

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA

VIJAYAWADA | SUNDAY | 7 MARCH 2021

WEATHER



Max: 34.0°C
Min: 21.0°C
RH: 81%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Cloudy.
Max/Min temp.
34/21 °C

NATION | 5

Modi briefed on commanders' meet

SPORTS | 8

Shuttler Sindhu in Swiss Open final

TABLOID

12 months, 12 cities, in one suitcase



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ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Uttarayana
Tithi: Magha Bahula Navami till 4.49 pm
Star: Moola till 9 pm
Varjyam: 7.27 pm to 9 pm
Durmuhuram: 4.46 pm to 5.33 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
HIJRI CALENDAR
Rajab 22, 1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 6.05 am
Zohar: 1.30 pm
Asar: 5.00 pm
Maghrib: 6.17 pm
Isha: 8.15 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.20 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.15 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 1.23 AM
MOONSET TOMORROW 1.44 PM

COUNTER POINT



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

SHORT TAKES

2 killed at BJP MLA b'day in MP

Bhopal: Two people were killed in a group clash at the birthday party of BJP MLA Dharmendra Singh Lodhi in MP's Damoh district, police said on Saturday. The incident took place in the village of Banwar at around 10 pm on Friday, Damoh district superintendent of police Hemant Chouhan said.

■ Report on Page 5

₹1,500 cr scam busted by cops

Hyderabad: A ₹1,500-crore multi-level marketing scam was busted by the Cyberabad police who on Saturday, announced the arrest of 24 people for their involvement in the racket. Cyberabad police commissioner said 10 lakh people across the country were cheated by Indus Viva Health Sciences Pvt. Ltd.

TS Eamcet from July 5 to July 9

Hyderabad: The TS Council of Higher Education on Saturday announced that the Eamcet will be held from July 5 to July 9. As per the notification, the test for the agriculture and medical stream will be held on July 5 and July 6, and for the engineering stream from July 7 to 9. Applications run from March 20 to May 18.

TROUBLE | FREE

Phase 3 to see more vaccinations in state

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 6

With no adverse health incidents being witnessed among those taking Covid-19 vaccine from March 1 under Phase 3, more number of targeted people are expected to turn up for the jab in Andhra Pradesh. State health authorities are now administering the first dose of vaccine to new category of people involving those aged over 60 years, apart from people aged between 45-49 years with multiple health complica-

tions. In addition, health-care and frontline workers, who had missed their either first or second dose of vaccine, are also being immunised.

From March 1 to 5, health personnel have so far administered Coronavirus vaccine to 1,12,115 persons in the state. Among them, 24,863 got their second dose. The number of adverse events following vaccination (AEFV) reported, that too minor in nature, have been just two till now.

Authorities maintain that vaccination is unlike the

first and second phases of Covid-19 vaccination programme, when two deaths in addition to few cases of severe health complications had been reported. The third phase of immunisation is going on without any major health issues among beneficiaries. However, no specific reason is being attributed to this phenomenon.

But health authorities are optimistic that this will help more number of targeted beneficiaries to now turn up for vaccination in a big way. For example, a 103-year-

old woman Veeramma from Guntupalli village of Ballikurava mandal in Prakasam district turned up for Covid-19 vaccination at a local PHC on Wednesday.

She developed no adverse effects post immunisation. Similarly, Alla Sriharamma (91) from Inkolli village of J. Panguluru mandal in Prakasam district took the vaccination without any complication.

Prakasam district medical and health officer Dr. P. Ratnavali said, "At a time when a section of health-

care and frontline workers are hesitating, these aged women are serving as role models for people to turn up for vaccination and protect themselves.

"We are also undertaking door-to-door campaigns involving ANMs to identify especially aged persons for immunisation, in addition to those suffering with health issues."

Meanwhile, state health authorities have advised targeted people to register for their vaccination at the 1,284 government hospitals as also 553 private hospitals

linked with YSR Aarogyasri scheme.

Health director Dr. T. Geetha Prasadini said, "We are not receiving any reports of adverse effects during Phase 3 of Covid-19 vaccination. We have come across only two minor cases throughout the state, even though vaccination centre managers have been calling up beneficiaries to inquire about their health. As a result, we are expecting more number of targeted people to turn up voluntarily for vaccination," she added.

Indian Summer



Indian captain Virat Kohli (from left) poses with teammates Washington Sundar, Axar Patel, Mohammed Siraj and Rishabh Pant after beating England by an innings and 25 runs on the third day of the fourth Test at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Saturday to win the series 3-1 and qualify for the inaugural World Test Championship final against New Zealand, to be played at Lord's in London in June this year. ■ Full report on Page 8

— PTI

2 senior babus get NBW for contempt

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 6

The AP High Court served non-bailable arrest warrants on two senior IAS officers and directed the police to execute them and present the two officers before it by March 19.

Justice Battu Devan-and, had summoned special chief secretary, BC wel-

fare K. Praveen Kumar and BC welfare director B. Rama Rao in a contempt case to be present before the court on March 5 but they did not turn up.

Instead, they filed petitions seeking exemption from personal appearance. The judge struck down their petitions and served NBWs on them. He directed the Vijayawada police

commissioner and Guntur SP to present the two before the court.

