

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | THURSDAY | 4 MARCH 2021

WEATHER

Max: 38.0°C
Min: 20.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: NIL

Forecast: Clear.
Max/Min temp.
38/20 °C

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Shashti
till 10.01 pm
Star: Vishaka till 11.58 pm
Variyam: 6.49 am to 8.18 am;
3.45 am to 5.16 am (Friday)
Durmuhurtam: 10.39 am to
11.17 am; 3.12 pm to 3.58 pm
Rahukalam: 1.30 pm to 3 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Rajab 19,1441 AH
PRAVERS
(ROYAL MOSQUE)
Fajar: 5.40 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 4.30 pm
Maghrib: 5.48 pm
Isha: 8.30 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.18 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.10 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 11.16 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 10.52 AM

COUNTER POINT



Now, we have introduced platform reservation to avoid overcrowding!

SHORT TAKES

Force to guard Tibet trijunction

New Delhi: The government has sanctioned a dozen fresh Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) battalions, comprising over 13,000 personnel for the Nepal and Bhutan borders guarding force, to “fortify” defences along these fronts including the tri-junction area in Sikkim that adjoins Bhutan and Tibet, officials said.

Prez gets Covid vaccine dose-1

New Delhi: President Ram Nath Kovind was administered the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine at an army hospital on Wednesday and urged all eligible citizens to get vaccinated. According to tweets on his handle, the president, 75, was accompanied by his daughter when the vaccine dose was administered to him at the army’s Research and Referral Hospital here.

Taxmen raids Anurag Kashyap

Mumbai: The Income-Tax Department on Wednesday raided premises linked to filmmaker Anurag Kashyap, who launched the now dissolved production house Phantom Films, Reliance Entertainment group CEO Shishabhashi Sarkar and Taapsee Pannu. Searches took place at 30 locations in Mumbai and Pune.

■ Full report on Page 5

LEGAL | POINT

SC says dissent is not sedition

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said that expressing views that are contrary to the stand or position of the government of the day cannot be termed as sedition.

“It is not seditious to disagree with the government,” said a bench comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hemant Gupta, junking a PIL seeking action against former Jammu and Kash-mir chief minister Faro-oq Abdullah



NATION | 5

Sasikala quits politics ahead of TN polls

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HC STAYS SEC’S ORDER TO ALLOW RENOMINATION

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has suspended an order of State Election Commission (SEC) permitting 14 persons to file their nominations in the forthcoming urban local body polls.

A single judge bench headed by justice D. V. S. S. Somayajulu said the statute and rules clearly mention that complaints from nomination till declaration of results are not to be entertained by SEC. The court observed that any such issue could be decided only through an election petition.

The judge pointed out that candidates, who have been prevented from filing their nominations, must only approach tribunals.

The High Court judge opined that the State Election Commission has no authority to issue such an impugned order.

■ Page 2: Law favours petitioners, says HC

SEC ORDER TO BAR VOLUNTEERS IN POLLS STAYED

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has issued an order suspending the State Election Commission’s direction not to involve ward volunteers in urban local body polls.

A single judge bench headed by Justice DVSS Somayajulu said there was no need to suspend all activities of the ward volunteers referring to the impugned order of the SEC permitting the ward volunteers to carry on their normal and routine mandated responsibilities.

■ Page 2: Set up call centre for complaints: HC

Karnataka minister quits over sexual abuse charge

Bengaluru, March 3: Karnataka water resources minister Ramesh Jarkiholi on Wednesday resigned from the state cabinet, following allegations of sexual harassment against him.

His resignation came after protests and criticism by opposition parties and several sections of society, causing a huge embarrassment to the government and the ruling BJP.

In his resignation letter to Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa just ahead of the cabinet meeting this afternoon, Jarkiholi claimed he was innocent.

Fervour peaks



Devotees perform during procession ahead of Kumbh Mela 2021, amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, in Haridwar, on Wednesday.

— PTI

372 panchayats to vote on 15th

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

The State Election Commission on Wednesday issued notification for conduct of elections to the left over offices of sarpanches and wards in 372 gram panchayats. They will be held from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm on March 15.

The SEC stated that elections could not be held to the offices of sarpanches and wards in the recent polls for reasons like all nominations being either invalid or were withdrawn.

According to the schedule, the election notice would be issued by the returning officer on Thursday so that nominations can be filed from 10.30 am to 5 pm.

The last day for receipt of nomination is up to 5 pm on March 6 and scrutiny of nominations will begin by 8 am the next day.

Appeal against rejection of nominations will be up to 5 pm on March 8 while withdrawal of can-

● The last day for receipt of nomination is up to 5 pm on March 6

● Polling to be held from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm on March 15 and counting of votes will be taken up on the same day.

didatures can be till 3 pm on March 10. Polling to be held from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm on March 15 and counting of votes will be taken up on the same day.

State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar called upon registered voters to elect their sarpanches and wards in the notified gram panchayats.

In Srikakulam district, elections are to be held for two sarpanch positions at Pattupuram and Nuvvularevu gram panchayats and to several wards in 38 gram panchayats.

■ Page 2: Polls in some leftover villages

J&K SEPARATIST LEADER RELEASED FROM DETENTION

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, MARCH 3

The Jammu and Kashmir police said on Wednesday said that All Parties Hurriyat Conference chief and Muslim cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq is no longer under house detention.

The Mirwaiz was among hundreds of people placed under house arrest or jailed ahead of J&K was striped of its special status.

WORLD | 6

Tadon forced to exit WH nomination

SPORTS | 8

India vs England final Test from today



Vol. 25 No. 303 Established 1940 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

Jagan for reforms to revitalise coop

Says PACS should offer non-credit services

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy agreed to bring in reforms in the cooperative sector and instructed that loans should be provided to the needy by district central cooperative banks.

He conducted a review meeting on cooperative sector reforms, multi-purposes centres and milk scheme in his camp office at Tadepalli on Wednesday.

The meeting discussed the recommendations of NABCONS (NABARD Consultancy Services) on management methods to strengthen the co-operative services and make them more efficient. It was suggested to digitise APCOB, DCCBs and PACS for comprehensive banking services. It was suggested that the PACS should offer non-credit services along with credit services and extend its network.

Proposals were made for setting up one PACS for every three Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBK) and to appoint agriculture, banking, finance and accountancy professionals as directors to boards of



Proposals were made for setting up one PACS for every three RBK and to appoint agriculture, banking, finance and accountancy professionals as directors to boards of APCOB and DCC banks.

It was also recommended to amend the APCS Act to allow half of the board to retire every two and a half years. They agreed to bring professionals on a one-third ratio in PACS, including agriculture assistants working in village secretariats. It was decided to audit PACS regularly and the CM called for an action plan on irregularities and suggested that the investigation should be done by third party agencies.

He said DCC banks should lend loans in a fair manner and there should be definite procedures on disbursement of loans.

Recommendations were made to ensure DCC banks support the programmes being implemented by the government in agriculture and allied sectors. It was decided to increase the market share of cooperative banks up to 20 per cent and the planning of disbursement of loans should support the programmes of RBKs and food processing MSME units.

He said the negative opinion that people have about DCC banks should go away. Towards this, banks should deliver quality and transparent services and warned that there should be no political interference, whatsoever, in financial activities.

Digitisation of primary agriculture cooperative societies should be completed as per timelines. The action plan for digitization would be completed within three months and the work by March next year. The CM sought focus on the production of ethanol in sugar factories so that they would get some relief.

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SHORT TAKES

Law favours petitioners: HC

From Page 1

The court maintained that even if efforts made by SEC are laudable with the avowed objective of conducting free and fair polls, the fact still remains that law is in favour of petitioners. It may be mentioned that SEC had earlier issued an order permitting 14 persons to file their nominations for the scheduled local body polls on March 10. These persons had complained that they were either prevented from filing their nominations or forced to withdraw their nominations when the local body election process was on in March, 2020. However, these elections were postponed due to Coronavirus pandemic. Only four of 14 persons permitted, however, filed their nominations.

GP ELECTIONS IN SOME LEFTOVER VILLAGES

From Page 1

In Visakhapatnam district, it will be held for a sarpanch position at Ginnelakonta and to several wards in 34 gram panchayats.

In West Godavari, elections will be held for sarpanch position at LND Peta and many wards in 10 gram panchayats.

In Prakasam, sarpanch elections are due in Narrisetty Vari Palem gram panchayat while it will be for four sarpanch positions in Nellore, including Kampasamudram, Velicherla, Vavileru and Mypativari Kandriga gram panchayats. In Kadapa, elections for sarpanch positions will be in T. Velama Vari Palli and K. Sugumanchupalli. In Kurnool, election will be held for sarpanch at Padur gram panchayat while in Anantapur it will be the Ravuludiki gram panchayat.

HC: SET UP CALL CENTRE FOR COMPLAINTS

From Page 1

The court opined that in case any attempts were made by the volunteers, appropriate action for coercion, intimidation and undue influence could be taken up under relevant provisions of the law.

The court observed that conduct of a free and fair poll was the ultimate objective of the SEC and all those involved in the election process and said that if the grievance of the petitioners was that the voters were being threatened with withdrawal of benefits by ward volunteers, the court suggested to the SEC that it could take further steps like setting up 24 hours call centre to receive complaints from each urban local body and also could set up mobile kiosks to receive complaints.

The court also suggested that the SEC could give wide publicity in case the individuals were threatened or coerced to make a complaint by highlighting the legal provisions and in extreme cases, police protection could also be given to the voters to enable them to exercise their franchise.

The court laid stress that an educated and informed voter, conscious of his rights and duties, was the main requirement today.

The SEC's contention was that the ward volunteers should not be entrusted with the distribution of voters' slips and they should be without mobile phones as it would result in influencing the voters.

4 VOLUNTEERS GET NOTICE FOR POLL PARTICIPATION

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

Notices were issued to four Ward Volunteers for their participation in the election campaign at Guntur on Wednesday.

Guntur Municipal Corporation commissioner Challa Anuradha said that volunteers cannot participate in the election campaign but Volunteers Durga Bhavani, Dasaripalli Victor and V. Vinod belonging to 47th Ward and Sk. Sirisha of 47th Ward in the city participated in the election campaign. She said that after receiving the complaints against the four, notices were issued to them seeking their explanation.

Action would be initiated after receiving explanations from them, she said and added that if the four volunteers failed to give convincing answers, their services would be terminated.



Gannavaram MLA Vallabhaneni Vamsi Mohan conducts campaign at Bhavanipuram for municipal elections in Vijayawada on Wednesday. — C. NARAYANA RAO

YSRC maintains grip in hometown Pulivendula

Jagan's partymen were elected without contest in 33 wards

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, MARCH 3

The YSRC flag was hoisted in the Chief Minister's hometown, the Pulivendula Municipality, on Wednesday. Jagan maintained his formidable grip on his hometown as his partymen were elected without contest in all the 33 wards of Pulivendula.

A total of 57 nominations were filed in the municipality, of which two were rejected. Of the remaining 49 nominations, 12 withdrew their papers on Tuesday and Wednesday. Eventually, only 37 nominations remained. Of these, YSRC candidates filed two nominations each in four wards.

Pulivendula was the only



Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

municipality in the district that saw unanimous elections. In Rayachoti and Yerraguntla municipalities, YSR Congress candidates won most of the wards. In these two municipalities the ruling party is in a position to elect Chairman.

YSRC could see its candidates unanimously elected in 23 of the 50 divisions in Kadapa municipal corpo-

● **WHILE THERE** are 41 wards in Proddatur, ruling party candidates were unanimously elected in nine. Elections were to be held for the remaining 32 wards.

While there are 41 wards in Proddatur, ruling party candidates were unanimously elected in nine. Elections were to be held for the remaining 32 wards. Ten of the 35 wards in Badvel municipality were set for unanimous election of ruling party candidates. Elections were set for the remaining 15 places.

While there are 20 wards in Jammalamadugu municipality, YSR Congress candidates were to be elected unanimously in two wards while there will be contest in 18 wards. BJP candidates are contesting 16 wards. Elections were to be held for all the wards in one municipality in the district, Mydukuru. There are a total of 24 wards there.

YSRC predicts clean sweep in municipal polls

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

YSR Congress has claimed that fulfilling of its election promises and implementing welfare schemes even amid Coronavirus crisis has made people trust the ruling party. That is the reason why it won gram panchayat polls hands down and will similarly win in municipal elections too, asserted advisor to government (public affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy.

Speaking to media here on Wednesday, he expressed confidence that people will not believe in Telugu Desam's promise of reducing taxes in municipal corporations if it won the civic elections. He pointed out that TD has not even been able to field candidates from many wards in municipal corporations, although the State Election Commission has given one more chance to file nominations.

He termed as baseless TD's allegations that the government is threatening opposition candidates from contesting the municipal polls.

He maintained that elections have always proved that YSRC is the clear winner because it has people's blessings.

Ramakrishna Reddy slammed TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu for

Election observer conducts inspections

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

Meanwhile, Krishna district election observer J. Subramanyam on Wednesday reviewed arrangements for elections in the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation.

Officials including VMC commissioner Prasanna Venkatesh explained to the election observer progress in distribution of voter slips. He also

● **RAMAKRISHNA REDDY** maintained that elections have always proved that YSRC is the clear winner because it has people's blessings.

releasing a manifesto for municipal polls and making false promises to cheat the public.

Taking a dig at the manifesto, the government advisor asked Naidu whether he had given 20 litres of drinking water for just ₹2 or a job to each family, which was promised in the 2014 TD municipal manifesto.

He said YSRC will complain to the SEC about the

opposition party cheating people by putting in its manifesto promises that are patently false.

