued expeditiously.

He said that all the schools in the state would be fully modified within the next five years with new infrastructure.

RAGHAVENDRA
SWAMY
VARDHANTHIDC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 20

Sri Raghavendra Swamy 426th Vardhanthi observed across all parts of AP, TS, TN and Karnataka states and branches across country and other countries on Saturday. Guru Raghavendra Swamy, saint from Madwa Philosophy believed avatar of Lord Prahlada Raja who was reason to bring Lord Narsimha Swamy and St. Vyasaraj next avatar also emperor of Vijayanagar empire and Raghavendra Swamy during present period.

His 426th Vardanthi was observed by Mantralayam Sri Raghavendra Swamy Mutt across all parts of globe.

TTD Additional EO Sri A.V. Dharma Reddy on Saturday visited Sri Raghavendra Swamy Mutt in Mantralayam in Kurnool district.

As part of the tradition since 2006, he presented silk cloths to the mutt on the occasion of Ceremony of Sri Guru Raghavendra Swami on behalf of the Srivari temple.

Earlier the additional TTD EO called on the pontiff of Mantralayam.

Corp Hopsitals told to pay for
charging Aarogyasri patientsDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 20

In a swift move, joint-collector N. Prabhakar Reddy imposed penalties to the extent of ₹18 lakh on the local corporate hospitals for collecting medical charges from the patients eligible for free treatment under the Aarogyasri scheme.

While addressing the district disciplinary committee here on Saturday, the joint-collector instructed them to collect the fines from the corporate hospitals for violating the guidelines and keeping a tab on their activities.

Alleging that Medicover, Lotus, Narayana, and KIMS hospitals have collected additional amounts

from the patients, he said they had imposed a penalty of 10 times more than the amount collected from the patients.

According to Prabhakar Reddy, they have imposed a fine to the tune of ₹11,08,400 to the Medicover Hospitals for collecting ₹1,10,840 from patients.

Similarly, KIMS Hospitals was asked to pay

₹1,46,520 for charging ₹14,652, Lotus Hospital was told to pay ₹1,08,000 for collecting ₹10,800 and Narayana Hospital was instructed to pay ₹5,08,400 for charging ₹50,840 from Argoyasri beneficiaries.

Prabhakar Reddy made it clear that network hospitals should conduct medical examinations free of cost to the patients.

Surge in Covid cases, 380 cases,
two deaths reported in 24 hours

Among the daily cases, Guntur topped the state with 70, followed by 60 in Chittoor

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 20

Andhra Pradesh continues to witness a surge in Covid-19 infections as 380 were reported with two deaths in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities reported on Saturday that out of 30,978 samples tested, 380 persons were found infected with the virus. Out of a total number of 1,47,05,188 samples tested so far in the state, 8,93,366 persons were infected with Covid-19, and of them, 8,84,094 were recovered while 2,083 are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, Guntur topped the state with 70, followed by 60 in Chittoor, 51 in Kurnool, 44 in Krishna, 43 in Visakhapatnam, 26 in East Godavari, 22 in Anantapur, 21 in Nellore, 15 in Srikakulam, nine in Vizianagaram, eight in Kadapa, six in Prakasam and five in West Godavari.

With regard to the cumulative Covid-19 cases, Chittoor continues to lead with 491, followed by 266 in East Godavari, 265 in Guntur, 258 in Krishna, 174 in Visakhapatnam, 150 in Kurnool, 105 in Anantapur, 87 in Srikakulam, 83 in Prakasam, 76 in Nellore, 62 in Kadapa, 35 in Vizianagaram and 31 in West Godavari.

Among the daily Covid-19 deaths, one each was reported from Kurnool and Prakasam.



People in large numbers wait to get tested for Covid-19 at Sanjeevini Bus which was set up at Government ENT Hospital in Visakhapatnam on Saturday.

— K. MURALIKRISHNA

73 test Covid positive in
Kurnool in 48 hoursDC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, MARCH 20

The District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO) Dr Rama Giddaiah, said Covid-19 cases are in the surge again as 73 people have been infected in the past two days.

In the last 24 hours, 24 new cases have been reported and the trend is increasing as many school children reportedly tested positive. He said people are lax in observing the Covid-19 protocol

of wearing masks and maintaining physical distance. This would prove costly to the public as they should take maximum precaution to protect themselves and others from being infected, the DMHO said.

Dr Narendranath Reddy, Kurnool General Hospital Superintendent, said total negligence of the general public in following Covid norms in public areas like vegetable markets, shopping malls, bar and restaur-

ants, malls selling groceries, Rythu Bazaars, Cinema halls and multiplexes, people moving from one place in a state to other states have all contributed for the spike in Covid-19 infections.

Further raising caution, he said those people who have already been affected have failed to stay home or maintain physical distance and freely moving in public places like temples. He advised people to strictly follow the Covid-19 rules.

BIRRD to hold
medical campsDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, MARCH 20

The TTD would offer free medical services to the people across the state through their BIRRD Hospital (Balaji Institute of Surgery, Research and Rehabilitation for the Disabled).

TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy disclosed this while inaugurating a mega medical camp at Markapuram in Prakasam district on Saturday.

He said the medical camps were being organised as per the directions of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in every district of Andhra Pradesh.

Referring to BIRRD Hospital established in Tirupati with 50 beds and two operation theatres in 1985, Subba Reddy said the institute now has 300 beds and 12 operation theatres.

BIRRD hospital pro-

vides free treatment for those affected by poliomyelitis, congenital anomalies, cerebral palsy and correcting deformities by surgical intervention and artificial limbs. State-of-the-art technology is being used in the treatment of spinal injuries.

All donations to the hospital are exempted from income-tax under 80(G) of the IT Act. The names of donors who donate ₹5 lakh will be displayed along with their photographs in the hospital. TTD offers free darshan with aarti for five members for three days in a calendar year.

One room will be named after the donor who donates ₹10 lakh or more. A silver memento engraved with the images of Lord Venkateswara and Goddess Padmavathi would be given to the donors of ₹5 lakh and ₹10 lakh.

POSITIVE CASES RISE IN ANANTAPUR

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 20

At least three students from Nijavali High School in Kundurpi mandal in the district are reportedly infected with Covid-19. Three students were

studying in ninth standard. The medical and health authorities alerted over possible spread of virus from Karnataka border areas in Kundurpi mandal located in Tumkur and Chitradurga districts of Karnataka.

GREATER VISAKHAPATNAM MUNICIPAL CORPORATION									
Date: 20.03.2021									
Total No of Tenders : 5									
S. No	Tender Notice No.	No of Works	Value of Works (ECV)	Down Loading Starting Date	Down Loading End Date	Last Date of submission of bid	Date of opening of Tenders (Technical Bid)	Date of opening of Tenders (Price Bid)	Phone No.
1	'e' Procurement Tender Notice No.21/2020-21/EE-VDB, Dt:16-03-2021 Short Tender Notice (7 DAYS)	3 Works (3rd Call)	Rs. 208.18 Lakhs	19-03-2021 @ 10.00 AM	30-03-2021 @ 03.00 PM	30-03-2021 @ 03.30 PM	30-03-2021 @ 04.00 PM	30-03-2021 @ 04.00 PM	Ph:9912872224
2	Short Tender Notice No.46/2020-21/SE(W-HV/EE-HDBI Dt:19-03-2021 (UPHC Funds)	3 Nos	Rs. 240.00 Lakhs	19-03-2021 @ 11.00 PM	26-03-2021 @ 02.00 PM	26-03-2021 @ 03.00 PM	26-03-2021 @ 04.00 PM	26-03-2021 @ 04.00 PM	Ph:729959317
3	'e' Procurement Tender Notice No.32/2020-21/SE(W-HV/EE-VB/DB, Dt:19-03-2021	3 Nos	Rs. 209.61 Lakhs	20-03-2021 @ 02.00 PM	06-04-2021 @ 03.00 PM	06-04-2021 @ 04.00 PM	06-04-2021 @ 04.30 PM	06-04-2021 @ 04.00 PM	Ph:729959317
4	'e' Procurement Tender Notice No.40/2020-21/SE(W-HV/EE-HDB/GVMC/ Dt:19-03-2021 Item No.01	4 Nos	Rs. 2,79,44,952/-	20-03-2021 @ 06.00 PM	26-03-2021 @ 02.00 PM	26-03-2021 @ 03.00 PM	26-03-2021 @ 03.30 PM	26-03-2021 @ 04.00 PM	Ph:729959317
5	ANAKAPALLE 'E' Procurement Tender Notice No.33/2020-21/SE(W-HV/EE-VB/DB Dt:19-03-2021	4 Nos	Rs. 2,72,29,164/-	20-03-2021 @ 10.00 AM	03-04-2021 @ 02.00 PM	03-04-2021 @ 03.00 PM	03-04-2021 @ 03.30 PM	03-04-2021 @ 04.00 PM	Ph:0891-2143301

Note: For any other details required in respect of above tender notice, please contact concerned phone number before applying for tender schedules and visit us: @ www.aeprocurement.gov.in For Commissioner

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1 L | ₹ 68*Taaza
1 L | ₹ 64*Moti
450 mL | ₹ 28*Slim 'n' Trim
1 L | ₹ 75*Lactose Free Milk
250 mL | ₹ 25*

DECCAN Chronicle

21 MARCH 2021



Ranjona Banerji

Off the beaten track

What cooking teaches, how tastes are learned

The cooking revolution was perhaps one of the upsides of the pandemic. Entitled people who employed cooks suddenly found themselves staring at unprepossessing bunches of bottle gourd and cabbages and tried to imagine how to make them appetising. I shared with great enthusiasm some 10 “one-pot” recipes with family and friends until I ran out of steam and they ran out of ingredients.