The judge directed Vizianagaram collector M. Hari Jawaharlal and district BC welfare officer D. Keerthi to appear on April 6.

Petitioner Chandramouli, ward boy in the BC welfare hostel at Jonnavalasa in Viziana-

garam district, had moved the High Court last year seeking direction to the authorities to give him promotion. When the authorities did not do so, he moved a contempt petition.

Meanwhile, sources maintain that the government may move the division bench seeking relief on the issue.

Mithun, Akshay likely to share dais with Modi today

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, MARCH 6

Two famous Bollywood actors, Mithun Chakraborty and Akshay Kumar, are likely to share the stage with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his mega campaign rally for the West Bengal elections on the Brigade Ground in Kolkata on Sunday.

Mithun Chakraborty is reaching Kolkata on Saturday night, said BJP national vice-president Mukul Roy, adding, "I spoke to him. He has expressed his wish to meet the PM." BJP national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya also echoed Roy. Both kept Mithun's purpose of meeting Modi and the venue of their meeting secret.

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

If Mithun joins the BJP and contests the polls as

Suvendu vs Didi in Nandigram

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

The BJP on Saturday released its much-awaited first list of candidates for West Bengal Assembly polls, making it official that Suvendu Adhikari, a former protégé and close confidante of Trinamul supremo and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, will take on the latter head-on in Nandigram.

The electoral battle between Banerjee and Adhikari is being touted as the "Battle Royale" as the Chief Minister has left her Bhawanipur seat

which she had been representing for the last two terms. Nandigram, in East Medinipur, is considered the home-turf of the Adhikaris and is credited for bringing the Trinamul to power in 2011 and ousting the Left from the state after 30 years of its rule. The first list of 57 names, which came a day ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first election rally in the state at the Brigade Ground since the model code of conduct was imposed, also has names of former Indian cricketer Ashoke Dinda and ex-IPS officer Bharati Ghosh.

Bhoomiputra (son of the soil) or even takes part as a star in the saffron party's campaign, it is bound to be a major surprise to the Trinamul and other parties since he had resigned as a parliamentarian citing health issues in December 2016 and stayed away from politics after his name surfaced in the multi-crore

Saradha chit fund scam as brand ambassador in exchange of a lump sum amount which he returned in face of Enforcement Directorate questioning.

According to BJP sources, Akshay, known for his rapport with the PM, was also invited to the same event and he has accepted it.

BJP SETTLES FOR 20 ASSEMBLY SEATS IN TN

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

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

In the 20 seats the BJP has agreed to contest in the Assembly elections, through a deal signed at midnight with the AIADMK, two seats would be given to former actresses of Tamil cinema, it is learnt.

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

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

In the agreement on the seat sharing that was signed by AIADMK coordinator O. Panneerselvam, co-coordinator Edappadi K. Palaniswami and BJP national general secretary C.T. Ravi.

TD leaders' revolt against MP Nani

Internal conflicts in Vijayawada begin to surface

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 6

A major political drama erupted in Telugu Desam on Saturday with its leaders splitting along caste lines ahead of party chief Chandrababu Naidu visit to Vijayawada on Sunday for municipal corporation elections campaign. Sensing trouble, the TD high command plunged into action and resolved the unrest within hours.

Telugu Desam MLC Buddha Venkanna, former MLA Bonda Umamaheswara Rao and minority leader Nagul Meera openly revolted alleging domination by Kamma leaders led by Vijayawada MP Kesineni Srinivas alias Nani. They alleged the MP had changed Naidu's route map to benefit his supporters and gave an ultimatum

to Naidu to choose them or the MP.

Internal conflicts within TD in Vijayawada had started emerging right from selection of candidates. MP Nani is accused of denying coporator tickets to followers of Venkanna and other senior leaders, apart from preferring his daughter Kesineni Swetha as the mayoral candidate. Venkanna accused Nani of indulging in immoral politics. He alleged the MP had earlier sunk the Praja Rajyam Party and is now bent on damaging Telugu Desam.

Umamaheswara Rao claimed Nani has been suppressing BCs, who have been traditional supporters of TD. Nagul Meera said he and other senior leaders of Vijayawada have been sidelined after the middle-

rung Nani started suppressing BCs, minorities and other communities by indulging in caste politics.

In a fire-fighting operation towards the same evening, Nani's daughter Swetha with TD senior leader Nettem Raghuram went to the house of Umamaheswara Rao. Raghuram maintained that Naidu's campaign route being changed by Nani is a misconception. The change has actually been made by the party high command. He maintained that all leaders will work united for the win of TD in Vijayawada Municipal Corporation elections.

Subsequently, Venkanna, Umamaheswara Rao and Nagul Meera agreed to shun differences and work for victory of Swetha and other TD candidates.

Balakrishna slaps photographer

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, MARCH 6

Film star and Hindupur MLA Nandamuri Balakrishna slapped a photographer at the residence of a party worker in Srikantapuram in Hindupur on Saturday. Balakrishna slapped the photographer for closely tracking him. The video of his slapping the photographer went viral on social media.