Responding to TD's allegations on increasing of property taxes after municipal polls, Ramakrishna Reddy said it is Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy who has raised the living standards of people through welfare.

"Will anyone believe that taxes will be increased and people burden," he asked.

He maintained that "however many lies Chandrababu may utter about taxes, people will not believe him but elect YSRC."

Ganta's close aide Kasi, others join ruling party

Leaders damage old TD office in Vizag

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 3

B. Kasi Viswanath, senior member of the Telugu Desam and a close aide of former minister and Visakhapatnam North MLA Ganta Srinivasa Rao, has joined the YSRC along with 44 noted sympathisers of the party in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday.

The ruling party sources said Kasi's entry into the YSRC paved the way for Ganta Srinivasa Rao joining the YSRC, which remained in suspense since the previous general elections.

"The TD is in turmoil due to wrong policies and I also faced serious problems during the past one and half years," Kasi told the reporters after joining the YSRC.

Recently, the GVMC authorities demolished his go-karting project near Bhimili which cost him Rs 3 crore. Since then he has been keeping aloof from the TD activities along with Ganta Srinivasa Rao and waited for a right time to join the ruling party.

Top leaders of the party, including a senior MP, announced that decks have been cleared for Ganta Srinivasa Rao joining the YSRC and only few guidelines were awaited from the party high command, which might happen after the elections.

When Ganta was accosted by the media persons, he said such rumours were being spread since last two years though he never indicated any such move.

"The announcement by

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 3

The leaders, who have been loyal to the party and began their campaigning hoping to get B forms, ransacked the old party office of TD in Dabagardens in Visakhapatnam city on Wednesday after the nomination was given to new candidates in the last minute.

In another incident at Gajuwaka, a group of leaders burnt the effigy of Visakhapatnam West MLA P.V.G.R. Naidu after they too were denied the B forms.

These two incidents disturbed the party leaders as Nara Lokesh was slated to campaign in Visakhapatnam on Thursday, followed by Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday.

President of 31 ward Doddli Babu Anand, Nunna Nagendra of 42

ward, Pilli Ramana of 35 ward, Bantupalle Ramana of 33 ward and executive secretary of the party Ramanand were the candidates who were denied the nomination in the last minute. They launched a protest and alleged that the B forms were auctioned for a price.

Another set of leaders alleged that the leaders who joined the party recently were given tickets after they shelled down huge amounts of money. They include Kedari Gowri for 36th ward and Bangari Ravi Shankar for 37th ward who got the nominated on Wednesday.

A group of leaders burnt the effigy of Visakhapatnam MLA PVGR Naidu (Ganababu) when their leader Nammi Venkata Krishnamurthy was denied B form for 99th ward. They vowed to work against the official candidates and continue to fight as independent candidates.

a senior leader that I would be joining the YSRC soon came as a rude shock to me. I will not join the ruling party without consulting my party members and my close political aides. I will make it a major event," Ganta Srinivasa Rao told the reporters.

Political observers said the YSRC has been looking for a leader to take over the north Andhra affairs, particularly

Visakhapatnam, as the top leadership has no confidence in minister Muttamsetti (Avanti) Srinivasa Rao.

"This is the reason why Avanti has been opposing joining of Ganta into the ruling party since the 2019 elections," a senior leader of the ruling party said.

Avanti also skipped the joining ceremony of Kasi Viswanath into the YSRC on Wednesday.

ACTION AGAINST THOSE INVOLVED IN POLL FRAUD: SEC

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

The State Election Commission to initiate stern action against those who involve in electoral malpractices in the urban local body polls in the state.

In a statement issued here on Wednesday, the SEC stated that it had been receiving several complaints from political parties and candidates with regard to withdrawal of candidatures under duress, coercion, inducements and other factors. It also said that representations had also been received from several quarters expressing apprehensions about possible forced withdrawal of candidatures.

The SEC instructed the collectors and district election authorities to follow due diligence and not to permit withdrawal notices mechanically under any circumstances and also not to accept such notices from any third party.

The SEC ordered for video recording of withdrawal candidatures by the returning officers or election officers and felt the need to preserve such footage as an election record. Withdrawal of nominations by the contestants commenced on March 2 and completed on March 3 by 3 pm.

In a separate development, the SEC said the municipal commissioner, Proddatur, proceeded on leave from March 1 to 31 and she was detached from the election duties. Assistant commissioner of Proddatur municipality was given full additional charge as municipal commissioner.

Naidu accuses YSRC of forgery

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu lodged a complaint with State Election Commission alleging forgery of nomination withdrawal papers to ensure unanimous elections. Demanding immediate inquiry, Naidu stated that in the Chittoor Municipal Corporation (CMC), YSR Congress leaders were openly claiming that the nominations of TD candidates will be withdrawn either by forgery or impersonation in order to obtain unanimous wins. He claimed that all the TD candidates have submitted B-Forms before stipulated time, 3 pm on Wednesday. He alleged that YSRC leaders had

fraudulently withdrawn nominations of TD candidates.

Naidu alleged that the YSRC henchmen in connivance with a section of officials and police are forging signatures of TD candidates and submitted withdrawal papers to the concerned returning officer. Even YSRC leaders were party to the crime, he said.

He recalled that the State Election Commission has issued directions to all the election officials to video record withdrawal of nominations by the candidate, and preserve them as election records but such video recording have not been happening wherever the YSRC supported candidates are trying for unanimous verdicts.

ATCHANNAIDU PROMISES REVIVAL OF ANNA CANTEENS IN AP CIVIC BODIES

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

TD state president Kinjarapu Atchannaidu assured that Telugu Desam will reopen Anna canteens in all civic bodies of AP, where a full meal was available for just ₹5 per person.

This is the primary promise that TD has made in its manifesto released ahead of elections for municipal corporations and municipalities.

Atchannaidu pointed out that Anna canteens had been started by Telugu Desam to feed the hungry among poor. But after YSRC came to power, it shut all 204 of these canteens alleging corruption. The TD chief alleged that YSRC government wants

to convert the space allotted for these canteens into shopping centres and sell them to private individuals.

He reiterated that Telugu Desam remains committed to provide poor people a full meal for ₹5. He recalled that then chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu had started Anna canteens across municipalities and corporations to provide food to people thrice in a day, charging ₹5 per meal. Its objective was to provide subsidised hygienic and affordable food to poor people. Around six lakh poor people were having these meals three times a day until July 2019 when YSRC government shut them down alleging corruption.

TENDERS | FILED

Farmers are getting a fair price due to implementation of govt schemes, say officials

AP to spend ₹12K cr for developing farm facilities

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

The state government will spend ₹12,000 crore on developing multi-purpose farm facilities, including

warehouses, drying yards, cold rooms and crop collection centres, apart from acquiring farm equipment and machinery. Tenders will be finalised by April

15 for construction of warehouses within a year, officials informed Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at a Palavelluva review meeting.

Officials said farmers are getting a fair price due to implementation of various government schemes. They pointed out that the cost of buffalo milk in YSR

● **THERE IS** additional profit of ₹7.80 on cow milk, whose price has increased from ₹25 to ₹32.80.

Kadapa district, which was ₹44.31 earlier, is now ₹53.95, leading to a gain of ₹9.64. Similarly, there is additional profit of ₹7.80 on cow milk, whose price

has increased from ₹25 to ₹32.80. In Chittoor district, farmers have gained an extra ₹8.75 on buffalo milk and ₹8.13 on cow milk. In Prakasam district, the gains are ₹14.15 and ₹8.78 respectively.

Earlier, officials informed the Chief Minister that DCCBs of Kadapa, Kurnool, Anantapur and Eluru are

in poor condition. Their licenses could be cancelled soon. They pointed out that 45 per cent of primary agriculture cooperative societies (PACS) are running in losses and 49 per cent of mandals are not linked to DCC banks' network. They suspected corruption in disbursement of loans as no technology is being used to track loan

distribution and collection.

Agriculture and cooperatives special chief secretary Poonam Malakondaiah, cooperative services special secretary Y. Madhusudan Reddy, commissioner and registrar of cooperative services Ahmed Babu and other officials were present in the meeting with Chief Minister.

IN BRIEF

Garib Rath from April 1

Visakhapatnam: The Railways has decided to resume Garib Rath special superfast express trains between Secunderabad and Visakhapatnam from April 1. The train will leave Secunderabad at 8.30 pm daily with effect from April 1 and reach Visakhapatnam on the next day at 7.40 am. In return direction, the train will leave Visakhapatnam at 8.40 pm daily with effect from April 2 and reach Secunderabad on the next day at 8.10 am. These trains will have stoppages at Warangal, Khammam, Vijayawada Jn., Eluru, Rajahmundry, Samalkot Jn, Tuni, Anakapalle and Duvvada between Visakhapatnam and Secunderabad stations.

Adivasi woman gunned down

Visakhapatnam: In a shocking incident, a 45-year-old woman was gunned down by one of her relatives at Rangalasingi village under Dumbriguda mandal in Visakhapatnam agency late on Tuesday night. The deceased was identified as Pangi Sita, 45, a resident of Rangalasingi village. Circle Inspector of Police, Araku Police Station, M. Pydaiah said the family of Pangi Sita and accused Pangi Damodar are related to each other but both the families have been fighting over a land dispute for a long time. On Tuesday late night, again there was a fight and in a fit of anger P. Damodar shot down Sita using a country-made weapon. She died on the spot.

Orchards in blaze

Kadapa: The fire on the hill became a curse for a farmer. The incident took place in Vempalle in Kadapa district. Over 150 mango trees and 250 lemon trees belonging to a farmer named Mohammad Ghouse near the Government Polytechnic College were burnt to ashes. As well as drip pipes worth about ₹50 lakh, other equipment was burnt. Fire officials came from Pulivendula and tried to extinguish the fire but to no avail.



Venkaiah Naidu

Venkaiah to visit Tirupati

Tirupati: The Vice-president of India, Mr Muppavarapu Venkaiah Naidu, will arrive on a two-day visit to Tirupati on Thursday. According to officials, the Vice President will start from Chennai and arrive at Tirupati airport in an Indian air force flight at 9.50 am. He will visit the Indian Institute of Technology-Tirupati campus at Yerpedu near Renigunta at around 11.15 am to interact with the IIT faculty and students. The Vice President is also scheduled to inaugurate Amara Raja hospital near Karakambadi. Later, he will visit the house of Galla Ramachandra Naidu, the founder of the Amara Raja Group of companies. At 4.15 pm, Venkaiah Naidu will start to Tirumala by road and halt for the night at Sri Padmavathi Guest house. The Vice-President will pray at Lord Venkateswara temple in Tirumala on Friday morning and return to the guest house for a brief stay. He will wind up his Tirumala visit at around 8.30 am and will reach the Tirupati airport at 9.20 am and then leave for Surat at around 9.25 am. In connection with this, officials of the district administration led by Collector M. Harinarayanan and the Tirupati urban police wing led by SP Ch. Venkata Appala Naidu was making elaborate security arrangements for Venkaiah Naidu's visit.

CPI QUESTIONS PAWAN ON VIZAG STEEL

DC CORRESPONDENT KADAPA, MARCH 3

CPI state secretary Ramakrishna criticised the state BJP leaders and demanded Pawan Kalyan, who had befriended the BJP, to react to the Visakhapatnam steel plant privatisation proposal.

He was campaigning for the party candidate in the 19th division in Kadapa.

He said that Pawan Kalyan, who likened the special status to a rotten laddu, did not question the VSP move.

He said the CPI struggle would continue till the Union Government subverts the decision to privatise the steel plant as the Centre intends to sell land worth lakhs of crores.

He asked Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy whether it was democracy to arrive at 'unanimous' verdicts by preventing even independents from contesting.

The CPI leader said that the police, at the instance of YSR Congress leaders, were terrorising the people. He said that this highhandedness was an affront to democracy.

TWO PERSONS ARRESTED FOR JOB FRAUD

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, MARCH 3

The Chittoor sub-division Police, on Wednesday, arrested two persons on charges of cheating job aspirants. The accused A. Deva Priyan, 27, hailing from Tamil Nadu's Villupuram district and V.S. Hari Hara Kumar, 50, has taken money from many aspirants, by promising to get them jobs in the government sector. Chittoor DSP N. Sudhakar Reddy revealed to the media the primary accused in the case - Deva Priyan, who completed his bachelor of engineering and was hailing from Tamil Nadu, had used his local contacts to lure the unemployed youth on pretext of getting them jobs in government sector.

"He deputed one Hari Hara Kumar and some other persons as agents and lured job aspirants by offering them jobs in Railways, FCI, Agriculture, LIC, Income tax and other government sectors. He collected ₹15-₹20 lakh from each aspirant. Till date, the group has cheated 7 youths in Chittoor, one each in Kadapa and Nellore districts," the DSP said.

The DSP also revealed that the group has also cheated over 50 unemployed youth in the past and collected ₹1.5 crore from them.

KNOW & RISE AWARENESS ON ADMIN

DC CORRESPONDENT ANANTAPUR, MAR.3

Anantapur collector launched an exclusive programme "Know & Rise" by involving students to acquire knowledge in administration. The innovative concept of collector Gandham Chandrudu was following lack of knowledge among students in various sectors mostly administration of different departments. Programme was formally launched at revenue bhavan on Wednesday. About 15 students, studying Class 8-10 standard of Rajendra Municipal High school attended.

The DEO, mandal educational officers, head masters of municipal schools of Anantapur were also the part of Know & Rise.

M r C h a n d r u d u observed the students at high school level were confined to their studies and lack of knowledge on administration.