Early in the lockdown of 2020, a friend started a recipe-sharing online group. It was brilliant. A bunch of similarly middle class but otherwise disparate people tried to make each other’s lives easier with tips and recipes and answers.

It was a very happy experience for a short while. And then as the group grew, it became a cesspit of gender, ethnic, caste, caste biases. (There would have been race if we had enough varied races in the group.) Anger and accusations, offence and defence, and suddenly we weren’t talking about how to best temper a daal but oh, in my high caste family we never eat X, Y and so on.

That something so beautiful in its conception and its early days could descend so quickly into fractious lines of othering and hatred is testament to the human ability to destroy anything worthwhile with our inherent stupidity.

That said, I learnt a lot in my first few weeks and top of the list is an onion chutney for idlis and dosas. With due apologies to our esteemed Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and anyone else who doesn’t eat onions or care how much they cost. It is delicious so the loss is not mine.

My journey as a cook started somewhat before the online world governed our lives. Like many of my sort, I tried a little baking. At 10 I proudly made a hard as rock cake that wasn’t supposed to be a rock cake and watched in awe as a visiting family friend munched through it saying “delicious” after every long torturous chewing expedition. I haven’t forgotten his kindness and he still claims it was delicious!

This story is my Mother’s. When I was about 16, my grandparents were horrified that she hadn’t taught me how to make proper “Indian” food. Baking did not count in the marriage mart scheme of things. (This turned out to be correct. During one of my parents’ many short-lived disasters into the murky world of arranged marriages for me, one grandmother said all her grandson wanted from a bride was the ability to make fried brinjal wheels. The conversation did not go any further nor did the fancy cake I had baked.) My Mother told me that her honour was at stake and it was up to me to uphold it.

I cooked whatever I did. At the end of the meal, my Mother informed the grandparents of the reality. They blustered “but, but you never taught her”. My Mother, a teacher, had the last word: “I taught her how to gather knowledge.” No answer to that.

But I really learnt how to cook by experimentation. And by eating. To replicate tastes and memories. To try new things and ideas that were floating about in my head. And all that means stepping out of your comfort zone. For instance, when I was in my late teens all I wanted to eat at a Chinese restaurant was chilli chicken. I know, right. Even if “Indian Chinese” in the early 1980s was not as resplendent in choice as it is now, that was a pretty dumb choice to have set in stone.

I also experimented with vegetarianism in my early 20s. Until I got tempted by taste. O dear. Crabs at Kamling and chicken at Baghdadi. I got done in by Bombay, you might argue and that set me on my culinary journey. Underlying that of course is childhood. Bengalis have a terrible phrase inflicted on children and on us by our grandmother: “khete shekho”. Learn to eat.

Attached to this phrase were some pretty gruesome vegetables like chichinge or snake gourd and borboti or yardlong or asparagus beans. There is no taste connection between this bean and an asparagus, it has to be made clear. To this day, I cannot and will not eat these. Add to this cluster beans aka gawar ka phalli, which is not a Bengali staple but which I won’t eat anyway. Conversely my Mother hated arbi or taro root or Colocasia corms. So we never ate that at home. I love it. My paternal grandfather hated pumpkin of all kinds so that was banned, but now we find we love it. What sense does it make? None at all. The Chinese ability to get over food taboos may be unpalatable for some, but shows a remarkable ability to adapt. There is no moral high ground in proclaiming that you are too superior to eat onions. It only means that your mind is consumed by taught rigidities.

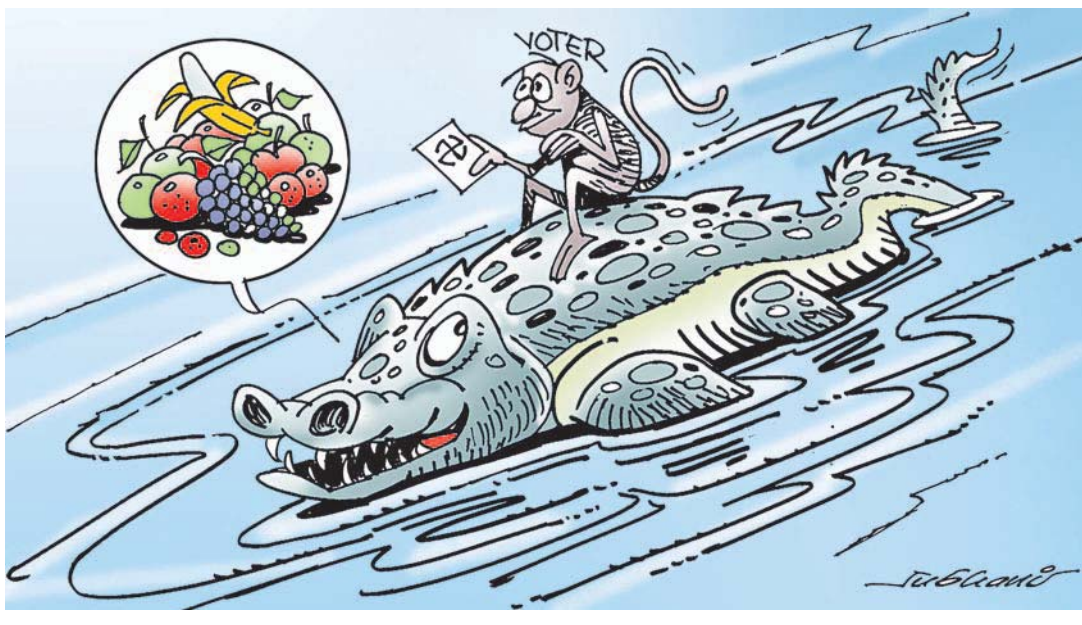
Food taboos however are a topic of great sensitivity and resultant anger, so let’s not go there! To each her own.

But I made two fabulous new finds recently: buds of the *Bombax ceiba* and Bauhinia flowers. In both cases, the vegetable vendors were pleasantly amazed that I wanted to buy these local delicacies, having stereotyped me as a ‘broccoli and salad patta’ buyer. One asked me to look up the Internet for recipes, the other explained how to cook the kachnar. The look of his joy when I came back to buy more was delightful.

I realise I have left the door open for the great controversy of “veg biryani”. Maybe for another time?

The writer is a senior journalist who writes on media affairs, politics and social trends. She tweets at @ranjona.

Subhani



Let it rip! Stop us turning into the Republic of Hurt



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya’s View

In a land which has valued creativity and creative freedom since time immemorial, there are new glass ceilings — and sometimes steel ones — coming up all around. This sense of creative claustrophobia is the direct result not of “reasonable restrictions”, but subjective biases in those who either have the power to decide, or think they have the right to do so because of their proximity to power. The cumulative result is a sense of trepidation and apprehension, even fear, among the artistic fraternity about what they can depict, and what is likely to cause offence, and render them liable to arbitrary legal and punitive action.

The area of morality, religion and societal behaviour is the most contested area. We have new custodians of morality who are easily outraged by anything that does not fit into their conservative, upper-caste, patriarchal and outdated notions of “correct” behavior. Newly appointed CM of Uttarakhand, Tirath Singh Rawat, waxed eloquent on this gem of wisdom just a few days ago. Ladies who wear ripped jeans, he said, “pave the way for societal breakdown leading to substance abuse”. He was outraged that this “kainchi ka sanskaar” actually enables females “to reveal their knees” (what sacrilege!), when “the most important thing for women is to look after their family and children”.