Balakrishna was on an election tour in Hindupur municipality for the last couple of days. On Saturday, he was in the 9th municipal ward in Srikantapuram.

Balakrishna went to a house and the photographer Somu, who was reportedly engaged by the candidate, was taking pictures. The actor lost his temper and slapped the photographer.

After ordering him to delete the videos, he slapped him for a second

time. When the issue went viral, party leaders reportedly tried to smoothen things. They released a video and photograph of Somu with Balakrishna and the party symbol.

In the video, Somu says "As great fan of Balayya, I was not hurt by the incident because he has been touring without rest."

YSRC in-charge Naveen Nischal said "As a MLA, he should have patience and be more responsible". He added that there were previous instances of the actor slapping in public.

Superintendent of police Satya Esubabu said no complaint was received with regard to the issue.

However, the photographers association of Hindupur staged a protest at Amedkar Circle demanding action against the MLA for his behaviour. YSRC leaders lashed out at Balakrishna and said that was unfit to be a public representative.



A video grab of Telugu Desam leader and cine actor Nandamuri Balakrishna slapping a photographer.

Farmers block HR expressway

Chandigarh/New Delhi, March 6: Thou-sands of protesting farmers on Saturday blocked the six-lane Kundli-Manesar-Palwal (KMP) Expressway in Haryana to mark the completion of 100 days of their agitation at the Delhi border even as the Centre said it is ready to amend the three contentious agri laws to respect their sentiments.

The farmer leaders on their part said the protesting unions stood firm on their demand for a complete repeal of the three laws, and asserted they are ready for talks with the government, but it should be held without any pre-conditions.

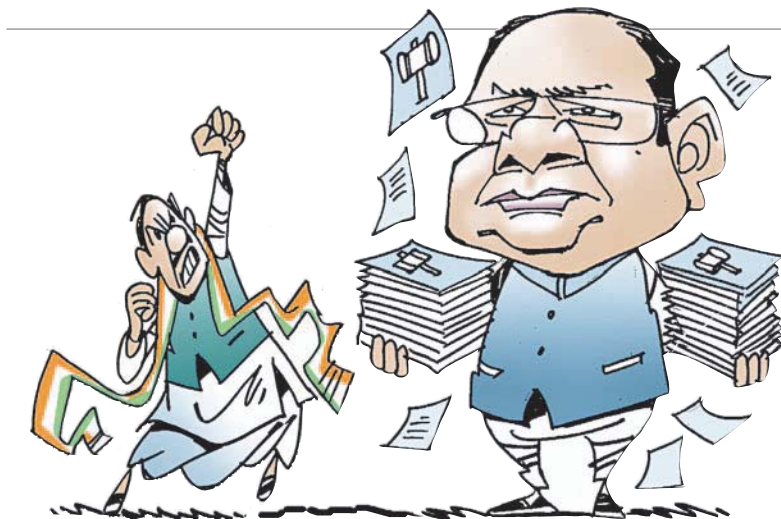
The Congress said the 100-day period of farmers' protests was a "black chapter" in India's democracy for the treatment meted out to the protesters, and alleged it marked 100 days of the ruling BJP's "arrogance".

The road blockade began at 11 am and continued till 4 pm. — PTI

NETA'S NATTER

CJ Hima Kohli putting fear of law in babus

Since the day she was named to the Telangana High Court, Chief Justice Hima Kohli has stirred up the political and bureaucratic circles in Hyderabad. Known for her high and unimpeachable integrity and fearlessness, Chief Justice Kohli has made it a mission to create fear of law amongst the high and mighty who would normally feel entitled to total exemption and immunity from any implications of law on their power ambitions. Little wonder, the mood was subdued and apprehensive when the first women CJ in the state took the oath of office, given her insistence on actually implementing the canon that the law is equal for all. The "more equals" were clearly not happy. Constantly taking up the government, and various officials and departments over their disobedience of court orders and judgment, reckless disobedience and other actions falling under the purview of contempt of courts or irresponsible questioning and criticism of judges, the higher judiciary, under her captainship, is now making it a mission to punish the officials. While some mercy was shown in the first order of imprisonment of a district collector, later reduced to service and imprisonment consequent only to failure to pay a fine, the others may not be so lucky. Will IAS officers actually go to jail is a question on top of people's minds. While common people, activists and crusaders against corruption and highhandedness of officials are celebrating CJ Kohli's tough approach, the powerful are counting days for her short stint to soon get over.



Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar's troubles deepen?

Just a few days after the judiciary took serious note of the wilful contempt and utter disdain of the bureaucracy and decided to teach the stubborn set of the supremely recalcitrant to obey the law by sentencing a district collector to imprisonment, the entire officialdom in the state has sat up to check the scores. Unlike in cricket, a captain topping the scoring list did not emerge as the best news for Team IAS, with news circulating that Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar tops the list of contemnors of the various orders of the Telangana High Court. Making it worse, scuttbutt in the power corridors began to keenly follow a senior Congress leader, who is making a trip to Delhi with a file listing and detailing allegations of misconduct, misuse of power and corruption against Kumar, demanding

that he be relocated to his parent cadre, Andhra Pradesh. While a senior Congress leader seeking appointments with senior BJP leaders in the government, with allegations against a bureaucrat would normally not ruffle feathers, it is the appointments he is trying to get with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah that are causing concern in officialdom. Added to it is the belief that the BJP wants this leader to jump ship from Congress to strengthen their bid for power against the TRS in Telangana state that is underlying fears that the BJP top brass may actually hear him out seriously.