Girl enacted kidnap drama to mislead kin

The girl left hostel saying she would be visiting her uncle

DC CORRESPONDENT VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 3

The 24-year-old college student, who was found in an unconscious state with hands and legs tied in a bush near Gurla village in Vizianagaram two days ago, enacted the entire drama to mislead the family members and hostel authorities.

The Vizianagaram police got these details after prolonged counselling of the girl, currently undergoing treatment in a government hospital in Vizianagaram. There

● The girl found out that her elder brother made enquiries in the hostel about her absence

● She got panicked and immediately boarded Palakollu-Palakonda bus the same day and arrived at Gurla late on February 28 night. From there she walked to bushes

were no physical injuries on her body and she was also not sexually abused. She belongs to a village in Terlam mandal and studying degree in Vizianagaram govern-

ment college.

Vizianagaram police chief B. Raja Kumari said she deployed two teams headed by DSP rank officers to crack the case.

As per their investigation, it was found that the girl left the hostel on February 27 informing the warden that she would be visiting her uncle's place and return after two days. But she went to meet her boyfriend in Narsapur in West Godavari district.

Meanwhile, she found out that her elder brother made enquiries in the hostel about her absence.

Special sub-registrar offices in 4 corporations

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

State government plans to set up special sub-registrar offices with more amenities for the benefit of people at Visakhapatnam, Tirupati, Vijayawada and Kurnool municipal corporations in phase-1.

Revenue special chief secretary Rajat Bhargav and registration and stamps inspector general M.V. Seshagiri Babu

● The department earned ₹4,709 crore in the current fiscal up to Feb. 2021

held a review meeting here on Wednesday.

The authorities planned to set up special sub-registrar offices in select municipal corporations having good revenue potential to the department and these offices would be having all requisite amenities to provide comfort to the

people. The authorities called for proposals for setting up these offices.

The stamps and registration department earned revenue to the tune of ₹4,709 crore in the current fiscal up to February, 2021.

The officials reviewed the revenue collections district wise and issued directions on how to overcome shortfall in revenue collections against the targets and also to improve revenue.

Geotagging of housing soon

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

The mapping, geotagging and beneficiaries' registration on AP Housing Department website will be completed by the end of this month. Ajay Jain, principal secretary to the Government, Housing Department conducted a review meeting at AP State Housing Corporation office, Vijayawada with all district joint collectors (Development), project directors (Housing), project directors (DRDA), Municipal commissioners on Mega Housing Programme was launched by the Government under N a v a r a t n a l u Pedalandariki Illu scheme.

Mr Ajay Jain directed all district joint collectors (Development) to review the progress of the ongoing housing

programme with constituency level with PDs, EEs, Dy.EEs, AEs, engineering assistant, welfare assistant towards the foolproof implementation of the mega housing scheme.

He further instructed all village secretariats staff to be available in their respective secretariats to serve the people and resolve their issues regarding the housing scheme. He further directed that all joint collectors (Development) should inspect the village secretariats and should review the progress of the works.

Narayana Bharat Gupta, Managing Director, A.P State Housing Corporation Limited, Ch. Mallikarjuna Rao, Chief Engineer, APSHCL, Superintending Engineers, APSHCL and other Officials participated in the review meeting.

TTD condemns Raju's allegation

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, MARCH 3

The TTD has condemned the allegations levelled by MP Raghurama Krishnam Raju on TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy over the issuance of Srivari Darshan tickets and termed it as unfortunate.

The MP had alleged that the TTD chairman's office has not been considering his recommendation letters for sanctions of Srivari Darshan tickets.

In a statement released on Wednesday, TTD clarified that all the recommendation letters of public representatives including MLCs, MLAs, MPs etc. for Srivari darshan were processed by the TTD board cell and the TTD board chairman has no connection with the process of issuing Srivari VIP darshan tickets on elected representatives recommendation letters.

TTD said that the board cell considers only one recommenda-

● YSRC MP Raghurama Krishnam Raju alleged that the TTD chairman's office has not been considering his recommendation letters for darshan

● TTD clarified that all the recommendation letters of public representatives for Srivari darshan were processed by the TTD board cell and the TTD board chairman has no connection with the process of issuing darshan tickets

tion letter by any elected representative for a day and if any additional recommendation letters come, it will be brought to the notice of additional EO for consideration on merits and devotee rush.

"As of now the TTD board cell has not rejected any recommendation letter of MP Raghurama and if any, brought to officials notice, suitable action would have been taken," the TTD stated.

AP reports 135 new Covid cases, 1 death

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

Andhra Pradesh registered 135 fresh cases of Coronavirus infections and one death.

The state health authorities reported here on Wednesday that out of 36,970 samples tested, 135 persons were found infected with the virus. Out of a total number of 1,40,47,174 samples tested so far in the state, 8,90,215 persons were found infected with the confirmed Coronavirus and of them, 8,82,219 were recovered in the course of treatment while 826 are still active with the virus.

Among daily cases of Coronavirus infections, Chittoor topped the state with 31 followed by 23 in Visakhapatnam, 15 in Krishna, 12 in Srikakulam, 11 in Anantapur, 10 in Kurnool, nine in Guntur, eight in East Godavari, five each in Kadapa, West Godavari and Nellore, one in Vizianagaram and zero case in Prakasam.

With regard to cumulative Coronavirus active cases, Chittoor reported the highest 174 followed by 88 in Krishna, 85 in East Godavari, 69 in Nellore, 66 in Srikakulam, 61 in Kadapa, 58 in Guntur, 57 in Anantapur.

HARASSMENT CASE AGAINST DOCTOR FOR MISBEHAVING WITH PATIENT

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 3

A case of sexual harassment has been registered against a government doctor in Kankipadu police station in Krishna district on Tuesday night.

The case was filed against Dr S. Sivarama Krishna, who was working in a gov-

ernment hospital in Movva village Community Health Centre. Dr Sivarama Krishna also runs his own clinic in Edupugallu village in the evenings.

According to Kanki-padu police, a 22-year-old married woman approached the doctor for treatment for pregnancy. The doctor took advantage of her problem.

Breakthrough in boy's kidnap case

DC CORRESPONDENT TIRUPATI, MARCH 3

Tirupati police have achieved a breakthrough in kidnap of a 6-year-old boy from Alipiri link bus stand on February 27 by releasing the suspect abductor's photo.

Alipiri circle inspector Devendra Kumar said the kid Sivam Kumar Sahoo, along with his parents hailing from Chhattisgarh, had arrived at Tirupati on February 27. The family was waiting on the platform of the Alipiri link bus stand to board a bus to Tirumala, when an unidentified person lured and abducted the boy.

After noticing that their son was missing, his family members searched in vain for him all around the bus

stand. They then lodged a complaint with the Alipiri police station. Tirupati Urban superintendent of police constituted special teams for tracing Sivam and his abductor.

CCTV footage retrieved by police showed the abductor sitting close to the family observing movements of the boy. When Sivam moved away from the sight of his parents, the abductor lured and took him away, inspector Devendra stated.

Releasing photos of the boy and his abductor, the inspector appealed to public that they contact 9440796752, or WhatsApp 8099999977, or police control room number 6309913960 if they notice the boy or the abductor in their surroundings. Police also announced a reward.

IndianOil

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DECCAN Chronicle

4 MARCH 2021

Cyber warfare and state surveillance new normal

Cyberattacks have become the new normality. Warfare using Internet-enabled technology to attack another nation's digital infrastructure with viruses or carry out denial-of-service attacks is also becoming common enough. Strenuous denials as in the suspected cyberattack on the Maharashtra electricity grid that brought about a blackout in Mumbai in October 2020 when suburban train services and stock market trading were halted are barely believable because the likelihood of state-sponsored actions in a cyber battle was very high at a time of India-China tensions along the LAC. The employment of non-state actors to carry out such attacks to aid plausible deniability cannot be discounted either since cyber hits for hire are dime a dozen in an increasingly connected world.

There are no innocents in this battle of wits fought through computer networks. India is also suspected to have sponsored phishing activity in the time of the coronavirus to aim at Chinese entities while China is said to have been behind a string of hacking attempts aimed at India's banking sector. America responded recently to Russian cyber threats to its electricity grids by littering the Russian system with code in a cyber warning. The history of Russia intervention and hactivist actions goes back some way, extending to interfering with a Presidential election. The recent Russian intervention through the SolarWinds hack that hit nine government agencies and 100 corporations including Microsoft had set the cyber world abuzz about State versus State cyber action.

The key to containing urban surges is the vaccine even if there is no guarantee on efficacy against the Brazilian strain, which is said to be re infecting those who have had the virus

Cyber security is the watchword but cyber protection is an expensive exercise as dependence on foreign hardware and software in India is extremely high and vulnerabilities exist in all systems that are networked for operational efficiencies. Even as the Indian Army has been priding itself on electronic warfare capability it enjoys on the borders, LAC and LoC, military experts have been calling for replacement of Chinese-made hardware in utilities like power and railways. Vaccine research and manufacturing has also become the target of attacks lately suggesting how susceptible the world is to cyber theft. The government has a great responsibility towards funding cyber security measures in all sectors that are strategically important while individuals are left to their own devices to protect their privacy.

Another facet of new normality has equally sinister implications. In this modern technological environment, the State has been empowered to use cyber tools in surveillance as technology in this field has improved by giga leaps and bounds. Myanmar is an extreme example now in its extensive use of military grade surveillance in targeting critics of the February 1 coup. The capacity to mine phones and computers and employing software and spyware to eavesdrop on conversations and the use of drones and iPhone cracking devices are part of a vast digital arsenal that the State has built up towards electronic warfare in repressive surveillance of its people. An Orwellian dystopia is very much upon us already as States get more powerful in sustaining surveillance upon its critics, rebels and dissidents and just about anyone disagreeing with its ideology. As Bob Dylan said, the times they are a-changin'.

India is out of recession, but...

After stonewalling demands to lower taxes on fuel, the Union finance ministry suggested that it was in talks with all stakeholders to lessen the tax burden on fuel consumers. While it is good news for the general public, especially the middle class, which has been hit hard by an unprecedented near-three-digit fuel price, the statement, however, comes with a qualification — any reduction should not affect the government's finances.

Though the economy has begun to see an uptick in activity, the government may not get such elbowroom any time soon. The Reserve Bank of India, too, has been cautious in its assessment of the economy. Despite highlighting various positives seen in the economy, the RBI concluded, stating that "the jury leans towards such recoveries [seen in India] being shallow and short-lived". The central bank has also pointed out that the private investment — a key driver in a country's growth story — was missing in action. The credit off-take by large corporations continued to be in negative territory.

Another driver for economic growth is foreign direct investment (FDI). However, the RBI report quoting UNCTAD data states that FDI flows globally has recorded a precipitous decline, plunging by 42 per cent to an estimated US \$859 billion in 2020 from US \$1.5 trillion a year ago. Though emerging economies like India have been modestly hit, the RBI admits that downside risks to the outlook of FDI flows remain in 2021 due to persistent uncertainty clouding the course of the virus. This worry, perhaps, could be one of the driving factors for easing curbs on investments from China. While India could be better placed than the Western countries, it would be wrong to say that its economy has come out of the woods.

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Subhani



India must learn from Chanakya, not a Shah!



Mohan Guruswamy

Mohamed Reza Pahlavi, the second and last Shah of Iran from the Pahlavi dynasty, was the son of an Iranian gunnery sergeant who managed to seize control of that country in 1925 and crown himself king. Like Rajput kings who gave themselves extravagant genealogies of being descended from the sun or the moon, Mohammed Reza gave himself a 2,500-year-old lineage descending from Cyrus the Great. To him the surest and simplest way to greatness was to use Iran's new petro-dollar millions to buy the latest weapons that money can buy.

Iran then was a low-income country, but the Shah's vision was soaring. The Americans encouraged him. The US Air Force and the Navy loved him for he helped to defray the cost of development of new weapons. Flushed with his weapons, he grandiosely announced that after the two superpowers, Iran was the greatest military power and, encouraged by the United States, he appointed himself as the keeper of peace and order in the near region. Reza Pahlavi's megalomania blinded him to the reality of Iran and a man called Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a Shia theologian who was banished to a Paris suburb. We know what happened next.

This should be a lesson in history for all those strategists who think that weapons confer status. India's diplomatic and military establishment seems gripped by grandiose visions of an India sitting on global high tables like the UN Security Council. India's new middle classes blithely talk about India becoming a superpower, and against this rising tide

few are willing to question why? Recent studies reveal that as much as 70 per cent of Indian households make do without the minimum standards evolved by international bodies like the UNDP to be considered above the poverty standard. India's own poverty line is indeed a starvation line that prescribes a minimum caloric norm. Even by that self-serving standard, a quarter of India is excruciatingly poor. And not only is India poor, it is also economically backward, with a relatively small manufacturing base supporting a disproportionately large service sector, giving it the economic profile of a post-industrial society like the US or Europe. We mostly miss the irony of looking post-industrial without having industrialised!

India's pursuit of iron-clad national security and global status ambitions makes it annually import as much as \$20 billion, or ₹120,000 crores, of weapons, putting us in a league of our own. Our military leaders want even more and to this extent they now have a vested interest in weapons acquisitions. Most of our other engineering imports are to facilitate domestic production, either as plant and machinery or as components. Thus, they contribute to overall value addition. Military hardware imports are a one-way street and the only ones who benefit by it are the exporting economies.