So much then for women’s liberation, and the decades of struggle that have gone into

empowering women rather than confining them only to the home and the perpetuation of progeny. It could be argued, of course, that these are the personal views of a certain Mr. Rawat. In a free Republic anyone has the right to their opinion, and if Rawatji is an unapologetic male chauvinist. So be it. Alas, it is not that simple. People like Rawatji are in power today. They live in a time warp, and the greater their misogyny the more they their conviction that they are right. More worrisome, is the fact that they quote sanskaar or culture as the reason for their indignation. The corollary to this appropriation is only logical: anyone violating sanskaar must be reined in, brought to book, dealt with, and Bharat that is India must remain unsullied from all these evil progressive tendencies.

But sanskaar becomes even more lethal when it is coupled with religion. So, the religious sentiments of two BJP leaders were outraged by the fact that a serial was named *Tandav*, which they interpreted to be an insult to Lord Shiva. Such an allegation needs to be laughed out of the room, simply because the word *Tandav* is both an adjective and a proper noun, and when used as the title of a serial, the content of the story itself makes it obvious that there is not even a remote connection to the dance of destruction of Mahadeva. But a case was filed against Amazon Prime Video, and such is the fear, that the production house issued an abject apology,

deeply regretting the unintended “hurt” that may have been caused, and agreeing to cut out any “objectionable” scenes. What is even more inexplicable is that the Allahabad high court, instead of providing protection to the serial makers, proclaimed that no one has the right to hurt religious sentiments.

The real reason for the ire against *Tandav* may be quite different. In the serial, there is a university suspiciously sounding like ‘JNU’, whose students “subversively” shout slogans of “*azadi*”, and politicians are depicted as having no compunctions in fueling religious divides for political dividends. The whole script sound strangely familiar, and what better way to put this impudence in its place than to file an FIR against the impertinent producers on grounds of hurt religious sentiments?

We are fast becoming the Republic of Hurt. Some people were hurt by a Muslim boy kissing a Hindu girl with a temple in the background in the Netflix adaptation of *A Suitable Boy*. The iconic Marathi playwright, Vijay Tendulkar, recently faced a posthumous storm of protest because his play, *Jaat hi Poocho Sadhu ki*, used the Hindu word “sadhv”, and thus hurt Hindu religious sentiments. The fact is the play is not about faith at all, but about the ills of casteism. But obviously the Bajrang Dal, which raised objections, does not read beyond the title of the plays they want

What is even more inexplicable is that the Allahabad high court, instead of providing protection to the makers of *Tandav*, proclaimed that no one has the right to hurt religious sentiments

banned. In any case, it succeeded. The staging of the play was cancelled in Madhya Pradesh.

The real problem in our Republic of Hurt is that one doesn’t know what will next cause someone to be hurt. For instance, just the other day, the BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh government decided to remove eggs from the midday meals given to anganwadi centres. The decision to provide high-protein eggs was taken by the previous Congress government. At the time the BJP had protested, seeing in this “nefarious” move the attempt to change the dietary habits of Hindus. But this begs the question: don’t Hindu children eat eggs too? Those who don’t are welcome not to, but the decision to replace eggs by milk has been questioned by child health experts. Such experts would, of course, then be called anti-national. The dilemma before filmmakers is that if their next production shows people eating eggs, or eating non-vegetarian food, would they have an FIR filed against them for “hurting religious sentiments”. One never knows.

A highly unwarranted subjectivity driven by medieval cultural notions and political hubris is seriously threatening creative freedoms in India. It is in this light that we need to see the government’s latest guidelines to control social media and OTT platforms. These guidelines may talk about self-regulatory mechanisms, but the final decision in the three-tier process lies with the ministry of information and broadcasting. If Tirath Singh Rawat becomes the minister of I&B, ladies in ripped jeans exposing their knees, and eating eggs to boot, must watch out.

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

LETTERS

MUMBAI SAGA

Shobhaa De has deftly touched upon the shady and dubious nexus between politicians and tainted officers in the SUV case (*Something rotten... Why is Maha in such a mess?*, March 20). She was right in saying that it might become a ‘Mumbai saga’ with real-life villains and not Bollywood actors. There are wheels within wheels in the episode. Central and state agencies need to work in close coordination and not at cross-purposes to get to the bottom of the matter.

Dr C. Ghanshyam Visakhapatnam

AMARAVATI LANDS

We welcome the AP High Court staying the probe initiated by the CID into the Amaravati capital land case (*HC stays inquiry into lands case, March 20*). Once we go through the proceedings, everyone can understand the reason for the case. It is a pity that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy repeatedly fails in court when he tries to prove the former CM corrupt.

Panchakarla Govardhana Rao Kankipadi

Even after 20 months in power, the YSRC government could not find evidence against then CM N. Chandrababu Naidu and his colleagues. It is a pity that Section 146 of the APCRDA Act bars prosecution against the government authority, officer etc for any action. Who created this Act? It was the TD government. So, obviously it was meant for misuse or abuse of authority.

Govardhana Myneedu Vijayawada

Once jailed, the YSRC top brass wants their opponents to undergo the ordeal. The CID notices have already been questioned by the court. The CID ought to have thoroughly verified the charges before serving notice on the former chief minister instead of acting like minions of the ruling party. Mudslinging is the best way of defence now days as per the YSRC.

K. Sai Prasanna Tagore Tadepalligudem

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Big housing plan for SCs, STs in State

HYDERABAD, MARCH. 20 A Rs. 12-crore master plan to provide houses to the weaker sections through a co-operative apex federation was announced in the Legislative Assembly today by the Finance Minister Mr. K. Vijayabhaskara Reddi.

The Finance Minister was replying to the five-day general discussion on the vote-on-account budget.

He announced that the State Government proposed to organise a co-operative apex federation exclusively to look after the housing needs of the Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and Denotified Classes.

With loan assistance to the tune of Rs. 12 crores from the Life Insurance Corporation, the Minister said, the proposed Federation would put up 70,000 houses next year, each house costing some Rs. 1,800. Work on the project would start very soon, he added.

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



Mithun made to wait after biting bait; Mamata’s game of drones

It has been two weeks since actor Mithun Chakraborty was inducted into the BJP with great fanfare in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a rally in Kolkata. However, there is still no clarity about his exact role in the upcoming Assembly polls. No one knows if he will only campaign for the BJP or whether he will contest these elections and be projected as the party’s chief ministerial candidate. In his initial interviews, Chakraborty had been circumspect when asked if he was the BJP’s face for the top job but has subsequently warmed up to this suggestion, saying he will not mind taking on this responsibility if directed by the BJP leadership. However, the actor is still awaiting his turn as he has yet to participate in any major party programme. According to the buzz in Kolkata, BJP leaders Kailash Vijayvargiya and Dilip Ghosh are avoiding Chakraborty. Apparently, they are not confident about including him in the poll campaign as the actor is reputed to be an “unguided missile.”

Here’s more on the high-voltage West Bengal Assembly poll. The battle between the

Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamul Congress and its main challenger, the BJP, is intensifying with both sides pulling no punches in showing the other one down. As the campaign picks up momentum, several photographs have appeared in the local press showing the sparse crowds at the public rallies addressed by BJP leaders, including its president J.P. Nadda and home minister Amit Shah. It appears the Trinamul Congress has been using a drone to take aerial shots of the BJP’s election rallies, which are then brandished by it to mock its chief political rival.

Rahul Gandhi may have stepped down as Congress president close to two years ago but he continues to have a major say in the party’s internal matters. For instance, the Nehru-Gandhi scion was involved in the selection of candidates for the upcoming Assam and Kerala Assembly polls. The Wayanad MP is learnt to have asked the Youth Congress to provide a list of potential candidates for both states, preferably who do not belong to political dynasties,

come from humble backgrounds and have been working at the grassroots. As a result, 15 Youth Congress office bearers made it to the Kerala list. Most of them are in the 25-50 years age group. Another 10 tickets have gone to those who moved from the Youth Congress to the party’s district and state units in the last 10 years. In Assam, six members of the Youth Congress non-dynast candidates have been fielded. The only exception here is Angkita Dutta. Rahul Gandhi has also told the Youth Congress leaders that this experiment will be replicated at the national level if these candidates perform well in the Assembly polls, provided they intensify their agitations and protests against the government.

There appears to be no end to the Ashok Gehlot-Sachin Pilot saga. After their brief show of solidarity when the Rajasthan chief minister and his former deputy held joint public rallies for the forthcoming four by-elections, their cold war has resurfaced once again. Mr Pilot apparently saw red when he heard that Mr Gehlot planned to

field his son Vaibhav Gehlot from the Rajsamand Assembly seat. There was also talk that Rajasthan Assembly Speaker C.P. Joshi’s son Himanshu would be fielded from the Sahada Assembly segment. Mr Gehlot is keen on rehabilitating his son ever since he lost the 2019 Lok Sabha poll from Jodhpur. However, the two veteran leaders hit a hurdle when Mr Pilot and his camp followers objected to their choices. Meanwhile, Mr Pilot is getting impatient and has been petitioning the Congress leadership in Delhi to meet his long pending demands. Though he has been reassured that he will be adequately compensated for the loss of the deputy chief minister’s post, nothing concrete has emerged so far.