How will things shape up in court in Hyderabad and the political durbar in Delhi in the coming week - everyone is waiting and watching with bated breath.



MIB leaves AP redfaced... again

Srilakshmi gives herself a 'promotion'

Senior AP bureaucrat S.Y. Srilakshmi seems to be so 'self-reliant' that she needs no approval from the system to do what she wants. The Telangana state cadre officer sprang a surprise by securing an order from the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) changing her cadre to Andhra Pradesh six years after bifurcation. This she did after her hectic lobbying for being sent on deputation to AP failed. She joined the AP cadre and report-

ed to the general administration department though the rules say the Union department of personnel and training has to first act on the CAT order. On Friday, she declared herself special chief secretary that too in an affidavit she filed in the Telangana High Court seeking quash the CBI's infamous Obulapuram mining case.

She is yet to be promoted from the rank of principal secretary. Of course for the next and ultimate position - Chief Secretary - Srilakshmi does not need a self-appointment as Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy is inclined to make her the next executive boss.

The Most Influential Bureaucrat (MIB) has landed the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government in an embarrassing situation, once again. It was an open secret in babudom both at the state and the Centre that he was instrumental in the AP government clamping charges of deriving personal gains by exerting pressure on subordinate staff against retired Union health secretary Preeti Sudan. She was served a show-cause notice that created ripples in the administrative circles. The grapevine was that the MIB

bore a grudge against Preeti Sudan for a personal reason but projected it to the political bosses that she had refused his request to back the state in its fight against the decision of State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar to postpone the local body polls last year and that she needed to be taught a lesson. Now that Preeti Sudan has replied to the notice and backed her argument by citing DoPT rules, the state has no option left but to drop the charges. One more tight slap!

OTHER STORIES

SEC TO FOCUS ON VIJAYAWADA, VIZAG, GUNTUR, TIRUPATI

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 6

Following complaints of rampant misuse of money and liquor, resulting in flouting the poll code, the State Election Commission (SEC) has decided to focus on four municipal corporations to curb such illegal practice.

In a statement issued here on Saturday, the SEC stated that it received more complaints on rampant misuse of money and liquor in the run up to the urban local body polls, especially in municipal corporations like Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Guntur and Tirupati. The SEC also requested the income tax department and enforcement directorate to focus on such issues and check violations related to the implementation of model code of conduct especially related to misuse of money and liquor. The SEC is holding a teleconference with all the concerned on the issue at 11 am on March 7.

SEC TAKES STEPS TO CURB ILLEGAL ELECTIONEERING

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 6

In the wake of complaints on some ward volunteers involving in electioneering illegally in the urban local body polls, the State Election Commission (SEC) has initiated steps to curb such practice.

In a statement issued on Saturday, the SEC stated that a 24/7 call centre was set up at No. 0866-2466877 asking people to lodge complaints on such illegal practice with an assurance to take action on such complaints immediately.

The SEC suggested to the people to send an email to 'secy.apsec2@gmail.com' and district collectors, municipal commissioners, and call centres in districts for necessary action. It also asked the people to lodge a written complaint also to deal with such electoral malpractice effectively.

18 TD NOMINEES MOVE HC TO STALL POLLS IN CHITTOOR

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 6

Eighteen Telugu Desam contestants filed lunch motion in the High Court seeking its direction to stall the election in the Chittoor municipal corporation, alleging that their nominations were withdrawn with their forged signatures on Saturday. The TD contestants in their petition said that they did not withdraw their nominations to contest from 18 divisions in the urban local body polls and alleged that it was a clear case of fraud on the election process.

Advocate Krishna Reddy to represent the petitioners in the court hearing on Sunday.

Parties go into aggressive mode in VMC elections

Candidates and prominent leaders visit wards to attract voters

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 6

Campaigning for the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) elections is in full swing with candidates of YSRC, Telugu Desam, Jana Sena, BJP and Communist parties visiting wards to attract the voters.

Providing a celluloid touch was actor Ali, who campaigned for YSRC candidates in Vijayawada on Saturday. He went around Vidyardharapuram and other localities along with endowments minister Vellampalli Srinivas Rao and other leaders.

Ali recalled that the economic growth of underprivileged sections by way of implementation of several welfare schemes happened during the time of Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy. He said that this is being replicated to remarkable levels by the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government, which has fulfilled most election promises. He claimed that recently Jagan Mohan Reddy had sanctioned crores of rupees for the development of Vijayawada. He appealed to the voters to support YSRC nominees in the VMC elections.

YSRC MP Nandigam Suresh conducted an election campaign in 49 division and other areas of the city. He stated that people are eagerly waiting to give a massive win to the ruling party like they did in the gram panchayat elections.