In the next decade alone, India will import over \$200 billion of weapons. Consider this. This is the kind of money that can give us a brand-new high-speed rail quadrilateral or 10 new world-class cities of 10 million people each. If we factor in the military's wishlist, then we are really looking at infinity. And much of what is being

planned for acquisition is not even required. Take, for instance, the French Dassault Rafale fighter-bomber. Each of these aircraft will cost at least ₹1,600 crores and the IAF wants 126 of them. It just got 36 of them for now. Not being satisfied with this, the IAF is thinking ahead and is said to be contemplating large numbers of an even more costly fighter — the American F-35. This will be in addition to the 272 SU30MKI fighter-bombers the IAF is in the process of inducting. Those who are knowledgeable will argue that the SU30MKI confers far greater lethality than the Rafale and costs about ₹650 crores. Hence, why even buy Rafales? This is the exact question then defence minister Manohar Parrikar had posed. Besides, the SU30MKIs are already being assembled by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd at Nashik and its AI-31FP turbofan engines at Korapur.

Then let's consider what is the aircraft the IAF needs to urgently replace. It's the now outdated MiG-21 series. The MiG-21 is described as a frontal aviation aircraft designed mainly to intercept enemy aircraft and on occasion to drop small bombs and conduct ground attacks. It has a very limited range and endurance. The logical replacement for the MiG-21 is another light single-engine interceptor such as the Tejas LCA or even the more expensive Saab Gripen, but not an expensive heavy twin-engine long-range fighter-bomber.

Empirical evidence suggests that the survival ability of a twin-engine fighter is not better than a single engine fighter in a conflict.

The Indian strategy must threaten to disrupt China's economic interests and inflict huge costs on any Himalayan adventure, not just in the Himalayas but also in other theatres of our choosing

It gives it a bigger load carrying capacity and more range. But single engine fighters like the Gripen also have good range now. As the Pakistan Air Force showed in the post-Balakot engagement, good radar and better missiles even on an old platform like the F-16 can be more than a match for heavy fighters without them.

More than numbers, India needs a strategy to keep the Chinese deterred. This strategy must threaten to disrupt China's economic interests and inflict huge costs on any Himalayan adventure, not just in the Himalayas but also in other theatres of our choosing. China's People's Liberation Army might have the advantage of interior lines in Tibet and Xinjiang, but the IAF and the Indian Army maintain bases and formations close to the border on the plains, giving them several tactical advantages. Just adding more troops and calling them strike formations makes little sense, as high-altitude battlefields require acclimatisation and the conflicts in all probability will be long over before they can be deployed in battle. India can never match China in the numbers game alone. To deter China, it has to show the willingness and ability to impose disproportionate costs. We must consider scenarios like this. China operates almost 20 airfields in Xinjiang, Tibet and Yunnan, from which the PLAFAF can target IAF airbases in the Ganga and Brahmaputra basins. Each of these airbases is alongside a major population centre. China's home areas are deep in its hinterland. Do we have a plan to counter target them?

It's very easy to become a Shah with poor people's money. Clearly, India doesn't need to be inspired by a Shah. However, it does need to be inspired by Chanakya or even Sun Tzu.

The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry. He also specialises in the Chinese economy.

LETTERS

WITHDRAW QUESTION

Brinda Karat is absolutely right in demanding CJI to withdraw his "question" posed to the accused in the minor rape case. By popping such a question, the CJI and his two other colleagues have given an impression that the apex court is supporting such "retrograde" approaches. The mental trauma experienced by a rape victim cannot be put in words. If the court gives an opportunity to the accused to escape punishment by way of marrying the rape victim what more can be said about it.

Govardhana Myneedu Vijayawada

GHAZIPUR BORDER

Closing the Ghazipur border again by the Delhi Police hardly makes any difference to the farmers agitation and chances for big damage for the BJP in the poll-bound states as farmers unions are going for anti-BJP campaign (*Ghazipur border closed again, DC, March 3*). If farmers' unions can lure workers/employees unions in the poll-bound states and jointly if they can go for an anti-BJP campaign then there will be a drastic political changes in the nation. However, farmers agitation for repeal of farm laws cannot be taken as an easy task.

Panchakarla.Govardhana Rao Kankipadu

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Yahya calls for leaders' meet

NEW DELHI, March. 3 As the flames of protest kindled by the postponement of the Pakistan National Assembly sessions engulfed the entire Eastern Wing, leading to the imposition of curfew on at least two towns, President Yahya Khan today called the country's political leaders to a conference in Dacca on March 10 to thrash out their differences over constitution-making. Mr. Rehman declared that no power could suppress the majority verdict given in his party's favour in the December 7 elections to the National Assembly.

Addressing a meeting he said, "the voice of the people of East Pakistan cannot be stifled".

Sunanda K. Datta-Ray Reflections



If Biden can't punish MBS, US image will take ethics hit

By taking an expeditious stand on Jamal Khashoggi's brutal killing, US President Joe Biden may have thrown away the chance of drawing an ethical line between his administration and its predecessor. It looks almost as bad as allegations that India had sent naval commandos to capture beleaguered Princess Latifa of Dubai off the Goa coast and handed her over to the UAE in March 2018 to please one of the world's richest heads of state.

Pragmatism isn't always reconcilable with ethics, which also explained India's long boycott of Israel. Moreover, as Morarji Desai found in 1977, he couldn't easily distance India from the Soviet Union. Of course, the Democratic President, from whom Americans and the world expect so much, and who spent his first hours in the White House cancelling many of Donald Trump's executive orders, might yet redeem himself. He has already taken the US back into the Paris climate agreement and is exploring ways of reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. Mr Biden has also ordered a review of US arms sales to the Saudis and is reportedly considering a ban on all non-defensive purchases.

But surely the world's only super-

power claims a higher moral role than just organising the distribution of weapons and pocketing the profits. That was emphasised in 1990 as the USSR's collapse prompted Richard Nixon to crow triumphantly from retirement that the time had come for America to reset its geopolitical compass. "We have a historic opportunity to change the world", he wrote.

Mr Biden's ambitions needn't be that grandiose, but he does have an opportunity to correct some of the distortions and aberrations of the past four years, give even 74 million Trump supporters a sense of true pride in their country's achievements, and inspire foreigners with confidence in Washington's sense of fair play. Sadly, some of Mr Trump's partnerships recalled the old story of an American President infamously claiming that a particularly unsavoury South American dictator "might be a son of a bitch, but he is our son of a bitch". Americans were taken aback in 2018 when Mr Trump appeared to support Vladimir Putin over US intelligence claims on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. His applause for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro and courtship of North Korea's Kim

Jong Un also looked like aligning the US with regimes that are the antithesis of values the US claims to promote.

At home, the deadly Charlottesville protest in 2017, the rise in violent right-wing extremism, and the viral spread of malevolent conspiracy theories that he encouraged were accompanied by mounting police brutality against blacks. The rise of groups like the Proud Boys, a violent street gang that gained new notoriety after Mr Trump acknowledged them during a pre-election debate with Mr Biden, was a particularly dangerous feature of those years.

It's the close military and strategic relationship with Saudi Arabia that disturbs many Americans. When Mr Trump and Saudi King Salman signed a \$350 billion arms deal in 2017, Tulsi Gabbard, Democratic congresswoman from Hawaii, warned: "Saudi Arabia is a country with a devastating record of human rights violations at home and abroad and has a long history of providing support to terrorist organisations that threaten the American people". The sale was the reported handiwork of Mr Trump's all-powerful son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner, said to be close to the kingdom's real ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, 35. Mr

Kushner, who cultivated relationships with Saudi royals, personally contacted Lockheed Martin during the deal-making process.

Widely known as MBS, the crown prince has been accused by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence of ordering Khashoggi's murder and the dismemberment of his body. "We assess Saudi Arabia's crown prince... approved an operation in Istanbul, Turkey, to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi", says the ODNI's four-page report. Resident in the US, Khashoggi, who wrote for the Washington Post, was lured into the Saudi consulate in Istanbul and never seen again. When the Central Intelligence Agency levelled the same charge only a month later, Mr Trump blocked the report's declassification and continued Washington's strong ties with Riyadh. He refused to hold the prince publicly responsible for the crime even as the US government demanded that the perpetrators be punished.

To do the crown prince justice, he accepted Saudi Arabia's overall responsibility for the murder of a dissident journalist who was his most vocal critic. But he denied any personal link although the ODNI says

"the crown prince viewed Khashoggi as a threat to the kingdom and broadly supported using violent measures if necessary to silence him". Antony Blinken, US secretary of state, says the US will not admit foreigners who threaten dissidents. To flesh out that oblique warning, Washington has banned 76 Saudi nationals implicated in Khashoggi's killing.

Nevertheless, if action isn't taken against the prime suspect, the drama might resemble Frederick Forsyth's thriller *The Cobra* in which the US President sanctions the creation of an elaborate and expensive state-within-a-state machinery with the sole objective of destroying the cocaine industry. But when the resultant civil conflict threatens political careers, the US government abandons the cause. In the words of the man who was appointed to take on the cocaine underworld: "It has become corrupt and venal, weak and yet arrogant, dedicated to the obese and the stupid."

Nobody can say that of Mr Biden's administration. But he has yet to live up to the convictions that earned him a historic victory.

The writer is a senior journalist, columnist and author

SHORT TAKES

FOREST FIRE RAGES AT SIMILIPAL SANCTUARY

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 3

A major forest fire raging in Similipal sanctuary spread across 2,750 square km for the past one week and has endangered the lives of animals. Several trees in the sanctuary have been turned into ashes.

As per reports, the fire has already spread to Betanoti, Rasgobindpur and Morada forest range of the sanctuary.

Union environment minister Prakash Javadekar has directed officials to take immediate action to bring the Similipal fire under control. "I have ordered officers to take immediate action and report it to me," Javadekar tweeted on Tuesday.

Initially, Akshita M. Bhanj Deo, the princess of Mayurbhanj, had posted a message on social media about the devastating fire in the Similipal sanctuary, Asia's second largest biosphere.

Earlier on March 2, Union petroleum and natural gas minister Dharmendra Pradhan drew the attention of the Union environment minister on the Similipal fire by tagging him on the social media. Pradhan also tagged Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on the social media post.

IT RAIDS ANURAAG KASHYAP, TAAPSEE PANNU PROPERTIES

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC MUMBAI, MARCH 3

The Income Tax Department on Wednesday raided premises linked to filmmaker Anurag Kashyap, who launched the now dissolved production house Phantom Films, Reliance Entertainment group CEO Shibhashish Sarkar and Taapsee Pannu. The IT searches are in connection with Kashyap's Phantom Films, which was dissolved in 2018.

Searches took place at 30 locations in Mumbai and Pune, including premises linked to a talent agency as well as Phantom Films, which was co-promoted by Anurag Kashyap, producers Vikas Bahl and Madhu Mantena. In the meantime the income tax officials were questioning both Kashyap as well as Pannu in Pune.

Speaking about these raids, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar in a briefing stated that the Income Tax department probes someone based on whatever information they get and the issue goes to court later.

Anurag Kashyap and Taapsee Pannu are outspoken critics of the government and have lent their voice to various causes, including the ongoing farmer protests against central laws.

According to an IT official the searches were carried out as there have been instances of tax evasion. The movies produced by the production house have been super hit, but the profits and account statements of the company are showing disproportionately low income. The action drew severe criticism from the opposition parties and activists.

ARMY OFFICER, JAWAN DIE BY SUICIDE

DC CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, MARCH 3

Any Army officer and a young soldier on Wednesday ended their lives by shooting themselves with their service weapons at two different places in Jammu and Kashmir.

The police and Army sources said that the officer Colonel Sudeep Bhagat Singh reportedly shot himself dead inside the unit he was posted at in Khanmoh area on the outskirts of capital Srinagar.

On hearing the gunshots, some soldiers rushed to the spot and found the officer lying on ground in pool of blood. He was taken to the hospital where doctors pronounced him dead, the sources said.

Earlier during the day, the bullet-riddled corps of an Army jawan was found at a camp in Gurdan area of frontier Rajouri district in Jammu region. The police said that preliminary investigation into the incident point out to the 24-year-old soldier's shooting himself dead with his service weapon.

Rajouri Government Medical College (GMC) Hospital Superintendent Dr. Javaid Iqbal Choudhary said that the soldier had died on way to the hospital and that it appeared to be a case of suicide.

SASIKALA ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT FROM POLITICS

DC CORRESPONDENTS CHENNAI, MARCH 3

In a surprise move, V.K. Sasikala, the erstwhile confidante of J. Jayalalithaa, announced that she was retiring from politics and said that she would be praying continuously for the return of Jayalalithaa's golden rule in the state.

Even her nephew and founder of AMMK, T.T.V. Dhinakaran was vexed. He told the media that the announcement came as a bolt from the blue.

Great expectations in some quarters of Sasikala storming the AIADMK citadel and establishing her supremacy have evaporated.

The announcement made through a typed message on a plain sheet of paper with her signature in Tamil, dated March 3, caused the raising of eyebrows for her previous statement came from her 'camp office' in a letterhead that had the AIADMK flag embossed boldly on the middle and identified her as the 'general secretary'.

During a seat-sharing talk in Chennai a few days ago, the BJP gave great importance to her by putting pressure on AIADMK leaders to accommodate Dhinakaran and Sasikala in their alliance, which was vehemently resisted.

The reason given by the BJP leaders was that the AIADMK votes would be split if AMMK was to stand alone.

In Wednesday night's statement, Sasikala repeatedly urged the followers of MGR and Jayalalithaa to be united in the coming elections and defeat DMK, the common enemy identified by Jayalalithaa herself.

She did not exactly say if she was referring to the AIADMK party of the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) as the one that would usher in the 'golden rule of Amma.'