The Modi government is extremely sensitive to criticism, especially when it comes from civil society groups or politicians in the West. Recently, the government reacted sharply when US-based non-governmental organisation Freedom House and Sweden-based Varieties of Democracy Institute

downgraded India on the democracy ratings with the Swedish institute describing India as an “electoral autocracy”. And yet the Modi government’s actions speak louder than its words. For instance, the ruling dispensation has gradually restricted the entry of media persons to several ministries and the Parliament House. It was helped in this exercise by the year-long pandemic as the fear of infection was used to keep out journalists. These restrictions remain in place even though the government never fails to point out how it succeeded in containing the coronavirus pandemic. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has been proactive in denying access to journalists to Parliament. Not only has entry to Parliament been severely restricted but now even the routine exercise of renewing a journalist’s annual pass has become problematic. Apparently, the applications for the renewal of passes has been sent to the Speaker’s office for further scrutiny.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

SHORT TAKES

WOMAN CUTS OFF HER MOLESTER'S GENITALS IN MP

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC BHOPAL, MARCH 20

A woman in a Madhya Pradesh village chopped off a man's genitals for attempting to rape her at Amilia under Rampura police station in Sidhi district late on Friday. Both of them were arrested after they lodged cases against each other.

According to the police, the accused, Ramesh Saket (45), barged into the house of the 45-year-old victim late on Friday night. The woman was at home with her 13-year-old son; her husband was out of town. The son ran to safety, thinking that the intruder was a thief.

The accused then attempted to rape the woman who resisted him for around 20 minutes. During the course of the struggle, she picked up a sickle from under the bed and cut off the man's genitals.

Modi-Mamata clash over extortion

PM accuses Didi's nephew for creating single window for industries in West Bengal

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC KOLKATA, MARCH 20

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday branded West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress as a pathshala (school) teaching "brutality, extortion, cut-money, syndicate and anarchy" and accused her MP nephew Abhishek Banerjee of turning the system of "single-window" into "Bhaipo (nephew) window" for business in the state.

Referring to the global outage of some popular social networking applications on Friday night, Mr Modi also said that the state's development has been down for half a century and requested people to give "one chance" to the BJP in the ensuing Assembly election with a promise that he would devote his "life" for public

welfare.

The PM told a mega BJP rally at Kharagpur in West Midnapore, "Didir party hochchhe nirmamatar pathshala. Didir pathshalate syllabus hochchhe tolabaji. Didir pathshalate syllabus hochchhe cut-money. Didir pathshalate syllabus hochchhe syndicate. Didir pathshalate orajokotar training dewa hoy (Didi's party is a school of brutality, Extortion, Cut-Money and Syndicate are the syllabus there. Training of anarchy is imparted there.)"

Tearing into the dynasty politics in the ruling TMC, Mr Modi then targeted the CM's nephew. "On one hand the country is continuously progressing towards the single window system. It is needed in the government so that businessmen and entrepreneurs do not have to run from pillar to post. But in



Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives a picture of Rabindranath Tagore from a local party leader during an election campaign rally in support of BJP candidates, ahead of State Assembly polls, at BNR Ground, Kharagpur in West Midnapore district, on Saturday.

— PTI

West Bengal, a separate single window system has been made. While the people of Bengal are aware of it, the people of the country do not know about it. What is this single win-

dow in Bengal? It is a Bhaipo window. Without passing through this window, nothing happens in Bengal," he alleged without taking Banerjee's name. Modi, who has a

huge fan following on social media, said, "Many of you know last night WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram remained down for 50-55 minutes. People became impatient and

worried. Questions cropped up in their mind. Though it was only for 50-55 minutes, everyone kept thinking about what happened. While some things on social media were down for 50-55 minutes worldwide, in Bengal development has been down for the last 50-55 years. So was the trust, dreams and resolve. I can understand your impatience."

Seeking votes for the BJP, he added, "In the last 70 years you gave chances to many. You have seen the exploitation by the Congress, experienced the destruction by the Left parties and realised how the TMC shattered your dreams in the last 10 years. Give us a chance of five years. We will ensure the waste of the last 70 years is removed. Give us your blessings once. We will not care about our life for your welfare.

JAN. 26 VIOLENCE IN DELHI WAS GOVT PLAN: TIKAIT

Shahjahanpur: Bharatiya Kisan Union chairman Naresh Tikait on Saturday alleged the BJP government was behind the January 26 violence in Delhi, and it is "insulting" farmers.

Addressing a mahapanchayat at Puwaya, Tikait said, "The BJP government itself engineered the violence in Delhi, and insulted the farmers."

"The BJP government is the biggest enemy of the farmers. There still is time for all farmers to unite, otherwise they will reach to the brink of destruction."

He also claimed that whatever happened in Delhi during farmers' tractor march on January 26, "was a plan of the government, and the accused were also people of the government. — PTI

Singh: Deshmukh asked Waze to collect ₹100 cr per month

BHAGWAN PARAB | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 20

In a sensational twist to Antillia security scare case, former Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh has reportedly accused Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh of extortion. In his alleged letter to chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, Singh has claimed that Deshmukh had directed the suspended police officer Sachin Waze to collect ₹100 crore every month for him from bars and restaurants. Deshmukh has denied the charges.

However, Singh's letter not only has levelled accusations against the home minister, but also casts aspersions on Thackeray, Sharad Pawar and Ajit Pawar by claiming that these three leaders were

already made aware of Deshmukh's acts.

Singh was removed from the post of police commissioner amid row over an explosives-laden vehicle found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence. Antillia and was transferred to Maharashtra's Home Guard department.

Singh wrote, "Sachin Waze who was heading the Crime Intelligence Unit of the Crime Branch of the Mumbai Police, was instructed by Anil Deshmukh to assist in collection of funds for him. He expressed to Waze that he had a target to accumulate ₹100 crores a month by telling there are about 1,750 bars, restaurants and other establishments in Mumbai and if a sum of ₹two-three lakhs each was collected from each of them, a monthly collection of ₹40-

50 crores was achievable. The Home Minister added that the rest of the collection could be made from other sources."

"The Hon'ble Home Minister has been calling my officers bypassing me and other superior officers of the Police Department. He instructed them to carry out official assignments and collection schemes including financial transactions based on his expectations and targets to collect money," he further said.

Singh also alleged that he has been made a scapegoat to divert attention from the actual wrongdoers in the Mukesh Ambai security scare case.

However, Deshmukh has rubbished the allegations of extortion made by Singh saying the former Mumbai top cop is trying to save himself.

HOSABALE NEW RSS'S GENERAL SECRETARY

DC CORRESPONDENT WITH AGENCY INPUTS NEW DELHI/BENGALURU, MARCH 20

Senior RSS leader Dattatreya Hosabale on Saturday succeeded Suresh 'Bhaipyaji' Joshi as the second-in-command in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Hosabale was elected as the 'sarkaryavah' general secretary during the concluding day of the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha of the RSS in Bengaluru.

Born in Karnataka's Shivamogga, Hosabale is a postgraduate in English literature. He joined the RSS in 1968 after being associated with the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student wing of the RSS. He was jailed during the Emergency era.

Interacting with the media in Bengaluru, Hosabale while replying to a query on 'Love Jihad' said the RSS will support laws against "Love Jihad", maintaining that the issue had nothing to do with religion. "The use of fraudulent methods to lure girls for marriage, (religious) conversion, any kind of misuse or taking them to other countries has to be condemned and opposed... Some states have even come forward to make laws against this and the RSS supports this," he said.

When asked about the nomenclature, Hosabale said "Love Jihad" was used by the courts and not the Sangh. "Karnataka and Kerala high courts have confirmed the practice of Love Jihad," he said, adding that there was no question of religion in this.

He also distanced the RSS from Uttarakhand chief minister Tirath Singh Rawat's statement on women wearing ripped jeans. Talking about political parties targetting the RSS for various issues, he said they were free to express their opinions in a democracy but "it is wrong to say that the government is controlled from one place."



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar along with US defence secretary Lloyd Austin during a meeting, in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

Austin raises human rights issues at meet

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 20

US defence secretary Lloyd Austin on Saturday told external affairs minister S. Jaishankar in an hour-long meeting that "as the two largest democracies in the world, human rights and values are important to us and we will lead with these values," government sources confirmed on Saturday.

Jaishankar "agreed and emphasised that a strong relationship between the two democracies was not only important for both countries but for the rest of the world", sources added. The Indo-Pacific and Afghanistan were two important issues discussed during the meeting.