Meanwhile, TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu will campaign for his party candidates on Sunday. On Saturday, his Vijayawada MP Kesineni Srinivas (Nani) met Muslim clerics and sought their cooperation in the elections.

The MP recalled that YSRC had supported NRC, CAA and NPR in the Parliament while he had opposed them and stood by Muslims.

Nani lamented that



Comedian Ali conducting campaign at One Town area for YSRC candidates in municipal elections in Vijayawada on Saturday.

— DC

YSRC predicts four VMC seats for TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 6

YSR Congress predicted four to five seats for Telugu Desam in Vijayawada Municipal Corporation elections.

Minister for Panchayat Raj Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy expressed confidence that YSRC will continue its win-spreed and trump in both Vijayawada and Guntur municipal corporations.

Speaking after a meeting with Krishna district leaders on their poll strategy, he asked TD leaders to focus on ironing out differences within their party before criticising YSRC. Condemning TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu's unwarranted criticism, Reddy said the TD would hardly win three or four seats as their internal differences had reached a flashpoint.

When TD was at the helm, minority students had opportunities to study abroad but after assuming power, Jagan Mohan Reddy has stopped the scheme and put minority students into a lot of financial troubles. The TD leader said that he was working for the welfare of Muslims and other sup-

Meanwhile, Minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao, alias Nani, said that N. Balakrishna was unaware of the situation in the state and was criticising Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy for not questioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Vizag Steel Plant issue despite the former writing a letter to the Union government on the issue. He said the actor-politician reads the script written by Naidu and knows nothing about anything else.

Meanwhile, Nani took on BJP state president Somu Veerajulu saying that Veerajulu was talking illogically these days. Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu asked Veerajulu how the Modi government can control Jagan government when the fact is that both were democratically elected by people.

pressed communities and would continue to do so. MLC Batchula Arjunudu and other leaders also campaigned for TD candidates.

Leaders from Jana Sena, BJP and Communist parties campaigned extensively in various divisions seeking votes for their respective candidates.

3,000 POLICE DEPLOYED FOR VMC ELECTIONS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 6

Vijayawada police are making foolproof arrangements for a smooth conduct of the elections scheduled to be held on March 10. Vijayawada City Police Commissioner B. Srinivasulu said that the department is deploying about 3,000 police personnel for the peaceful conduct of elections in Vijayawada. He said that 1,870 rowdy-sheeters were bound over under Section 110 and 109.

The commissioner said they were deploying 62 mobile parties, 27 striking forces and 12 special striking forces. He stated that flag march is being carried out in problematic areas time and again and special arrangements have been made by the local police along with the SEB to prevent distribution of liquor and cash.

CONG COMPLAINS ON DISTRIBUTION OF MONEY BY YSRC, TD

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 6

Congress lodged a complaint with the State Election Commission over the violation of the election model code of conduct by distributing money to the voters by the YSRC and Telugu Desam.

Congress Vijayawada City president Naraharishetti Narasimha Rao has complained to the SEC that both the ruling YSRC and the Opposition TD were distributing money to the voters.

Vizag development possible under TD rule only: Naidu

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 6

Development of Visakhapatnam City was possible only under TD rule, said former chief minister and TD national president Nara Chandrababu Naidu, during his second-day campaign in Visakhapatnam on Saturday.

Addressing election meetings from in the city, Naidu said apart from his efforts to make Vizag the financial capital, his party also launched welfare schemes like Anna Canteen and Kalyana Lakshmi, which the Jagan Mohan Reddy government later withdrew.

He asked the people to recollect his 10-day services after super cyclone Hudhud ravaged the city and when he sourced food and water from neighbouring states. "I worked as chief minister for 14 years with a vision and provided house pattas to 60,000 people and built houses for 80,000," Naidu said.

He said the Jagan Mohan Reddy government began taxing water and air and would not hesitate to tax stray dogs. Making satirical comments on the YSRC government liquor policy, Naidu said it was a pity to see people lined up in front of wine shops for brands of which were never heard. "What is Boom Boom beer? It seems Jagan Mohan Reddy manufactures liquor himself to make profits ignoring the popular and safe brands," Naidu said.

He said this was the time to give a fitting lesson to the YSRC government by defeating all their candidates in the current elections. Stating that the development, which was initiated during the TD regime, came to a grinding halt and the chief minister was seeking blessings from a fake godman to get rid of his sins.

Later, MLC from Anakapalle Buddha Naga Jagadishwara Rao called on Naidu and asked him to campaign in Anakapalle, where five TD candidates were fighting to win the GVMC polls.

Naidu ran away to Kuppam, says YSRC

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 6

Continuing their aggressive campaign all over Visakhapatnam, the YSRC leaders alleged that chief minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy made Chandrababu Naidu run away to Kuppam from Chandragiri.

Campaigning in 52, 56 and 57 wards for the party candidates, ministers K. Kannababu and Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao, accompanied by Lok Sabha members M.V.V. Satyanarayana and K. Satyavathi said that TD, under the leadership of Naidu, resorted to large scale corruption in the state in the name of Janma Bhoomi committees.

Naidu handed over all the government funds to these committees in the name of welfare schemes, the ministers alleged.