'Khela Hobe' vs 'Jai Shri Ram' even at sweet shops

Kolkata, March 3: The bitter fight for elections in Bengal has reached the sweet shops with popular retailers in the state churning out new delicacies, capturing the mood of the season — 'Khela Hobe' vs 'Jai Shri Ram'.

Balaram Mallick Radharaman Mallick, one of the iconic sweet shops of Kolkata, has launched sandesh with the two slogans written on them. While 'Khela Hobe' is written on the sandesh in white and green, the 'Jai Shri Ram' sandesh is in white and orange.

'Khela Hobe', meaning 'Game On', is a slogan first given by Trinamul Congress as scores of its leaders switched to the BJP pitching Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee against all the opposition faces.

The slogan has since become popular with a pop version of it being played at TMC rallies and hoardings coming up across West Bengal. The opposition parties have also launched their own versions of the slogan, making it a flavour of the poll season. Besides, 'Jai Shri Ram' — the popular BJP slogan has turned into the party's battle-cry ahead of the closely — watched elections, which will begin on March 27.

"The soft-rolled Nalen Gur sandesh with either 'Khela Hobe' or 'Jai Shri Ram' embossed on them are already being bought by the respective political parties," Sudip Mallick, said the owner of the sweet retail chain. Modi sandesh and Didi Sandesh, with images of the two leaders etched on them, and other 'mishtis' (sweets)



Security personnel conduct a flag march, ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections in Kanyakumari district on Wednesday. — PTI

TN alliances in turmoil over sharing of seats

TNCC leaders to take a final call after a meeting today

G. BABU JAYAKUMAR & D. SEKAR | DC CHENNAI, MARCH 3

Both the Dravidian majors were unable to finalise their alliances for the April 6 elections to the state assembly as their coalition partners were digging their heels in and refusing to accept what was being offered to them. A dramatic realignment does not, however, seem possible.

While it looked that all differences were settled in the DMK camp on Tuesday night with the Congress representatives agreeing for 24 seats in principle, in the TNCC there was resentment over the low offer with functionaries saying that they were given 40 seats in the 2016 elections.

The issue may be sorted out on Thursday when TNCC leaders meet and take a final call on it, say party sources, expressing hope of saving the alliance. Yet a section of leaders in the TNCC was

not in favour of continuing with the alliance if the DMK refused to give in to their demand.

It was the same case with the other allies, too, with all of them wanting at least 10 seats each. Since the DMK itself is keen on contesting in as many as 170 or more seats, the allocation to the allies is being sought to be cut drastically, say sources.

But the smaller parties, too, want to get recognition by polling adequate percentage of votes and they feel it can be achieved only by increasing the number of seats. So, the VCK, CPM, CPI and MDMK are refusing to take what was being offered to them during the talks.

The DMK's offer to give more seats if parties like the VCK and MDMK could contest in the 'rising sun' election symbol, too, has angered the allies as they want to maintain their individual identity and also aspire for recognition as

state parties.

The same issue is also facing the AIADMK as its ally, the Tamil Maanila Congress, has upped it ante, demanding 12 seats. The problem that the AIADMK was facing of late with the BJP was on the identification of the seats, rather than the numbers.

Most of the seats that the BJP is eyeing at are also being sought by either the PMK or certain AIADMK functionaries, who had expended their resources in developing the constituencies. The earlier hitch in the AIADMK-BJP ties has been ironed out with the BJP not insisting on the AIADMK accommodat-

ing the AMMK of T.T.V. Dhinakaran. Not only did BJP leader C.T. Ravi make it clear that it was for the AIADMK to take the call on uniting with the AMMK, fisheries minister D. Jayakumar once again ruled it out on Wednesday, saying that

the BJP had never interfered in the internal affairs of the party.

Apart from that, the AIADMK was unable to finalise the agreement with the DMDK as the party was also demanding a Rajya Sabha seat in future, besides Assembly seats. With the AIADMK saying a firm no, it was also learnt that DMDK was not averse to switching over to the DMK-led front.

If the DMK agrees for its demand for the Rajya Sabha seat and if the Congress breaks away from the present alliance, the DMDK might land in that alliance, sources say, adding that the possibilities, however, were very remote.

But if the Congress snaps ties with the DMK and goes on its own, some other small parties, now peeved with the manner in which they were treated by the DMK's negotiating team, might also leave the alliance, sources say.

TMC: PM free to visit WB anytime

Kolkata, March 3: The Trinamul Congress on Wednesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is free to visit the state for BJP's election campaign "20 times or more" to see for himself the spree of development under the TMC dispensation and compare it to that of states ruled by the saffron party.

West Bengal minister and party spokesman Bratya Basu told reporters that Modi is welcome to attend as many meetings, say 20 or more, he wishes to and come to the state as many times he wants to see for himself how Bengal has progressed after TMC came to power in 2011... how roads look like, how power cut has become a rarity, how people in rural areas are getting better amenities and how states like UP and MP are lagging behind," Basu said.

BJP sources said Modi is slated to address multiple rallies during the eight-phase polls in the state stretching a little over a month. Leaders like Shah and J.P. Nadda will also address several meetings as well as other BJP heavyweights like Yogi Adityanath.

Basu was replying to a query whether eight-phase Assembly polls in the state, beginning

bearing symbols of the BJP and TMC are also on the tray for sale, he said. "Such sweets have demand during the elections," he said.

Another prominent sweet shop Pelu Modak in Rishra which had previously launched delicacies themed on popular political campaigns, is also selling such desserts. Amitabha Dey, one of the owners of the shop, said, "There is no political motive behind the decision to sell sandesh on the 'Khela Hobe' theme. We just wanted

to connect with the people who love the slogan, we wished to touch their emotions."

There are three types of sandesh with the 'Khela Hobe' slogan — in white, green and orange, he said. The sandesh, having chocolate, strawberry and mango flavours, are priced between ₹40 and ₹100, depending on the size, he said. "We are hopeful that apart from the supporters of the political parties, the sweet will be a hit among the common people," Dey said. — PTI

2 IISc students die on campus

Bengaluru, March 3: Two students of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) died on campus in separate incidents, the institute said here on Wednesday.

In the first incident, a PhD student from Bihar died by suicide. "The reason behind the suicide is not known as no note was found. Police are investigating," an IISc faculty said.

In the other incident, a student of MTech collapsed

● **IN THE first incident, a PhD student from Bihar died by suicide. In other incident, a student of MTech collapsed and was found unresponsive.**

and was found unresponsive while playing football. "After first-aid at the IISc health centre, he was taken to a hospital where he was declared dead," the institute said in a statement. — PTI

Hectic parleys on in the 3 major fronts in Kerala

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MARCH 3

The CPM, Congress and BJP-led Fronts in Kerala are engaged in hectic deliberations to finalise their candidates for coming Assembly polls.

The district leadership of the CPM has almost finalised the list of prospective candidates in all 14 districts. Barring some leaders, the names of most sitting MLAs including senior ministers have been recommended by the district leadership for the coming polls.

The issue of exemption for four and five time legislators will be taken up at the CPM state committee meeting on March 5.

The No 2 party in the LDF, CPI which contested 27 seats in 2016 Assembly polls is likely to get 25 seats this time. Some of the seats of the CPI are likely to be given to the new allies. Similarly, the number of CPM seats will also come down to accommodate the alliance partners.

The CPI leadership has asked the district councils to prepare a panel of candidates in each district.

The panel will be discussed at the state executive meeting. Subsequently the final list will be announced.

The Congress-led UDF is also in the process of final-

ising the candidates. Congress election committee meeting held in Thiruvananthapuram decided not to field sitting MPs in the coming polls. The members of the committee submitted separate recommendations about candidates to the top leaders.

KPCC president Mullappally Ramachandran has decided to opt out the elections this time as he wants to concentrate on the campaigning of the UDF. However, the final decision in his case will be taken by the high command.

Many veteran leaders including P.J. Kurien, P.C. Thomas, V.M. Sudheeran have requested the leadership to give tickets to young leaders.

The BJP is conducting its seat sharing and candidate level discussions on the sidelines of the Vijaya Yatra of party state president K. Surendran. The BJP and its allies in the NDA are likely to finalise the candidates by next week. The bulk of seats will be contested by BJP. All top leaders of the party are likely to be in the fray this time.

Union minister V. Muralaadhharan has said he would contest if there is any direction from the central "Metroman" E. Sreedharan will be fielded from Thrissupurathura or Palakkad.

Delhi civic bypolls: AAP wins 4 wards

New Delhi, March 3: The AAP on Wednesday won four of the five civic wards in Delhi in a bypoll, with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal asserting that people were desperate to bring the party to power in the three municipal corporations in the national capital.

The AAP, however, suffered a shock defeat in the minority-dominated Chauhan Bangar ward, where Chaudhary Zubair Ahmad of the Congress defeated the party's candidate Mohammad Ishraq Khan by a whopping margin of 10,642 votes.

The BJP failed to open its account in the bypolls, being seen as the semi-final ahead of the civic polls due in 2022, and even lost the Shalimar Bagh seat held by it to the AAP.

"We honour the mandate given by people. Losing Shalimar Bagh North is a matter of introspection. The shortcomings will be removed and I am sure BJP will win the elections for three municipal corporations in 2022," said Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta.

The AAP candidates won from Kalyanpuri, Rohin-C, Trilokpuri and Shalimar Bagh North wards.

According to the state elec-

tion commission, the AAP polled the highest 46.10 per cent votes in the bypolls, followed by 27.29 per cent by the BJP and 21.84 per cent by the Congress.

"The people of Delhi have once again voted in the name of work. Congratulations to all. The people are fed up with misrule of the BJP at MCD for 15 years. People are desperate to bring the AAP to rule the MCD," Kejriwal tweeted after the AAP's victory.

AAP candidate Dhirender Kumar won the Kalyanpuri ward by 7,043 votes.

The party candidate Vijay Kumar from Trilokpuri defeated BJP's Om Prakash by a margin of 4,986 votes. AAP's Sunita Mishra defeated Surbhi Jaju of the BJP in Shalimar Bagh ward by 2,705 votes. The seat was earlier held by the BJP.

Ram Chander of the AAP defeated BJP candidate Rakesh Goyal by 2,985 votes in Rohini C ward.

Deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia in a tweet congratulated the party workers for the victory and said people were fed up with the BJP and would bring in Kejriwal's politics of honesty and work, in MCD polls next year.

— PTI

Career Chronicle

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SHORT TAKES

OZ AG DENIES
RAPE CHARGE,
WON'T RESIGN

Canberra, March 3: Australia's attorney-general denied having sexual contact with a 16-year-old who had accused him of raping her 33 years ago and said Wednesday he would not resign as the nation's top law officer.

Christian Porter instead said he would take leave to care for his mental health after the allegations recently became public. "I'm going to take a couple of short weeks leave just for my own sanity," Porter told reporters. "I think that I will be able to return from that and do my job." The accuser took her own life last year, and her allegations against Porter became public last week.

15 KILLED AFTER
SUV CRASHES
INTO SEMITRUCK

El Centro (US), March 2: An SUV believed to be carrying 27 people crashed into a semi-truck Tuesday on a Southern California highway, killing 15 people and leaving others injured, hospital officials said. Judy Cruz, director of El Centro Regional Medical Center's emergency department, said 14 people died at the scene, which is about 11 miles (18 kilometres) north of the US-Mexico border, and another died after arriving at the hospital. Officials believe there were 27 people in an SUV that struck a tractor-trailer full of gravel. Multiple patients were sent to hospitals for their injuries, including four flown to Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs, spokesman Todd Burke said. Three

BUDGET CHIEF:
NEERA TANDEN
WITHDRAWS

Washington, March 3: In the first major setback to US President Joe Biden, Indian-American policy expert Neera Tanden has withdrawn her nomination as his top White House budget official after she faced strong opposition from both Democratic and Republican senators for her past controversial posts on social media.

Tanden, 50, had been facing a tough time for the confirmation of her nomination as Director of the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) over her past Twitter outbursts against several lawmakers, including those from her own Democratic Party.

Tanden, president of the left-leaning think tank Center for American Progress, would have led a key economic post that oversees the production of the President's proposed budget for his agenda if she had been confirmed. The OMB is in charge of the budget-drafting process in the White House, as well as having a large role in the issuance of new regulations.

Biden on Tuesday accepted her withdrawal and indicated that Tanden might be brought in the administration in some other capacity. Her withdrawal marks the first high-profile defeat of one of Biden's nominees. Eleven of the 23 Cabinet nominees requiring Senate approval have been confirmed, most with strong bipartisan support.

10 rockets hit US
airbase in Iraq

Baghdad, March 3: At least 10 rockets targeted a military base in western Iraq that hosts US-led coalition troops on Wednesday, the coalition and the Iraqi military said. It was not immediately known if there were any casualties. The rockets struck Ain al-Asad airbase in Anbar province at 7:20 a.m., coalition spokesman Col. Wayne Marotto said. No one claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Iraqi military released a statement saying the attack did not cause significant losses and that security forces had found the launch pad used for the rockets a burned out truck. It was found in the al-Baghdadi area of Anbar, about 5 miles (8 kilometres) from the base, an Iraqi military official said on condition of anonymity to discuss the attack with the media.

Video of the site shows a burning medium-sized truck in a desert area.

It was the first attack since the US struck Iran-aligned militia targets along the Iraq-Syria border last week, killing killed one militiaman and stoking fears of a possible repeat of a series of tit-for-tat attacks that escalated

last year, culminating in the US drone strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassim Soleimani outside the Baghdad airport.