Observers point out that the Biden administration has been under pressure from prominent Democrats at home to strongly raise various human rights issues and "concerns" with India including over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the Kashmir issue.

On Saturday, sources said, "Discussions focused on

the strategic situation in the Indo-Pacific. The US side briefed about the recent visits in East Asia. EAM spoke about India's current security challenges and our long term strategic outlook. The conversation also covered the changing global scenario, including Europe and West Asia."

Sources further said, "Afghanistan was addressed in some detail. Assessments were exchanged on the peace process and the ground situation, as also the concerns and interests of regional powers and neighbours. The EAM appreciated the Biden administration's engagement with India on this issue."

Sources said, "The steady growth of bilateral cooperation was recognised by both sides. EAM apprised (the US) defence secretary of the progress and potential of various aspects of the leadership. Highlighting the commonalities and convergence, the EAM said that the relationship was unique for the breadth and intensity of cooperation that covered so many domains."

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IN BRIEF

Lankan bus crash kills 13, injures 31

Colombo: A passenger bus plunged off a road in central Sri Lanka on Saturday, killing 13 people and injuring more than 30. Police said the bus fell into a precipice near the town of Passara, about 240 kilometres east of Colombo, its stated destination. Police spokesman Ajith Rohana said an initial investigation showed the negligence of the driver caused the accident. It wasn't immediately clear if the driver survived.

IMRAN KHAN TESTS POSITIVE FOR CORONAVIRUS

Islamabad, March 20: Pakistan Prime minister Imran Khan on Saturday tested positive for the Covid-19 and is self-isolating at home, his top aide on health said, two days after he got the first shot of vaccination. Khan, 67, was vaccinated on Thursday as part of the nationwide anti-Coronavirus vaccination campaign which is underway in its first phase.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination Dr Faisal Sultan took to Twitter to confirm that Khan has contracted the coronavirus. "PM Imran Khan has tested positive for Covid-19 and is self isolating at home," he said in a tweet. Khan's spokesman Dr Sheebaz Gill said that the prime minister has just a slight fever and cough. —PTI

AMID PROTESTS, MYANMAR RAIL STAFF MOVE OUT

Mandalay (Myanmar), March 20: Residents of Myanmar's second-biggest city helped striking railway workers move out of their state-supplied housing on Saturday after the authorities said they would have to leave if they kept supporting the protest movement against last month's military coup.

Mandalay residents carried the workers' furniture and other household items to trucks, van and pickup trucks. The state railway workers last month went on strike as key and early supporters of the civil disobedience movement against the Feb. 1 coup that toppled the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

The military regime has sought to force them back to work through intimidation, which included a nighttime, gun-firing patrol last month through their housing area in Mandalay and a raid in the railway workers' housing area in Yangon. Protests against the coup continued on Saturday in cities and town across the country, including in Mandalay and Yangon. —AP

7.0 MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE HITS NORTHERN JAPAN

Tokyo, March 20: A strong earthquake struck on Saturday off northern Japan, shaking buildings even in Tokyo and triggering a tsunami advisory for a part of the northern coast. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries.

The US Geological Survey put the strength at magnitude 7.0 and depth at 54 kilometres (33.5 miles). The shaking started just before 6.10 pm. The quake was centered off the coast of Miyagi prefecture, in the country's rugged northeast, which was heavily damaged during the huge earthquake and tsunami of 2011 that left more than 18,000 people dead. Japan's Meteorological Agency issued an advisory for a tsunami up to 1 metre (yard) in height for Miyagi prefecture immediately after the quake, but lifted it about 90 minutes later. The tsunami might have reached parts of the Miyagi coast already, Japan's NHK public television said.

Officials there said there were no immediate reports of damage. The strong tremor caused a temporary blackout in some areas and suspended bullet train services in the area, NHK said. The Nuclear Regulation Authority said no abnormalities have been detected at nuclear power plants in the region. —AP

EU threatens Astra with ban on export of vaccine

Berlin, March 20: The European Union's executive arm is increasing its pressure on pharmaceutical companies to speed up their vaccine delivery to the continent as virus numbers are rising again in many member countries.

The European Commission said on Saturday that AstraZeneca in particular could face export bans to countries outside

the EU if it didn't quickly deliver the promised amount of vaccines to the 27-nation bloc. "We have the possibility to ban planned exports," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Saturday.

"This is a message to AstraZeneca: You fulfill your part of the deal toward Europe before you start to deliver to other countries," von der

Leyen said in an interview with a German media group. Von der Leyen said the contract between the EU and AstraZeneca clearly regulates how much vaccines the EU gets from AstraZeneca's plants inside the EU and in Britain.

However, von der Leyen added, "We didn't get anything from the Brits while we are delivering vaccines to them." —AP

**PRE RELEASE EVENT****TODAY****SILPAKALAVEDIKA, MADHAPUR, HYDERABAD. FROM 06:00PM ONWARDS.****CHIEF GUEST TRIVIKRAM GARU****IN THEATRES MARCH 26TH 2021****A DEVI SRI PRASAD MUSICAL****PDV PRASAD PRESENTS SITHARA ENTERTAINMENTS****Rangde!**
gimme some love**SURYADEVARA NAGA VAMSI****VENKY ATLURI****P.C. SREERAM****NAVIN NOOLI AVINASH KOLLA****S.VENKATARATHNAM (VENKAT)**

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

A reluctant road film that goes adrift

Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar

CAST: Arjun Kapoor, Parineeti Chopra, Jaideep Ahlawat, Raghubir Yadav, Neena Gupta
DIRECTOR: Dibakar Banerjee
RATING: ★★★
 Playing in theatres

SUPARNA SHARMA

There is really no reason to dislike *Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar*.

The film — directed by Dibakar Banerjee that he's co-written with Varun Grover — opens with a scene that has the sharp bite and gritty traces of Kanu Behl's saga of urban discontent and fury, *Tittli* (2015).

We get a skewed view of three boys in a moving car in Haryana. They are discussing women.

Somewhere nearby, a girl is idling in her room at a posh hotel. She gets dressed, puts on red lipstick and goes to a restaurant to meet someone.

A journalist tries to draw her out, get her attention, invites her to a party.

A text is answered by a cop who arrives with a note and a car.

Bang bang... Two worlds collide.

This opening sequence of events is an exciting forewarning that whips up high expectations. And for a while *SAPF* is engaging. The characters have layers, they feel real and are inhabited with warmth and confidence by skilled actors.



The problem is that the film's plotting is sparse, and the direction confused.

Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar is a road film that doesn't want to be a road film. It doesn't want to go in the usual direction of, "and then they fell in love". That's a welcome though, a noble enterprise!

Problem is that *SAPF* doesn't know what else to do.

So while it takes the same road, and en route picks items from the buffet of events common to almost all road films — two strangers face threat, are forced to escape together, have arguments, reconcile because of fear of discovery, meet creepy and non-creepy people, suffer at least one assault or attempted rape, bad people get closer, tense climatic escape and, finally, ishk, ishk — it just does it all slowly.

It also replaces melodrama with an immersive *dekho* around. Instead of giving us maudlin moments and *mohabbatain*, *SAPF* keeps a straight face, is often sullen, and prefers to gaze at trees and stuff.

As I said, there's nothing to dislike about *Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar*. It's a decent film that promises more than it eventually delivers.

Satinder Dahiya *urf* Pinky (Arjun Kapoor) is a suspended cop, and Sandeep Walia *urf* Sandy (Parineeti Chopra) is a top honcho at Parivartan Bank. They are thrown together because of a massive bank scam around a government scheme that has the power to bring down the bank, and maybe the government as well.

Pinky thinks he's just running a chore, doing his former boss a favour till he realises his irrelevance and their treachery. She takes a while to figure what is going on.

Desperate to survive, they head to Pithoragarh to cross over to Nepal. And this journey they undertake together highlights the difference between the two and the worlds they come from.

Sandy has money and Pinky understands how this strange, devious world works. She carries a ₹2 lakh bag and he is helping her for ₹10 lakh.

In Pithoragarh, Uncle (Raghuvir Yadav) and Auntie (Neena Gupta) and a shopkeeper father-son duo add some recuperative Uttarakhandi flavour to the film. There are also some cute moments around *roti* and *achar* when

Pinky and Sandeep are forced to play house-house. But then...

Dibakar Banerjee is a fabulous director and he does small town India very well. He is also very political.

Here too what's quite nice is that Dibakar and Varun make the girl rich, independent and someone who doesn't think much about sleeping with her boss. "I'm not some local chamiya," Sandy says to Pinky.

And then there is Swabhiman scheme, Parivartan bank and a cop for us to read stuff into.