TD HAS NO MORAL RIGHT TO SEEK VOTES FOR CIVIC POLLS, SAYS GUDIVADA

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, MARCH 6

Anakapalle MLA and YSRC official spokesperson Gudivada Amarnath said the TD had lost moral right to seek votes for the civic polls.

Talking to reporters in Visakhapatnam on Saturday, Amarnath said, "The Opposition have sternly opposed Vizag being executive capital, and they have stalled distribution of house sites to over two lakh people, placed hurdles for building a guesthouse and tried to damage the brand image of Visakhapatnam on various counts and shamelessly the father-son duo have come to town seeking votes."

"TD has no interest in developing Visakhapatnam or North Andhra region, but in return loot-

ed the place for personal and political gains," the MLA said and added that opposition leader N. Chandrababu Naidu was all set to spoil the brand image of Visakhapatnam on multiple accounts, even by involving in landgrab cases but was now shedding crocodile tears to gain political mileage ahead of municipal polls.

After facing a major defeat in Naidu's own constituency in the Kuppam GP elections, Naidu and Nara Lokesh have come for GVMC elections campaign with a faulty narrative and fake promises.

"How can Chandrababu and Lokesh ask for votes in Vizag when they are opposing it to be Executive Capital?"

There were many land grabs during the Naidu regime, he said.

HC | ORDER

RTC directed to consider giving job to claimant on compassionate grounds

RTC told to provide job to married daughter

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, MARCH 6

Andhra Pradesh High Court directed the APSRTC to consider the claim of the married daughter of the deceased employee, as her husband lacked regular source of income, for appointment on compassionate grounds in any suitable post under the 'Bread Winner Scheme' within six weeks.

A single judge bench headed by justice Battu Devanand delivered the verdict recently and struck down the word 'unmarried' in clause-III of eligibility criteria of 'Bread Winner Scheme' of the APSRTC saying that it is discriminatory, arbitrary, unjust and violative of articles 14, 15, 16 and 21 of the Constitution of India. The court also set aside the proceedings of

APSRTC declining to provide employment on the rule that any one of the widow of the deceased employee or son or unmarried daughter was eligible to get the job under the scheme and as the deceased employee's daughter was married, she was not eligible for the job.

Ch. Pentaiah, hailing from Srikakulam, used to work as a driver in APSRTC and died in 2009. He was sur-

vived by wife Chinnammulu and daughter Damayanti. Pentaiah was the sole breadwinner. Though his daughter got married subsequently, her husband was not having any regular source of income as he works on daily wages.

Pentaiah's wife applied for a job of either conductor or Shramik in the RTC on compassionate grounds. However, her application

was rejected on grounds that she was not having eligibility criteria for such posts. Subsequently, her daughter Damayanti applied for a job on compassionate grounds and her mother gave a 'no objection certificate'. However, the RTC authorities set aside her application for the reason that the state government imposed a ban on appointments on compassionate grounds.

DECCAN Chronicle

7 MARCH 2021



Shashi Warriar

Off the beaten track

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

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

"What's that?" I asked.
"It's a set of model documents and letters from more than a millennium ago," he said. "It tells you how they wrote charters and mortgage deeds and passports and other legal papers in those days. It's probably the first-ever manual on writing official documents, and it proves just how civilised India was!"
"India?" I asked. "As best I know, there was no India a millennium ago, just several hundred kingdoms in the area is that now India."
"Well, mostly Gujarat and bits of Rajasthan and bits of Madhya Pradesh," he said, making an effort to keep calm. "The areas ruled by the Chalukyas. Around Pattan, in modern Gujarat. Not the Chalukyas of the Deccan."
"Ah!" I said. "And what do these papers show?"
"You can tell a lot from them," he replied. "They tell you about the organisation of government, crops, harvests, things like that."
"Harvests?" I asked.
"Of course," he replied, as if I were mildly challenged. "Taxes came after harvests. They had a fiscal year, but tax collection was flexible to account for variations in weather. And there's lots more. The documents cover the social hierarchy, and even family ties!"
"Family ties?" I asked, mystified.
"Yes!" he replied. "See? This tells you how to write a letter to your son or your son-in-law. It tells you how a loving husband wrote to his wife, or an angry one!" He pointed out an entry in the table of contents that said, "A Letter of the Displeased Husband to His Wife."

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

"It was the norm for those days," he said, shrugging.
I found it hard to swallow the idea of a widespread norm because, as I remembered it, there wasn't much contact between faraway kingdoms. "Norm where?" I asked.
"Over most of the world," he said. "Europe, England of those days. Most of what we call the Americas now was far behind, as was Africa."
"Ah!" I said. "You said something about gender equality... How come there's mention only of female slaves?"
"Well, they captured only women in raids," he said. "The men were all killed."
"What about boys?" I asked. "Male children?"
"We don't really know," he said.
"That seems fairly barbarous to me," I said.
"But that was how it was in those days!" he said, getting a little heated. I didn't want to anger him so I let it slide and asked, instead, "What's this about voluntary female slaves?"
"It's actually a form of social security," he replied. "If bad weather or a natural disaster or a war or something left a woman with no assets, she always had the option of becoming a slave, with her owner being responsible for her well-being."