Wednesday's attack targeted the same base where Iran struck with a barrage of missiles in January last year in retaliation for the killing of Soleimani.

Dozens of US service members were injured, suffering concussions in that strike. British Ambassador to Iraq Stephen Hickey condemned the attack, saying it undermined the ongoing fight against the Islamic State group. Coalition forces are in Iraq to fight Daesh at the invitation of the Iraqi government, he tweeted, using the Arabic acronym for IS. These terrorist attacks undermine the fight against Daesh and destabilize Iraq. Denmark said coalition forces at Ain al-Asad were helping to bring stability and security to the country.

Despicable attacks against Ain al-Asad base in #Iraq are completely unacceptable," Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod tweeted. The Danish armed forces said two Danes, who were in the camp at the time of the attack, are unharmed. — AP

Myanmar security men gun
down at least 6 protesters

Authorities extend crackdown on protests against last month's coup

Yangon, March 3: Myanmar security forces shot and killed at least six people on Wednesday, according to accounts on social media and local news reports, as authorities extend their lethal crackdown on protests against last month's coup.

Multiple reports from several cities and towns, difficult to independently confirm, said police used live ammunition as well as tear gas and rubber bullets to violently disperse protesters. In Myingyan in central Myanmar, multiple social media posts reported the shooting death of a 14-year-old boy.

A second death was reported later. At least four other deaths were reported elsewhere. Demonstrators have regularly flooded the streets of cities across the country since the military seized power on Feb. 1 and ousted the elected government of leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Their numbers have remained high even as security forces have repeatedly fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds to disperse the

crowds, and arrested protesters en masse.

On Sunday, the UN Human Rights Office said it believed at least 18 people were killed that day. The escalation of violence has led to increased diplomatic efforts to resolve Myanmar's political crisis. The UN Security Council is expected to hold a closed meeting on the situation on Friday, council diplomats said, speaking on condition of anonymity ahead of an official announcement. The United Kingdom requested the meeting, they said.

But any kind of coordinated action at the United Nations would be difficult since two permanent members of the UN Security Council, China and Russia, would almost certainly veto it. Some countries have imposed or are considering imposing their own sanctions. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, of which Myanmar is a neighbour, held a teleconference meeting of foreign ministers on Tuesday to seek a consensus on helpful measures. The region-

● **DEMONSTRATORS HAVE** regularly flooded the streets of cities across the country since the military seized power on Feb. 1 and ousted the elected government of leader Aung San Suu Kyi. Their numbers have remained high even as security forces have repeatedly fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds to disperse the crowds, and arrested protesters en masse.

al group of 10 nations has a tradition of non-interference in each other's internal affairs. A statement — issued by the group's chair, rather than as a joint declaration — called for an end to violence and for talks to try to reach a peaceful settlement.

Snubbing Asean's appeal, Myanmar's security forces on Wednesday continued to attack peaceful

protesters. Details of the crackdowns and casualties are difficult to independently confirm, especially those occurring outside the bigger cities.

But the accounts of most incidents have been consistent in social media and from local news outlets, and usually have videos and photos supporting them. It is also likely that many incidents from remote areas go unreported or generally unnoticed. In the central city of Monywa, which has turned out huge crowds to protest the military takeover, three people were shot on Wednesday, including one in the head, reported the Democratic Voice of Burma, an independent television and online news service.

There were also fatalities in the city on Sunday. In Myingyan in the same central region, multiple social media posts reported the death of the 14-year-old boy. Photos showed what was said to be his body, with his head and chest soaked with blood, being carried from where he fell by fellow protesters.

In Magwe, a student was reported seriously injured with a gunshot wound. In the town of Hpakant, four people were reported to have been shot with live ammunition. Myanmar's ethnic Kachin minority has historically had tense relations with the central government and fields a guerrilla force of its own.

One person was reported shot in Pynoolwin, a town in central Myanmar better known to many by its British colonial name, Maymyo. The town is popular with tourists because of its cool climate and was once a colonial hill station set up for British administrators during the hot season. The shooting was said to have broken out when security forces blocked a road to protesters.

The usual daily protests in Yangon and Mandalay, the country's biggest cities, were again attacked by police. In Mandalay, riot police backed by soldiers broke up an anti-coup rally, chasing around 1,000 teachers and students from a street with tear gas. — AP

Blast damages Dutch virus test
centre; experts probe reason

The Hague, March 3: A blast smashed five windows at a Coronavirus testing centre in a small Dutch town early Wednesday and explosive experts were called in to investigate, police said. Nobody was hurt.

Police in the province of North Holland tweeted that "an explosive went off" near the testing centre in Bovenkarspel just before 7 a.m. Police cordoned off the area, which is 60 kilometres (40 miles) north of Amsterdam, and were investigating the cause of the blast. Police spokesman Menno Hartenberg said it was unclear whether the testing centre was deliberately targeted or when the facility would be able to reopen.

He said it was clear that the explosive didn't "get there by accident. But we have no idea at the moment who exactly left it there and what the intention was." Police said a metal cylinder that had exploded was found outside the building. The northern regions of North Holland province have been identified as a virus hotspot in recent weeks, with infection numbers higher than the national average. In January, rioters torched a Coronavirus test facility in the fishing village of Urk on the first night of a 9 p.m.-to-4:30 a.m. nationwide curfew imposed as part of the government's latest Coronavirus lockdown. Attacks on health workers and facilities around the world have increased amid the Co-



A technical investigator wearing protective equipment is at work after an explosion occurred near a Covid-19 test centre, shattering windows but causing no injuries, in Bovenkarspel, the Netherlands, on Wednesday. — AFP

vid-19 pandemic. A new report by the Geneva-based Insecurity Insight and the University of California, Berkeley's Human Rights Center identified more than 1,100 threats or acts of violence against health care workers and facilities last year.

Some Dutch lockdown restrictions were relaxed Wednesday with hairdressers, masseurs and other "contact professions" allowed to reopen if they adhere to strict social distancing and hygiene measures. Nonessential shops also were allowed to reopen in the Netherlands for the first time since mid-December, though only to very limited numbers of customers who make an appointment in advance. — AP

Texas biggest state
to lift mask mandate

Houston, March 3: Texas will lift its mask mandate and increase the capacity of all businesses to 100 per cent from March 10, Governor Greg Abbott has announced, making it the largest US state to end one of the most effective ways to slow the spread of the deadly Coronavirus.

"It is now time to open Texas 100%, Abbot said on Tuesday. The announcement by the Republican leader in Texas, where the virus has killed more than 42,000 people, has rattled

doctors and city leaders who said they are now bracing for another deadly resurgence.

Texas is the largest US state to end its mask mandate. Abbott has faced criticism from his party over the measure, which was imposed last July. The administration of US President Joe Biden, a Democrat, has made it clear Coronavirus restrictions are still necessary to contain the spread of the disease that has claimed the lives of over 516,400 people in the country. — PTI

Sciamma's work: A gentle, warm
ode to the power of imagination

SUPARNA SHARMA | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

Imagination is no child's play. Building a happy, alternate universe requires feeling lonely while grappling with questions that no one is providing answers to. In our imagined worlds, everything and everyone is as they should be, and not how they are.

This creation of our imagination is a correction to fill the gaps that life and those we love have left unattended, and to live the life we think we deserve. French screenwriter and director Celine Sciamma, who has been consistently climbing up the ladder of critical acclaim with her films since the 2007 *Water Lilies*, really made her presence felt on the world stage when her stunning fourth feature, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2019.

On Wednesday, Sciamma's fifth feature, *Petite Maman*, a story about three generations

of women, had its world premiere at the International Film Festival of Berlin, online. The film opens when Marion's (Gabrielle Sanz) mother (Nina Meurisse) has passed away at an old age home. Nelly (Josephine Sanz), Marion's daughter, is eight but caring and curious beyond her age. They share a warm, loving relationship, but Nelly is also acutely aware of her mother's silence and sadness. Nelly is helping her parents clean out her mother's childhood home and in between chores, often at night, she asks Marion questions about her childhood, the wood hut she had built, the operation she had to undergo. But Marion doesn't want to tackle her past. "You always ask so many questions at bedtime."

"I only see you at bedtime." Next morning, Marion is gone, leaving Nelly with an unexplained, disturbing absence. In between helping her father, Nelly ventures out into the woods carrying fragments of memories her mother and

grandmother shared with her. There she discovers a friend and together they create a world complete with a hut in the forest and warm meals. They write a play, act out their roles, play board games and help each other find some answers. *Petite Maman* (Petite Mom) is an intimate, gentle, gorgeous ode to the power of imagination.

Though less dazzling in its scale and ambition than Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, *Petite Maman* is more assured, mature filmmaking. Shot in a house and a forest lit by yellow and red autumnal leaves, *Petite Maman* has few dialogue and yet it beautifully conveys feelings and emotions through the simplest of daily routines and interactions.

Shot during the Corona pandemic, *Petite Maman* seems to say that checking into an imagined world is not always checking out of life. It's also, sometimes, the place we need to go to, to find answers and love.



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	51,444.65	2.28
Nifty 50	15,245.60	2.19
S&P 500*	3,858.55	-0.30
Dollar (₹)	72.71	0.90
Pound Sterling (₹)	101.95	-0.21
Euro (₹)	88.05	0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	44,768*208	0.46
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	64.40	2.71
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.238	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.496	0.081

* As of 8:30 PM IST

India ahead in terms of women in senior mgmt

India is ahead of global average in women working in senior management positions and ranks third globally, says a Grant Thornton report that surveyed 10,000 businesses across 29 countries. The percentage of women in senior management in India stood at 39 per cent against the global average of 31 per cent. Over 98 per cent of businesses in India have at least one woman in senior management Vs 90 per cent globally.

Services expand at fastest rate in a year in Feb.



India's services activity expanded at the fastest rate in a year in February, while employment fell further and companies noted the sharpest rise in expenses from rising prices. The seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index rose from 52.8 in January to 55.3 in February—the sharpest rate of expansion in output in a year. Service sector employment fell during February as the pandemic restricted labour supply.

Podcast series on Indian entrepreneurs

Singapore-based Melting Pot Podcast has kicked off a series featuring 10 leading Indian entrepreneurs. In 10 episodes, the podcast will feature entrepreneurs who started their ventures at a young age and became an inspiration for people from all over the world. Melting Pot Collection is an inspiring series, presenting stories of culturally diverse and passionate individuals, says Payal Nayar, founder & host of the podcast.

Oye! Rickshaw launches battery swapping platform

Electric mobility start-up Oye! Rickshaw announced the launch of its battery swapping platform targeting to deploy 10,000 lithium-ion batteries by the end of this year. The firm, which started a battery swapping pilot project in December, said it has crossed 1 lakh swap kilometres in under three months. Founder Mohit Sharma said, "By introducing swapping, we are significantly reducing downtime of e-rickshaws."



■ Spectrum auction helps market regain momentum Bulls in 'pawri' mode



RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, MARCH 3

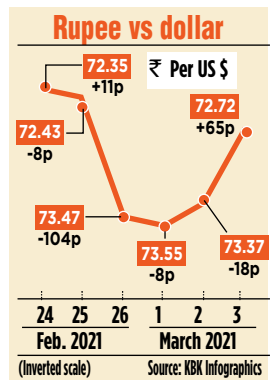
The stock market moved up for the third consecutive session, gaining over 2 per cent on Wednesday and making investors richer by over Rs 10 lakh crore since the steep, over 3.5 per cent fall last Friday. This week's spectrum auction, which fetched the government Rs 77,814 crore, seems to have buoyed market sentiments. Index heavyweight Reliance Industries and rival telecom company Bharti Airtel gained 4.52 per cent and 0.92 per cent, respectively, after they put in majority of the bids in the spectrum sale. Despite mixed global cues, with the overnight US market closing in the red, the Sensex opened higher and kept the momentum to close with a gain of 1147 points, or 2.28 per cent, at 51,444 points. The Nifty-50 gained 326

points, or 2.19 per cent, to close at 15,245. The return of foreign investors after last Friday's heavy selling seems to have stabilised the domestic market. Foreign portfolio investors were net buyers of equities worth Rs 2,088.70 crore on Wednesday after Rs 2,223.16 crore buying on Tuesday. Domestic institutions also turned net buyers on Wednesday by Rs 392.91 crore. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies crossed the Rs 210-lakh crore mark for the first time. The BSE Mid-cap and Small-cap indices gained 1.45 per cent and 1.34 per cent, respectively. "A stellar rally across BFSI & Metals powered indices higher today by 2.3 per cent with the market breadth improving dramatically in afternoon trade. Investors cherry-picked AMC, HFCs and the day also witnessed keen interest in sugar

₹ gains 65p, but rising trend may not last

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, MARCH 3

The rupee on Wednesday closed 65 paise stronger, as investor appetite for emerging market assets improved after the US treasury yields continued to cool off and weakened the dollar globally. However experts said that further appreciation of the rupee will be limited due to the hardening of the US 10-year yields. Sriram Iyer, senior research analyst, currency and commodities, Reliance Capital, said, "The rupee has been appreciating for the last two-three sessions due to corporate dollar and portfolio inflows in our equity markets, but this appreciation could be limited due to expectation of further hardening of the US treasury yields as the market is factoring good economic outlook supported by the US government stimulus plan and steps taken by the US Federal Reserve to support the economy." "The 10 year US yields, which is at 1.4 per cent right now, could harden



to 1.8 per cent which will support the US dollar, and if that happens, the rupee would weaken. In the short-term 72.50 will remain a key support for the USD-INR pair while on the upside 73.25 will remain a key resistance point," added Iyer. The US Fed will be worried if the US yields harden further as it wants to pump money at lower rates, added Iyer. At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 73.26 and after hitting an intra-day high of 72.71 and a low of 73.26, finally settled at 72.72 against the dollar.

stocks which recorded handsome gains" said S. Ranganathan, head of Research, LKP Securities. Among the sectoral indices BSE Bankex

gained 2.75 per cent, Metal (3.23 per cent), IT (2.01 per cent) and Realty (1.47 per cent) as all sectoral indices barring the Auto Index closed in the green.