Shopkeeper's son Munna with his blonde mohawk hairdo, Uncle and Auntie who are forever quibbling, try to anchor the film. But *SAPF* wants to meander in Pithoragarh, instead it goes adrift.

There's a dance at an engagement party, fighting off a creepy bank officer, and then a man dresses as a woman and dances in a *baraat*. In between are moments of dull nothingness.

What works for *Sandeep Aur Pinky Faraar* are its actors. All of them are very good though some of them are also playing the same roles we have seen them play before. Jaideep Ahlawat is a cop (Pataal Lok), Neena Gupta-Raghubir Yadav are husband wife (Panchayat), and Arjun Kapoor-Parineeti Chopra have been a thing since *Ishaqzaade*. She slapped him then, and she slaps him here.

Having said that, both Arjun Kapoor and Parineeti Chopra are quite good. He more than her.

Watch *SAPF*, but don't expect big thrills and high jinx. Expect some sweet moments and some pointless, dull meandering.



The Courier, in which Cumberbatch is an everyman spy

LINDSEY BAHR

The new Cold War film *The Courier* about a Soviet whistleblower and the British businessman who helped transport information to Western intelligence agencies is both based on real events and people and also is very much the product of a screenwriter's imagination. That's not to criticise the film written by Tom O'Connor (*The Hitman's Bodyguard*) and directed by Dominic Cooke (*On Chesil Beach*). It's simply to say that it is more historical fiction than it is history. The whole truth of this extraordinary chapter has likely died with the principal characters and/or been obscured and distorted by the people who write these things down.

What we know is that there was indeed a Soviet official named Oleg Penkovsky, played in the film by Georgian actor Merab Ninidze, who was an essential source for the Americans during the Cold War and the leadup to the Cuban Missile Crisis. One of Penkovsky's contacts was a British civilian named Greville Wynne, who wrote an autobiography about his experiences. Even the reliability of that account has been questioned. Still, it provided an intriguing jumping off point for O'Connor to write a classic espionage thriller that opens in select theaters Friday.

In *The Courier*, after Penkovsky makes an initial outreach to the West, MI6 and the CIA are at a loss for how to cultivate him as a source. They decide a civilian who might do business in the Soviet Union is the best bet and somewhat casually land on Wynne.

Cumberbatch, who we've seen play suave, cruel and egotistical many times over the years, plays Wynne as an ordinary middle class schlub just trying to keep his family afloat and club memberships intact. He doesn't suspect he's dining with spies when his government friend Dickie (Angus Wright) and an American CIA agent, Emily (Rachel Brosnahan), sit down with him to recruit him into service. He reacts with a boyish giddiness as though it was Ian Fleming himself sitting across the table.

Emily is one of the inventions of the film. O'Connor has said he just decided to make the CIA agent a woman. It certainly breaks up the monotony of such a male cast and it's always a delight to see Brosnahan in 60s garb. But it also feels a little insincere to just insert women in specific historical settings where they weren't. It was also done with the Felicity Jones character in *The Aeronauts* and the effect is often the opposite of empowering. Since *The Courier* is so fictionalised, however, it's easier to accept here. Plus, she gets to be the more persuasive agent.

Not that Wynne, who was in a bit of a rut, needed much convincing. He jumps on the opportunity and starts taking extended trips abroad, leaving his wife (Jessie Buckley) and young son at home. The film has an almost ebullient tone for much of the first half as Wynne and Penkovsky get to know and like each other over caviar lunches, big drunken nights out and tearful evenings at the ballet. It lightly zips along despite the fact that the stakes include death and nuclear holocaust. The honeymoon is soon to end, though, as suspicions start to arise around this business relationship and things get infinitely more complicated for our protagonists, which I won't spoil here, but it's a tonal whiplash.

The Courier is a story we haven't seen on film but it still feels very familiar most of the time, with espionage film tropes and clichés to spare. While it might not be on the same level as *Bridge of Spies*, it's solid, well-acted and enjoyable nonetheless. Just don't use it as the text for any history reports.

The Courier, a Lionsgate/Roadside Attractions release in select theaters Friday, is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America for "violence, partial nudity, brief strong language, and smoking throughout."

Running time: 111 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four. —AP

The Courier

CAST: Olga Kurylenko, Gary Oldman, Amit Shah
DIRECTOR: Zackary Adler
RATING: ★★★

No style, no substance, just bhai log ki much-much

SUPARNA SHARMA

All backbenchers in schools across schools and millennials are bound by an experience and habit unique to them. Whenever stumped by the deadly combo of not studying at all and a really tough paper, they first stare wantonly at the toppers who are writing furiously with their heads down, raising their hand only to ask for extra sheets. Then they gaze at the wide expanse of the blank answer sheet that needs to be filled.

I and my backbencher ilk had a time-honoured solution — we would set out on the mission to fill at least four pages. But since we knew nothing, we would write whatever we could recall from whichever subject, but in a cursive style invented by lagards.

We'd elongate each letter, stretch the connecting lines between them as far as possible, ensuring that the rule that would usually take eight words now had only three. This would fill the time and page, though it never ever fooled the teacher.

But, *umeed pe duniya kayam hai*. And we'd do it again, only to irritate, not impress yet another teacher.

Director Sanjay Gupta is a bit like us backbenchers.

He thinks he can fool his audience by elongating shots, by putting everything that he can in slow-motion, hoping they'll mistake it for substance, or even style. He is wrong.

If you take away all the slo-mo

Mumbai Saga

CAST: John Abraham, Mahesh Manjrekar, Amol Gupte, Prateik Babbar, Emraan Hashmi, Kajal Aggarwal, Rohit Roy, Samir Soni, Gulshan Grover, Suniel Shetty
DIRECTOR: Sanjay Gupta
RATING: ★★
 Playing in theatres

shots of people walking in various types of footwear, of cars and jeeps swerving, of one man bashing, many men flying and blood sprouting, Sanjay Gupta's *Mumbai Saga* will become a Mini Mumbai Blip.

The film's story, set in the Eighties and Nineties, is purportedly of a real-life Mumbai gangster, one D.K. Rao, who was an aide of Chhota Rajan but then branched off on his own into extortion, escaped three encounter attempts, including one in which he received seven bullets. He is currently in jail.

But Gupta takes liberties with the story, characters, events. He picks random incidents and people from the long history of Mumbai underworld purely because of their swag.

Mumbai Saga has four main characters and a story that's been done to death.

There is Bhau (Mahesh Manjrekar) the politician who keeps giving speeches about Marathi Manoos,

threatens non-Marathis, talks about renaming Bombay to Mumbai. He wears a beard, a shawl, and he sketches.

Then there's a vegetable seller, Amartya Rao (John Abraham). He's a *seedha-sadha* guy till he is really pissed off by hafta-demanding gangsters. He chops off one guy's hand. This irks Gaitonde (Amol Gupte), who runs Mumbai's EMI hafta scheme from his prison cell.

And finally there is Inspector Vijay (Emraan Hashmi) who introduces himself as "Encounter Specialist", as if Police Encounter were a legit department, like narcotics and accounts.

The plot is about a simple man becoming a don by doing lots of don-giri on the instructions of Bhau. This is all made up of scenes in slo-mo where Amartya and his minions in terrible wigs do bodily harm to goons with fists and guns. In between there are some pointless appearances by Suniel Shetty, Gulshan Grover, Arjun (Prateik Babbar) and Seema (Kajal Aggarwal) the chatterbox. And for dialogue, there are gems such as these:

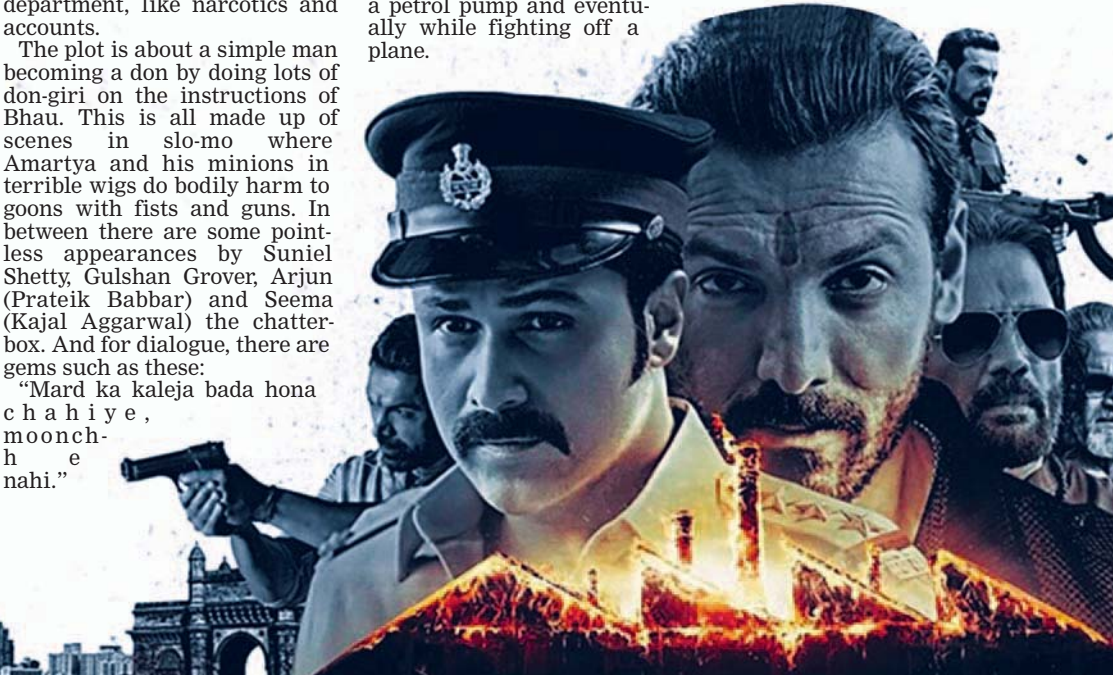
"Mard ka kaleja bada hona chahiye, moonch-henahi."