"And was there some way of ensuring that slaves were treated reasonably?" I asked.
"Two things," he said. "In the first place, we don't know. Second, it went on all over the place in those days. You see, slavery was probably better than begging or dying, which were the only two alternatives available."
I kept flipping the pages, and stopped when another interesting title caught my eye. "Letter to a Servant", it went. I couldn't help saying, "Well, if they taught their servants to read and write they must have been very civilised indeed!"
"Don't be silly!" he said. Apparently he knew what I was talking about. "The title of that letter is misleading. The servant is not a house servant but an employee in someone's business. It's not as if they taught their housemaids to read."

I checked. Sure enough, the letter was to a man who ran a part of the business, telling him not to do anything that would harm the business or let rascals into the premises. I said, "So they thought of office employees as personal servants. That doesn't seem very civilised!"
"Well," he said, shrugging, "it was the norm..." Then, flipping more pages, I found a chapter heading that went, "Ordeals as Usual". I looked it up and discovered matter-of-fact comments on ordeals to be used in the absence of evidence. After I read some bits about having people hold hot ploughshares in their hands I couldn't read any further so I handed it to him to read, which he did. When he was done, he looked up and said, "Well, it was what they did," he said, irritated. "Not just in those days but even today, when they put you in jail for sedition."
"But that's not fair, is it?" I asked.
He seemed to take umbrage, for he put the book in his bag and rose to leave, muttering something about spoilsports and traitors, and as I closed the gate behind him I wondered why I ended up more confused each time he came visiting.

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

Subhani



Freedom, conspiracy & other anti-national sins



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

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

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

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

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

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

Farmers cannot sit in peaceful protest for months on the borders of the capital of the nation, with many dying in the bitter Delhi winter, unless they are part of a "foreign hand" hatching a plot against the government. Now, the government has hard proof of such a plot. Climate

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

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

activist, Disha Ravi, all of some 21 years old, was rightly arrested for sedition for supporting the farmers, because her toolkit could well undermine the great Indian State. It appears Rihanna and Greta Thunberg are also part of this dangerous conspiracy. The ramifications of what is going on are huge, and require the authorities to take prompt and penal action.

Stand-up comics, dalit activists, human rights advocates — even Election Commissioners who dare to right dissenting notes — must join hands to condemn this seditious report. They must accept that they have no right to question the government in a manner that diminishes its self-esteem, or that of its leaders. The tremendous work the government is doing for the people needs to be acknowledged. It is indecent to subject it to irreverent questioning. Right to Information activists, worried about the reducing ambit of the Act, must not worry. If the government wishes not to reveal certain things, which otherwise it must do, there must be very good reason for it. The security of the State is a very important matter. So is the image of our great nation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

FREEBIES NOT GOOD

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy does not seem to be losing any opportunity to announce freebies to the people, the latest being the proposed free sanitary napkin distribution to the class VII to XII girl students of government educational institutions. Just for the sake such freebies, no parent would like to admit his/her girl child into a government school or junior college as the system still remains skewed, to say the least. The previous regime of the Telugu Dsam drove the state into a debt trap without showing commensurate development. In other words, that party looted people's money. The present rule of YSRC is also further deepening the debt quotient by indulging in free distribution of cash/kind in the name of implementing its electoral promises.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

FIGHTING FAKE NEWS

With reference to the report 'Jagan launches website for checking fake news' (*DC, March 6*) the move must be implemented with utmost seriousness because this is one area that misleads/misguides everyone. The culprits must be identified immediately. FIRs lodged and led to their logical conclusions after due process of law. Then only the menace of fake news can be curbed. Let's hope Jagan makes it worthwhile initiative.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

BORROWED MONEY

This is with reference to the report 'Finance minister justifies state govt's borrowings' (*DC, March 6*). Finance minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy wrongly justified the government's borrowed money more than limits which were spent on welfare schemes and arguing that spending money on welfare schemes will revive economy. He knows very well that due to huge welfare schemes implemented by government has spoiled the state financially.

Panchakarla.Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu

50 YEARS AGO IN

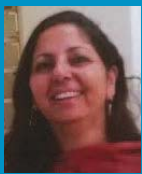
DECCAN Chronicle

All set for Bengal poll: Sen-Verma in Calcutta

CALCUTTA, March. 6 With the twin polls in West Bengal only four days away, the Chief Election Commissioner, Mr Sen-Verma flew in here today to acquaint himself with polling arrangements finalised at a top level conference on Thursday.

Mr. Sen-Verma, who was accompanied by the Commission Secretary, Mr. A.N. Sen, was himself to have attended the conference which decided on the biggest ever protective cover for any poll in India. The army Chief, Gen. Manekshaw, union Home Secretary, Mr. Govind Narain and the Principal Adviser to the West Bengal Governor, Mr. B.B. Ghosh were those who gave "okay" to security measures.

Anita Katyal
Political Gup-Shup



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

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

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

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

be published in Delhi.