Insurance brokers brought under ombudsman in expanded mandate

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, MARCH 3

In a bid to facilitate speedy redressal of customer grievances, the government has amended insurance ombudsman norms. Under the new rules, the Council for Insurance Ombudsmen will take over the duties of the executive council of insurers and insurance brokers will be brought within the ambit of the ombudsman. The government move

comes after the Department of Financial Services of finance ministry receiving scores of complaints from policyholders about the deficiency and delay in insurance services by the insurers. Besides, a parliamentary panel had also raised this issue last year, demanding that there should be a dispute resolution and complaint redressal mechanism in form of insurance ombudsmen for the insured.

Notifying the new norms, finance ministry said on Wednesday that the amended rules have enlarged the scope of complaints to ombudsmen include deficiencies in service by insurers, agents, brokers and other intermediaries. "Further, insurance brokers have been brought within the ambit of the ombudsman mechanism, by empowering the ombudsmen to pass awards against insurance brokers as well," it said.

Lexus drives in LC 500h at ₹2.15 crore

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, MARCH 3

Lexus, the Japanese car giant Toyota's luxury arm, on Wednesday launched a limited-edition model of its sports coupe, the LC 500h in the country at Rs 2.15 crore at pan-India showroom. The company claims that the model is inspired by the graceful flight of birds and airplanes to elevate the sense of driving with refined aerodynamics. The grand-touring coupe's special edition features borrow from an earlier partnership between air race pilot Yoshihide



Muroya and Lexus engineers that helped him win the 2017 Red Bull Air Race World Championships. A team consisting of the same engineers worked on the design of the Lexus LC 500h. "We are very excited to announce the addition of the exclusive limited edition of the LC 500h. With

its bold, aviation-inspired design language, we are confident that it will be well received by our discerning guests," PB Venugopal, president at Lexus India said. The limited edition model has been built by the same set of engineers who have built the LFA supercar.

Caterpillar celebrates 50 years of manufacturing in India

Hyderabad, March 3: Caterpillar, the world's largest manufacturer of construction and mining equipment, enters the 50th year of manufacturing in India. Globally, Caterpillar has more than 95 years of product support expertise, an installed base of about 2 million assets and a dealer network across 193 countries with about 160,000 employees. In India, Caterpillar now has a firm footprint with six manufacturing facilities, two R&D centres, five subsidiary entities and eight Caterpillar brands. "Caterpillar has been part of India's growth story for many decades. We



Jim Umpleby

have been a key partner since the 1930s, and it is remarkable to witness the progress in this great nation over the years," said Caterpillar chairman and CEO Jim Umpleby. "This year denotes the golden jubilee anniversary as we enter into 50 years of manufacturing in India," said country manager Banshi Phansalkar.

Business NOTE

TRACKING | VITALS

New Delhi, March 3: Healthcare startup Dozee on Wednesday said it has launched a contactless remote patient monitoring solution for hospitals and aims to partner over 500 hospitals in the next 12 months. The Dozee Pro solution features an AI-powered triaging system that enables remote monitoring of patients outside of the ICU. The startup has already tied up with 70 hospitals across the country in three months for remote patient monitoring. "We are looking to part-

Dozee raises an alert if there is deterioration in a patient's health

Startup offers remote patient monitoring

ner over 500 hospitals and monitor over 2 lakh patients in the next 12 months. We are keen to work with both government and private hospitals," Dozee CEO & co-founder Mudit Dandwate said in a virtual event. Dozee has so far deployed 4,000 devices in hospitals to monitor patients continuously and to help them enhance patient care and clinical outcomes. "Remote patient monitoring is rapidly becoming a way for hospitals and healthcare providers to deliver an enhanced level of quality patient care



through the pandemic and beyond. "From Covid-19 patient care, to post-surgical follow-up, to ongoing care management for patients with chronic illness, Dozee has been helping doctors and hospitals with

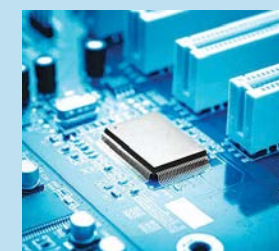
clinical-grade technology to provide quality of care safely and at scale," Dandwate noted. Dozee provides doctors with continuous data on a patient's vitals and raises an alert when there is deterioration in health, empowering them to make informed care decisions no matter where they are. The country has 20 lakh hospital beds and only one lakh ICU beds. Coupled with the shortage of trained nursing staff, it is impossible to keep an active watch on the health of all the patients continuously, especially outside

the ICU. Currently, hospital staff has to manually visit patients every couple of hours to measure the patient vitals. Without continuous monitoring, any deterioration in a patient's health can go unnoticed and lead to complications. According to industry estimates, the global remote patient monitoring market is expected to touch \$2.14 billion in 2027 from \$786.4 million in 2019, registering a Compound annual growth rate of 14.1 per cent through the forecast period. —PTI

‘Chip shortages could extend into next year’

DEBBY WU
MARCH 3

Taiwanese panel supplier Innolux Corporation says the current chip shortages could last beyond this year, becoming the latest manufacturer to warn that competition for semiconductors may persist for some time. "Supply at foundries is very tight. Capacity in the chip packaging and testing space is also tight," James Yang, president of the Foxconn affiliate, told analysts at an earnings conference on Wednesday. "The chip supply bottleneck could still remain unresolved in the first half of 2022."



Some chip packaging equipment now takes 11 months to ship, Yang said. Chipmakers aren't expanding capacity for 8-inch wafers needed for power management chips and display driver integrated circuits, he added. Automakers and 5G smartphones both need power management chips so the overall supply is getting even tighter, the

executive said. Chip shortages are expected to wipe out \$61 billion of sales for automakers alone and delay the production of a million vehicles in the March quarter, but the fallout now threatens to hit the much larger electronics industry. Possibly a broad spectrum of chip-heavy products from cars to phones and gaming consoles could see shortages or price hikes. About 3 to 5 per cent of total panel supply could suffer shipment delays, though the impact on Innolux so far has been slight, Yang said. Panel demand will outpace supply this year, he added. —Bloomberg

Extreme weather puts ₹6.2 L cr debt at risk

ARCHANA CHAUDHARY
MARCH 3

An increase in extreme weather events like floods, droughts and cyclones risk souring debt worth more than Rs 6.19 lakh crore (\$84 billion) at India's biggest financial institutions, according to leading non-profit environmental disclosure platform CDP. State Bank of India, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank and Axis Bank are among the institutions that reported climate risks to CDP in 2020, it said in its annual report released on Wednesday. The banks flagged exposure to environmentally sensitive businesses, including cement, coal, oil and power. They also listed

the effects of cyclones and floods on loan repayments in farming and related sectors. Lenders accounted for 87 per cent of the total risk, valued at about \$97 billion, across 67 Indian companies that responded to CDP. "Climate is the biggest risk to businesses in the long run. Financial institutions are beginning to understand it," said Damandeep Singh, Delhi-based director of CDP India. "As investors look at funding companies based on environmental, social and governance disclosures, we've seen many more companies report climate change risk." CDP, which gathered the data on behalf of 515 investors with \$106 trillion in assets, said it got respon-

ses from 220 small and large Indian companies. SBI, which is facing concerns from investors over its proposal to fund the Carmichael coal mine in Australia, valued its total climate risk at Rs 3.83 lakh crore. The bank said it may "indirectly face reputational risks, should it be involved in lending to environmentally sensitive projects which may have significant public opposition." The second-highest risk was flagged by HDFC Bank, which estimated it had Rs 1.79 lakh crore of assets in danger—a 24 per cent increase from 2019. IndusInd, Axis and Yes reported lowered risk at Rs 46,600 crore, Rs 7,500 crore and Rs 2,000 crore, respectively. —Bloomberg

Amazon, Google vie for digital payments platform to rival NPCI

SARITHA RAI
MARCH 3

Technology giants Facebook, Amazon.com and Google and credit-card providers Visa and Mastercard are among those vying for unprecedented access to India's burgeoning digital retail payments market. The companies are part of four consortia preparing to apply for licences to operate retail payments and settlement systems in the country, people familiar with the matter said. More companies could band together before a March 31 application deadline.



In a market where cash is still king, digital payments are quickly gaining ground as India's 1.3 billion people are starting to embrace online shopping and services such as online gaming and streaming. With Credit Suisse Group AG predicting \$1 trillion in online payments in India in 2023, the companies chosen to enable such transactions stand to reap lucrative commissions. "India's mobile digital payments is seeing huge growth in a post-pandemic world," said Vijay

Shekhar Sharma, founder and CEO of New Delhi-based Paytm. "It's a good time to open up more diverse payments solutions and keep the momentum going." One of the consortia consists of Amazon, Visa, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank as well as fintech startups Pine Labs and BillDesk. Another group is led by Reliance Industries and its partners Facebook and Google, which together agreed to invest more than \$10 billion in Reliance's digital services unit last year. Sharma's Paytm heads a group that includes ride-hailing startup Ola and at least five other companies. The fourth consortium consists of Tata

Group, Mastercard, Bharti Airtel and retail banks Kotak Mahindra Bank and HDFC Bank. The contest is fierce as regulator Reserve Bank of India is expected to give just one or two licenses, as implied in its notification inviting bids. The process to decide the winners could take at least six months and it could be a further year or more before the systems and solutions come into use. The winners will take on National Payments Corporation of India, the sole pioneering umbrella organisation backed by more than 50 retail banks. Its Unified Payments Interface, or UPI, protocol debuted in 2016 and set the digital payments arena afire by allowing

users to link their phone numbers to their bank accounts. "The regulator probably doesn't want concentration risk as the UPI backbone has become critical to the economy," said Nandan Nilekani, the man behind Aadhaar. "With more licensees and these systems presumably being able to operate seamlessly with each other, the aim seems to be to reinvigorate innovation and push digital payments even deeper into the country," said Nilekani, a co-founder and chairman of Infosys. Though commissions on digital payments are thin, the volume is potentially huge. Card and mobile payments represented only 21 per cent of \$781 billion in retail purchases at brick-and-mortar stores in 2019, according to an estimate by S&P Global Market Intelligence. The new licensees could make money by charging businesses transaction fees. They can also break new territory by setting up and operating ATMs, point-of-sale systems, remittance services and new innovative payment solutions. —Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Sania-Andreja sail into semis

Doha: Indian tennis star Sania Mirza and her Slovenian partner Andreja Klepac sailed into the women's doubles semifinals of the Qatar Open with a straight sets win over their rivals here on Wednesday. Sania and Andreja made short work of fourth seeds Anna Blinkova and Gabriela Dabrowski 6-2, 6-0 to reach the last four round. The Indo-Slovenian pair will next play top seeds Czech Republic's Barbora Krejickova and Katerina Siniakova. Krejickova and Siniakova defeated Dutch duo of Kiki Bertens and Lesley Pattinama Kerkhove 4-6, 6-4, 13-11 in another quarterfinal duel. Elsewhere in Rotterdam Kazakhstan's Alexander Dublik mauled champion Alexander Zverev in straight sets 7-5, 6-3 in the Round of 32 at the ABN Amro World Tennis Tournament on Wednesday. — *Agencies*

Paddler Sharath off to flying start

Doha: Ace Indian paddler Achanta Sharath Kamal advanced to the second round of the World Table Tennis Contender series with a hard fought 3-2 win over Czech Republic's Pavel Sirucek here on Wednesday. Sharath toiled hard before defeating Sirucek 17-15, 9-11, 11-6, 8-11, 11-9 in the first round. However, Sathiyam Gnanasekaran, who alongside Sharath secured a direct entry into the main draw, made a first round exit after going down to world No.32 Aruna Quadri 7-11, 4-11, 8-11. World No.20 Sharath struggled initially when he was seen trailing by five points in the first game before recovering well with a strong counter attacking display to take an early 1-0 lead in the match. Despite losing the next game, the nine-time national champion kept firing attacking shots to bag the third game comfortably. — *PTI*

Jesus brace helps City hunt Wolves

Manchester: Manchester City equalled their club record of 28 games unbeaten on Tuesday, hammering Wolverhampton 4-1 to open up a gaping 15-point lead at the top of the Premier League. Pep Guardiola shuffled his pack at the Etihad against the team who did the league double against them last season as he maintained his club's assault on an unprecedented quadruple. The champions-elect were made to sweat after Conor Coady cancelled out an early own goal from Leander Dendoncker but two late goals from Gabriel Jesus and a Riyad Mahrez strike sealed the three points. City's 28-match unbeaten run in all competitions equals their run from April to December 2017 and they are red-hot favourites to wrap up a third Premier League title in four years. — *AFP*

Ronaldo digs deep to blank Spezia

Milan: Juventus gave their hopes of a 10th straight Italian league title a timely boost as they beat struggling Spezia 3-0 on Tuesday to move within seven points of league leaders Inter Milan. Juventus were frustrated for long periods, but second-half goals from Alvaro Morata, Federico Chiesa and Cristiano Ronaldo clinched an important win. Juve sit three points behind second-placed AC Milan with Inter Milan four points further clear ahead of their match at Parma on Thursday. The Turin giants have won the last nine Italian league titles. — *AFP*

Live on TV

CRICKET

India vs England: Fourth Test, Day 1 from 9.30 am on Star Sports 1

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Fulham vs Tottenham from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1; West Brom vs Everton from 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 2

Italian League: Parma vs Inter Milan from 1.15 am (Friday) on Sony Ten 2, HD

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THE LAST GAMBIT

Resurgent India plot final move to trap England

Ahmedabad, March 3: A ruthless India will not take their foot off the pedal while taking England for another "spin ride" in the high-stakes Test series finale starting Thursday, aiming to not just complete another dominant home performance but also realise their World Test Championship dreams.