"Dumm (tail) toh teri hai hanin, toh Gayatonde ke saamne kya hilate ho?"

The plot contrives and makes its way to one Harvard educated businessman who strikes a deal with Gaitonde to evict people and sell mill land.

But Amartya warms him, "Teri gaadi bullet proof hai, tu nahin."

Ganeshji and an item girl make their respective appearances before Encounter Specialist Vijay chases and shoots them all — in a brothel, at an anda-pav stand, at a petrol pump and eventually while fighting off a plane.



In Yes Day, kids get their way for 24 hours



JAKE COYLE

Like an innocuous kid version of *The Purge*, Miguel Arteta's *Yes Day* imagines an annual 24-hour holiday of lawlessness.

The concept comes from Amy Krouse Rosenthal's 2009 picture book, which suggested a day when parents — regularly such fonts of "No!" — have to answer in the positive to their children's demands. For some, the idea had real appeal not just for giving kids a shot at decision-making freedom but for momentarily relieving parents of the burden of constant disapproval.

One parent, in particular, took to *Yes Day*: Jennifer Garner. The actress has previously spoken on social media about holding the holiday with her three children. And she's a producer of the film, which debuts Friday on Netflix.

"No is part of the job," narrates Allison Torres (Garner) in the film's opening scenes. But so stern is Allison —

Yes Day

CAST: Jennifer Garner, Edgar Ramirez, Jenna Ortega
DIRECTOR: Miguel Arteta
RATING: ★
 Streaming on Netflix

the bad cop next to her more easy-going husband Carlos (Edgar Ramirez) — that her three children's school projects suggest a dictatorship in need of a coup. One makes a video comparing her to Stalin and Mussolini.

When a guidance counselor (Nat Faxon) suggests *Yes Day* as a remedy, Allison goes along, with a few stipulations. You can't break laws and you've got to stay within 20 miles of home. This leads to a day of wall-to-wall fun, with bed-jumping, ice-cream feasts, a car wash trip with the windows down and a surprise theme-park visit. The day tests both Allison's helicopter parenting impulses

and the kids' own desire for independence. That's especially true for 14-year-old Katie (Jenna Ortega, an impressively poised young actor), who wants to attend a concert without her mom.

It's all lightly predictable as the family works out a level of comfort that isn't all yes or entirely no.

There's something to be said for lower-stakes family films, a genre that has increasingly aped the world-ending scale of superhero films. (One pandemic discovery for my family was 1974's *Swallows and Amazons*, a charming British film about kids just playing on a lake. On their own, they're plenty capable of making their own tents and adventures.)

Yes Day isn't nearly so sweet. Arteta (*The Good Girl*, *Cedar Rapids*) has an underrated ability at crafting comic, humanistic movies out of commercial concepts. But *Yes Day* slides too often into contrived, loudly scored montages of "fun" that don't

transfer to those of us watching. And while Garner and Ramirez are both very fine actors, neither of them is funny. Not to be negative on *Yes Day*, but it would be a lot better if, say, Will Ferrell and Maya Rudolph played the parents. (Though what movie wouldn't be improved with that casting?) The film's best moments come courtesy of Faxon and the very funny Arturo Castro, the *Broad City* actor who makes every scene he's in better. Here he plays a hapless and needy police officer.

Of course, after a pandemic year that has ruled out so much for kids, *Yes Day* may be a welcome reprieve for them. My kids, naturally, loved the idea and will probably take me to task for saying anything but "Yes" to *Yes Day*.

Yes Day, a Netflix release, is rated PG by the Motion Picture Association of America for some rude and suggestive material, and brief language. Running time: 86 minutes. Two stars out of four. —AP

SHORT TAKES

Yashaswini pips Manu for gold

New Delhi: India's Yashaswini Singh Deswal personified consistency and calmness on her way to winning the gold medal in the women's 10m air pistol ahead of the more celebrated Manu Bhaker in the ISSF World Cup here on Saturday. Deswal shot 238.8 to comfortably finish on top of the podium in the eight-women final while Bhaker managed 236.7 to settle for the silver medal. Viktoria Chaika of Belarus bagged the bronze medal with 215.9. The other Indian in the final, Shri Nivetha, started well but had to eventually settle for the fourth place with 193.5. Deswal secured her Tokyo Games quota with her gold medal in Rio. Deswal and Bhaker added to the bronze medal won by Divyansh Singh Panwar in the men's 10m air rifle earlier on the second competition day. — PTI

Three shooters test +ve at WC

New Delhi: Three shooters, including two from the Indian pistol men's team, have tested positive for Covid-19, National Rifle Association of India sources said on the second competition day of the ISSF World Cup here on Saturday. The shooters are currently self-isolating in their team hotel. Those who were sharing the rooms with the three shooters as well as their other teammates have also been isolated after undergoing Covid tests. The results of the roommates and other team members, though, have returned negative. A source said two among the three shooters are from the Indian contingent. "The shooters have been sent into isolation as per protocols. Testing is being done on a daily basis and that's their results have come to light," a source close to the federation said. — PTI

Vijender's winning run ends on 'ship'

Panaji: The unbeaten run of star Indian boxer Vijender Singh in the professional circuit ended on Friday night after he was defeated by his Russian opponent Artshy Lopsan in the 'Battle on Ship' here. Vijender, who had turned professional in 2015, entered the bout with a 12-0 record. In the opening round, Vijender was cautious in his approach as the Russian outplayed the Haryana boxer and used his height to perfection. The Russian, who was fighting his seventh bout, out-punched Vijender on the rooftop of the 'Majestic Pride Casino' ship, which resulted in a heart-break for the partisan crowd. The referee, after one minute and nine seconds in the fifth round, declared the Russian as the winner as the eight-round game ended in a knockout. — PTI

Leeds end London hoodoo with win

London: Patrick Bamford responded to his omission from the England squad with a goal as Leeds ended their misfortunes in London by beating Fulham 2-1 in the Premier League. Fulham missed a chance to move out of the relegation zone for the first time since December. After Bamford's 29th-minute opener, Fulham's Joachim Andersen equalized with his first goal for the club, and Raphinha notched Leeds' winner. Leeds have lost all five of their games in London this season, and were winless in their last 16 visits to the capital in all competitions, losing 14. Leeds took the lead when Jack Harrison's cross found Bamford, who put it past goalkeeper Alphonse Areola just before the half-hour mark. — AP

Live on TV

CRICKET	
India vs South Africa women: 2nd T20 from 7 pm on Star Sports 2, 3	
BADMINTON	
All England Open: Finals from 3.30 pm on Star Sports 2 HD, Star Sports 3	
FOOTBALL	
FA Cup Quarterfinals: Chelsea vs Sheffield United from 7 pm; Leicester City vs Manchester United from 10.30 pm on Sony Ten 2	
English Premier League: West Ham vs Arsenal from 8.30 pm; Aston Villa vs Tottenham Hotspur from 1 am (Monday) on Star Sports Select 1, HD	
Italian League: Juventus vs Benevento from 7.30 pm; Fiorentina vs AC Milan from 10.30 pm on Sony Six, HD	

LAST LAUGH

India crush England in last T20 to clinch 'see-saw' series

Ahmedabad, March 20: India defeated England by 36 runs in the fifth Twenty20 International to claim the series 3-2 here on Saturday. Rohit Sharma's sensational 64 and skipper Virat Kohli's well-crafted 80 powered India to a massive 224 for two, their best ever total against England, in the winner-takes-all fifth Twenty20. Skipper Virat Kohli contributed unbeaten 80 while Suryakumar Yadav scored 32 off 17 balls before Chris Jordan's stunning piece of fielding resulted in his dismissal off Adil Rashid.