Virat Kohli's men need at least a draw to maintain the current 2-1 scoreline to qualify for the Lord's final against New Zealand while England at best can heal Tim Paine's January scars by letting Australia a lucky passage to the summit clash with a win.

While a draw always seems a safe option in a game like this but Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri, with their attacking instincts, wouldn't like to play a defensive game which at times can be counter-productive.

India laid a venomous trap on the refurbished Motera and with the pink ball, demolished England inside two days, messing more with their minds than getting any tangible help from the track.

Axar Patel bowled ramrod straight and England had their heads "spinning" from the start. The play has worked well for the hosts.

Both Ajinkya Rahane and Zak Crawley felt that the track for the fourth Test looks "similar" to what they got in the previous two matches but the red ball which skids less off the surface compared to the pink one promises to make it a better contest between the two teams.

This is a Test match where England have little to gain save salvaging a bit of pride in a drawn series while India have everything to lose.

For England, poor team selection has also contributed to their shoddy batting where Joe Root (333 runs) managed to maintain a fair gap (187 runs) between him and the second highest scorer Ben Stokes (146).

Jack Leach (16 wickets) has done his bit but he does have his own set of limitations and with his pace he is unlikely to always trouble the batsman. — *PTI*



India's Shubman Gill (left) prepares to catch the ball during a training session ahead of the fourth Test against England at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. — *AP*

Virat shuts spin-track noise

Ahmedabad, March 3: Stop the noise, tighten up that defence and get on with the game — a combative Indian skipper Virat Kohli said on Wednesday ahead of the fourth and final Test against England as he navigated persistent queries on the spin-friendly tracks in the country.

India annihilated England inside two days in the Pink-ball Test at Motera, days after the visitors crumbled on another spin-assisting pitch in Chennai in the second Test.

England managed 112 and 81 in the Ahmedabad Test after scoring 134 and 164 in Chennai as Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel tormented them in turns.

"There is always too much noise and too much conversation about spin tracks," India skipper



Virat Kohli

Kohli said at the pre-match press conference.

"I am sure if our media is in a space to contradict those views or present views which say that it is unfair to criticise only spin tracks, then it will be a balanced conversation," he added. Kohli, at the end of the third Test, had blamed the batsmen's technique for their failure on the Motera track.

"But the unfortunate bit is everyone plays along with that narrative (spinning tracks) and keeps making it news till the time it is relevant. And then a Test match happens, if you win on day 4 or 5, no one says anything but if it finishes in two days, everyone pounces on the same issue," he said.

When asked what he thought were the skills required to survive on such challenging spin tracks, Kohli emphasised on having a solid defence, which, he believes, is not the strongest anymore thanks to shorter formats.

Meanwhile, Joe Root has urged his England team to be "braver" and to free themselves from fear in the fourth and final Test.

"We've got all the ingredients, all the pieces and all the skills to exploit and succeed in these conditions," he said. — *PTI*

NUMBERS GAME

TESTS AT NARENDRA MODI STADIUM:

● The only day/night match played here ended in just two days.

● England have won three and India two in last five Tests between the two sides.

● Axar Patel took 18 wickets in their first two Tests. The number for Axar Patel to shoot at in the final Test is 31, by Narinder Hirwani, so he needs the little matter of 14 wickets to beat that. Charles "Terror" Turner of Australia had 29 wickets after three Tests.

● Ravichandran Ashwin who scored 957 runs in 30 innings of 18 Tests, needs 43 runs to become 14th Indian batsman to make over 1000 runs against England. Ravichandran Ashwin who scored 957 runs in 30 innings of 18 Tests, needs 43 runs to become 14th Indian batsman to make over 1000 runs against England.

— *S. PERVEZ QAISAR*

Kohli bats for rotation policy in bubble times

Ahmedabad, March 3: India skipper Virat Kohli feels rotation policy is the way forward in the age of bio-bubbles as mental fatigue caused by restrictive quarantines will make it extremely difficult for players to stay hungry.

England have been following a rotation policy in their ongoing tour of India, something that has drawn criticism from legends such as Kevin Pietersen.

Kohli, though, is convinced that as long as players are staying in bio-secure environments, taking intermittent breaks is not a bad idea.

"The kind of systems

I feel any format of the game is right place for rotation. No human being can possibly go on for that many number of games throughout of the year. Everyone needs to find windows of having some time off.

— **VIRAT KOHLI**

India cricket captain

you have to follow in the bubble, it can get very monotonous and it is very difficult to keep yourself excited about small things," Kohli said.

Bio-bubbles became imperative for resumption of sporting action

after COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc in 2020.

"I feel any format of the game is right place for rotation. No human being can possibly go on for that many number of games throughout of the year. Everyone needs to find windows of having some time off.

"These are the things that need to be considered for as long as you play in the bubble, outside of that it depends on where you stand physically more than mentally. But till the bubble exists, we need to keep the mental factor in the picture as well, because mental fatigue would be a huge, huge factor," he said. — *PTI*

STEYN SORRY FOR HIS POST CRITICISING IPL

New Delhi, March 3: South Africa pace great Dale Steyn on Wednesday apologised for his criticism of the Indian Premier League, saying he never intended to "degrade or insult" the world's biggest franchise-based T20 tournament.

The 37-year-old veteran fast bowler said his statement that cricket is sometimes forgotten amid all the money talk in the IPL was taken out of context in social media.

"IPL has been nothing short of amazing in my career, as well as other players too. My words were never intended to be degrading, insulting, or comparing of any leagues. Social media and words out of context can often do that. My apologies if this has upset anyone," Steyn tweeted.

Steyn's apology came after he claimed on the sidelines of the Pakistan Super League 6, where he is representing Quetta Gladiators, that money is given more importance than the game in the IPL.

Steyn had said that this was one of the reasons why he had not featured regularly in the event.

"I think when you go to the IPL, there are such big squads and so many big names and so much emphasis on maybe the amount of money players earn and everything like that, so sometimes, somewhere down the line, cricket gets forgotten," he had stated. — *PTI*

Kapil, Pele receive first dose of Covid-19 vaccine

New Delhi, March 3: Indian cricket legend Kapil Dev on Wednesday received his first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine at a renowned city hospital here.

The 62-year-old World Cup-winning captain got vaccinated at the capital's Fortis hospital.

Kapil Dev, thus, became the second former India cricketer to receive the vaccine after India head coach Ravi Shastri, who got vaccinated on Tuesday at Ahmedabad.

Both the cricket legends received the vaccine after India's inoculation drive entered its second phase on Monday in which the coverage was expanded to



Kapil Dev

include everyone above 60 and those over 45 with comorbidities.

India's greatest-ever fast bowler Kapil Dev had undergone an angioplasty in October last year after suffering a heart attack.

Elsewhere, football great Pele also received his first

dose of a Covid-19 vaccine on Tuesday, calling it an "unforgettable day."

The 80-year-old Brazilian football legend posted the news on his social media channels along with a picture of himself receiving the shot in his right arm.

Pele did not disclose where the dose was given, but he has been staying at his home in Guarujá, outside Sao Paulo, since the pandemic hit Brazil one year ago.

"Today is an unforgettable day I received the vaccine! The pandemic is not over yet. We must keep discipline to preserve lives until many people have taken the vaccine," Pele said. — *Agencies*

United HCA ask for IPL matches

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

After being at loggerheads for quite a while, the top two of the Hyderabad Cricket Association are now on the same page, or so it seems. After president Mohammad Azharuddin and secretary R. Vijayanand sent out separate agendas for the Apex Council meeting held on Wednesday, the two sat down and thrashed out their differences at the Association's regular meet, at which some important decisions were taken.

On top of the list is the Annual General Meeting, to be held on March 28. A host of issues and business with regard to Ombudsman, constitution of selection committees among others is likely to be taken up here.

Miffed at being left out, the HCA will also write to BCCI secretary, president and IPL Commissioner to include Hyderabad as a venue for the upcoming season.

Among the decisions taken are release of players' pension that has been pending from 2017 and insurance to all club secretaries (barring those belonging to institution teams) and employees in the administrative wing of the HCA.

Sindhu, Srikanth start off in style

Basel, March 3: Top Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth staved off a spirited challenge from compatriot Sameer Verma to make a winning start to his campaign at the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament here on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, world champion Sindhu beat Yigit Neslihan of Turkey 21-16, 21-19 in her first round match that lasted just 42 minutes.

The fourth seeded Kidambi, who had claimed the title in 2015, took little over an hour to see off 2018 winner Sameer 18-21, 21-18, 21-11 in a hard-fought men's singles opening round match.

He will be up against France's Thomas Rouxel in the Round of 16. Rouxel beat Canada's Xiaodong Sheng 21-18, 21-14 in another first round match while the second seeded Sindhu will next face Iris Wang of USA in her Round of 16 match on Thursday.

Sourabh Verma also won his first round match against Switzerland's Christian Kirchmayr 21-19, 21-18.

Sourabh will next face eight seed Kunlavut

Vitidsarn of Thailand in the Round of 16.

PRANNOY CRASHES

However, H. S. Prannoy made an early exit after losing to France's Mark Caljouw 19-21, 21-9, 17-21 in a men's singles first round match.

Last night, Indian mixed doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa notched up an upset 21-18, 21-10 win over the world No. 8 and second-seeded Indonesian pair of Hafiz Faizal and Gloria Emanuelle Widjaja in the opening round.

The second seeded Indian pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also won their first round men's doubles match against Christopher Grimley and Matthew Grimley of Scotland 21-18, 21-12.

Another Indian shuttler, Pranaav Jerry Chopra didn't have a good outing as he along with his mixed doubles partner N. Sikki Reddy lost 18-21, 15-21 to the third-seeded English pair of Marcus Ellis and Lauren Smith in 39 minutes. — *PTI*

STAR MARY CRUISES INTO SPANISH TOURNEY SEMIS

New Delhi, March 3: Six-time world champion M. C. Mary Kom (51kg) was assured of a medal in her first competitive outing since qualifying for the Olympics last year when she entered the semifinal of the Boxam International Tournament in Castellon, Spain, on Wednesday.

The 37-year-old defeated Italian Giordana Sorrentino with a split verdict in the quarterfinal stage of the event.

Next up for her is American Virginia Fuchs as she builds up to her second Olympic appearance in Tokyo later this year.

It was a watchful start by the experienced Indian as she took her time to get a measure of her aggressive opponent. Both the boxers preferred to counter-attack in the opening round, adopting a cautious approach for most part.

The proceedings picked up pace in the second round but in the final three minutes, it was Mary Kom who launched into attacks, dropping her guard completely and using her right hooks to good effect. — *PTI*

On a high, HFC set bigger goals

DC CORRESPONDENT HYDERABAD, MARCH 3

Hyderabad Football Club just about slipped out of semifinal contention to finish a creditable fifth in the Indian Super League and coach Manuel Marquez is understandably satisfied.

That was a big leap, considering they finished at the bottom of the table in the previous season. The odds were against HFC with matches being played away from home and injuries to players but the team logged 29 points from 20 games winning six, losing three and drawing 11 to be nudged out by Goa (31 points) for a semis place.

"We are very satisfied about the season. We could not make it to the semifinals but it is very difficult to look for something to criticise the players in this situation. This group is amazing, one of the best that I have trained in my life," Marquez said during a media interaction here on Wednesday.

The rewards were overwhelming as six players from the side were picked for the Indian camp by national coach Igor Stimac. "That's the most any ISL club has in the list and makes all of us really proud. They are quality players and deserve greater exposure," Marquez said.

Marquez was all praise for the home fans' virtual support. "We have been playing away but knew that the Hyderabad fans were behind the team. We felt very close to them and can't wait to play in front of our supporters at home next season," he said.

"Imagine that this is a film and we are the romantic story. We fought against the odds through the tournament. For Hyderabad, the club and supporters to win six games was quite something," the Spaniard added.

He wants to expand the love story by involving local players. Asked about Aadarsh Narayanapuram, an 18-year-old Hyderabad



Hyderabad Football Club coach Manuel Marquez at a press conference in Hyderabad on Wednesday.

who has recently acquired a European player licence in the junior category and is currently playing for lower division side CD Olimpic de Xativa in Valencia, Spain, Marquez said: "You can count on players from your city. It's very difficult though and is a step-by-step process. But for me one important thing would be that players from Hyderabad could play in the first team. I have always liked working with local players — I have done that all through my stints at Spanish clubs."

"This team is practically new, you have start from a scratch. Now we are taking the first step and the intention of the club — and one that I like in this project — is to try and take players from Hyderabad. However, that's not easy and is something that needs time. But this is a big city which has contributed many players to the national team in the years gone by, we hope to bring back the good old days," the 52-year-old said.

"This year because of the Covid situation it has been tough else we would have had the youth teams and everything in place. Now, slowly and steadily we are building from bottom-up. All our grassroots programs and youth level teams are being chalked out. Probably in the coming days we will have more information and will execute our plans," Mayur Karanjkar, Hyderabad FC Head of Media, added.