Hardik Pandya remained unbeaten on 39. India struck early with Bhuvneshwar Kumar dismissing dangerous Jason Roy for a duck and kept consistent pressure on England.

Dawid Malan (68) and Jos Buttler (52) scored half-centuries but the required run rate kept mounting. They managed 188/8 for in their 20 overs.

After losing the toss for the fourth time in the series, India were predictably put in to bat by Eoin Morgan. Preparing themselves for success in all conditions ahead of the T20 World Cup, India thrived under the pressure of a series-decider to produce their best total of the series.

Jofra Archer and Mark Wood had troubled the Indians with their extra pace in earlier games but Rohit and Kohli sent them to the cleaners on way to their 94-run stand.

The hosts hammered 67 runs in the last five overs to give the innings a perfect finish.

Barring Ben Stokes and Adil Rashid, all England bowlers leaked more than 10 runs per over with Chris Jordan (0/57) being the most expensive. India decided to drop



India captain Virat Kohli (right) and batting partner Hardik Pandya celebrate scoring runs against England in the fifth Twenty20 at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Saturday. India won by 36 runs.

opener K.L. Rahul to accommodate an extra bowling option in left-arm pacer T Natarajan.

With no Rahul at the top, Kohli moved himself up the order to open with Rohit. The move worked wonders with Kohli and Rohit sharing a 94-run stand off 54 balls. Rohit did the bulk of the scoring in their partnership as Kohli was more than happy to enjoy a sensational display of stroke-making from the other end. — PTI

NUMBERS GAME

- Virat Kohli sets the record of most runs against England in Twenty-20. The Indian skipper reached this milestone during his unbeaten 80-run knock in the final Twenty-20 in Ahmedabad on Saturday.
- He made 577 runs at an average of 44.38 and a strike rate of 136.72 in 17 innings of as many matches with four fifties till the end of the Indian innings.
- India recorded their highest total against England by making 224 runs for the loss of two wickets in 20 overs.

— S. PERVEZ KAISER

SCORECARD

India: Rohit Sharma b Stokes 64, Virat Kohli (not out) 80, Suryakumar Yadav c Roy b Rashid 32, Hardik Pandya (not out) 39. Extras (lb-3, wd-6) 9. **Total (For 2 wts, in 20 overs) 224.**
ForW: 1-94, 2-143.
Bowling: Adil Rashid 4-0-31-1, Jofra Archer 4-0-43-0, Mark Wood 4-0-53-0, Chris Jordan 4-0-57-0, Sam Curran 1-0-11-0, Ben Stokes 3-0-26-1.
England: Jason Roy b Kumar 0, Jos Buttler c Pandya b Kumar 52, Dawid Malan b Thakur 68, Jonny Bairstow c Yadav b Thakur 7, Eoin Morgan (c) c sub (KL Rahul) b Pandya 1, Ben Stokes c Pant b Natarajan 14, Chris Jordan c Yadav b Thakur 11, Jofra Archer run out (Yadav/Pant) 1, Sam Curran (not out) 14, Adil Rashid (not out) 0. Extras (lb-9, w-11) 20. **Total (for 8 wts, in 20 over) 188.**
ForW: 1-0, 2-130, 3-140, 4-142, 5-142, 6-165, 7-168, 8-174.
Bowling: Bhuvneshwar Kumar 4-0-15-2, Hardik Pandya 4-0-34-1, Washington Sundar 1-0-13-0, Shardul Thakur 4-0-45-3, T. Natarajan 4-0-39-1, Rahul Chahar 3-0-33-0.

Sharath, Manika seal Tokyo spot

Doha, March 20: India got its best shot at a maiden table tennis medal at the Olympics on Saturday when Sharath Kamal and Manika Batra became the first Indian pairing to qualify for the mega event in Tokyo, beating world no. 8 duo of Sang-Su Lee and Jihee Jeon 4-2 in the final of the Asian qualification tournament here.

The 2018 Asian Games bronze medallists staged a remarkable comeback after being two sets down to outwit the top seeded Korean pair 8-11, 6-11, 11-5, 11-6, 13-11, 11-8 in a thrilling final to seal their Tokyo qualification in mixed doubles. Only the winner of the event qualified for the Games.

The Indian pairing had beaten the Koreans en route to a historic medal in Asian Games before losing to them on the pro tour the following year.

"Manika was unstoppable today. It is very important for her to play with flow so that I am able to play my power game. That is the only way we compliment each other.



She was outstanding.

"I never thought we could win the tournament. Now we are three games for winning an Olympic medal. It will be tough but it is our best shot," Sharath said referring to the 16-pairing draw at the Tokyo Games.

Sharath, who has also qualified for the singles event alongside G. Sathiyan, has now set sights at reaching at least the mixed doubles quarterfinals at the Games.

"I think if we can reach the quarters, it would be a fantastic result for us at the Games. Anything else from there is a bonus," said the world number 32.

The unprecedented result in mixed doubles means India will now have five entries in Tokyo (two each in men and women singles besides mixed). The delayed Tokyo Games will be held from July 23 to August 8 this year.

"I was really happy with

myself to be able to withstand the attack and services of a player like Lee Sang Su and Jion Jihee. Sharath *bhaiya* capitalised well with his attack to keep the pressure on them," Manika said.

On Friday, Sharath and Manika had defeated Singapore's Koen Pang Yew En and Lin Ye 4-2 in the semifinals to get to touching distance of making it to the showpiece event.

— PTI

SA WOMEN EASE PAST INDIA IN T20 OPENER

Lucknow, March 20: All-rounder Anneke Bosch first pegged the Indian women with a couple of wickets and then smashed an unbeaten 66 off 48 balls to ensure an easy eight wicket victory for South Africa in the first T20 International here on Saturday.

Harleen Deol's (52) confident maiden international fifty was the only silver lining for an otherwise lacklustre display by the Indians who posted a modest 130 for 6 after being invited to bat.

The Proteas chased down the target easily with five balls to spare with opener Bosch (66 not out) and captain Sune Luus (43 off 49 balls) sharing 90 runs for the second wicket. SA reached to 133 for 2 in 19.1 overs. —PTI

Brief Scores: India 130/6 in 20 overs (Harleen Deol 52, Jemimah Rodrigues 30) lost South Africa 133/2 in 19.1 overs (Anneke Bosch 66 not out; A Reddy 1/20).

Sindhu's quest halts in semis

Birmingham, March 20: Reigning world champion P. V. Sindhu suffered yet another semifinal defeat at the prestigious All England Championships as she went down tamely in straight games to Pornpawee Chochuwong of Thailand in the women's singles here on Saturday.

Sindhu, the Olympic silver medallist, couldn't match the pace, power and precision of her younger world number 11 rival Chochuwong and lost 17-21, 9-21 in a match that lasted 43 minutes.

The world No. 7 Indian had also lost at the semifinal at the 2018 edition as well.

Sindhu came into the semifinal contest with an overwhelming 4-1 head-to-head lead over the 23-year-old Chochuwong, whom she had beaten at the HSBC BWF World Tour Finals in January.

But all that statistics didn't matter as Chochuwong showed immaculate defence and played at a searing pace to outclass the Indian.

On Friday night, Sindhu had defeated Japan's third seed Akane Yamaguchi 16-21, 21-16, 21-19 in an intriguing quarterfinal match to make it to the last eight stage. Sindhu had battled for an hour and 16 minutes to eke out her first win over world number five Yamaguchi in last four meetings.

Sindhu played an aggressive game, matching Yamaguchi with her speed and retrieving skills but unforced errors allowed the Japanese to jump to a 11-6 lead. — PTI



P. V. Sindhu plays a shot against Thailand's Pornpawee Chochuwong in their All England Open Badminton Championships semifinal match at the Utilita Arena in Birmingham on Saturday. — AP

Bronze for Nikhat and Solanki

New Delhi, March 20: Indian boxers Nikhat Zareen (51kg) and Gaurav Solanki (57kg) settled for bronze medals after going down in their respective semifinals at the Bosphorus boxing tournament in Istanbul.

Asian Championship bronze medallist Nikhat suffered a 0-5 loss to 2019 Worlds silver medallist Busenaz Cakiroglu of Turkey in the semifinal on Friday. The opening round had both the boxers playing the waiting game but the subsequent rounds saw them attack a lot in an intense bout. However, the home favourite landed more punches and secured an unanimous win.

Commonwealth Games gold medallist Solanki, who notched up impressive wins in the previous rounds, lost 0-5 to Argentina's Nirco Cuello. He fought hard and displayed his attacking prowess but his efforts went in vain. — PTI

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