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

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

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

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

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

IN BRIEF

SARPANCH IN ODISHA DISQUALIFIED

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, MARCH 6

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

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

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

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

After the hearing was over, Gouda's lawyer, Srikanth Mishra said, "Based on the statements of four witnesses, two from each side, the Chhatrapur Civil Judge Senior Division disqualified the standing sarpanch Simadri for not knowing Odia. The Court has also directed the District Collector to take further action in this regard," Mishra added.

"I had filed the petition against Simadri after the panchayat elections in 2017. My three and half years of legal battle is over now as he has been disqualified from his post by the court for violating the Odisha Gram Panchayat Act. The court has also sent notice to the district collector and communication officer to take further action as the post will be lying vacant after Simadri's dismissal," said Gouda.

Vaiko agrees to fight polls on DMK symbol

Amit Shah on day-long political tour of TN, Kerala today

DC CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
CHENNAI, MAR 6

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

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

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

The CPM representatives, who visited the DMK office for discussions on Saturday morning, said that they would be getting back after taking the views of their party functionaries.

From the Congress, however, there was no word of confirmation on accepting the seats offered by the DMK, while sources in the DMK said that their leaders were only waiting for the Congress to return to the negotiating table.

In the AIADMK camp, the DMDK, which had been asking for 25 seats, expressed the hope that an amicable settlement would be reached soon as they had climbed down from their earlier demand, while the Tamil Maanila Congress leader G K Vasan was closeted with the Chief Minister at his



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

house. Sources said both the parties would wrap up their deals with the alliance leader by Monday. Meanwhile, it may be noted that senior BJP leader and Home Minister Amit Shah will be on a day-long political tour of the poll-bound states of Tamil Nadu, where he is set to launch a door-to-door campaign, and Kerala on Sunday.

A party statement said Shah will also address the valedictory function of the BJP's 'Kerala Vijay Yatra' in Thiruvananthapuram, besides attending several programmes in the two southern states.

Besides launching "Vetri Kodi Eandhi" at Suchindram in Kanyakumari, Shah will also hold a roadshow in the constituency where the BJP is also contesting the Lok Sabha bypoll.

CONG SAYS SUSHMITA WITH PARTY AMID DIFFERENCES OVER SEAT-SHARING

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

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

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

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

CDS BRIEFS MODI ON DISCUSSIONS IN COMMANDERS CONFERENCE

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

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

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

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

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

2 killed in BJP MLA's birthday party in MP

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

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

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

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

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

According to sources in police, Jaberla MLA Dharmendra Singh Lodhi was not present at the bash when the incident occurred.

On the other hand,

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

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

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

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

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

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

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

The country's overall cases tally has reached 1,11,92,088, including 1,80,304 active cases while the toll has mounted to 1,57,666.

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

According to the health ministry, a total of 1,94,97,704 people have been vaccinated against coronavirus so far. Maharashtra reported 10,187 new Covid-19 cases and 47 deaths in the last 24 hours. Total number of cases rose to 22,08,586, death toll stood at 52,440.

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

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

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

As many as 2,791 new Covid-19 cases, 16 deaths & 3,517 recoveries were reported in Kerala on Saturday. Active cases at 42,819, death toll 4,287 and recovered cases stand at 10,27,826. A total of 61,764 samples were tested for Covid-19 in the last 24 hours, said Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan. Meanwhile in Punjab, curfew to remain imposed in Jalandhar between 11pm and 5am in view of rising cases of Covid-19, according to the district administration.

Delhi recorded as many as 321 fresh cases.

Delhi to have its own school education board: Kejriwal

DC CORRESPONDENT WITH
AGENCY INPUTS
NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

Delhi will have its own school education board like other states, chief minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Saturday. The state government approved the for-

mation of the Delhi Board of School Education during a Cabinet meet.

The capital has 1,000 government schools and 1,700 private schools. All government schools and most private schools are affiliated to the CBSE, the chief minister said. About 20 to 25 gov-

ernment schools will be made part of the new Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE) in the coming academic year and their CBSE affiliation will be scrapped, he said. The schools that will be brought under the state board will be decided after discussions with

school principals, teachers and parents. In the next four-five years all the schools will be brought under it, Mr Kejriwal said.

The DBSE will be aimed at imparting such education that prepares "fiercely patriotic" and self-dependent students who serve the

society and the country in a selfless manner, he said.

"The Board will bring in best international practices and high-end techniques in school education. It will impart education as per the aptitude of the students," Mr Kejriwal added. "The focus will not be on learning

by rote. It will be on understanding (of concepts) and personality development," he said, adding that students will be assessed through the year. "We hope that all schools will voluntarily get affiliated to this board within four to five years," Mr Kejriwal said.

CLASSIFIEDS

FOR SALE

PROPERTY

COMMERCIAL

BANJARAHILLS ROAD no.1, 900 yards Brand New Commercial Building, JubileeHills 720. Road no.45 1,000, Road No.33 1200 yards & Ground Floor 1700 sft, Madhapur Main Road Ground Floor 3040 sft, Kondapur main road 1400, Jayabheri 934 yards N/E & Rental Income Properties 5 to 50 Cr Ph:9966991449, 9394022449. (W/2021/AT001229)

FARM HOUSES-SITES
EAST GODAVARI, 2500 Sq.yds Land, near NH5 & GIET Engg College, 4 kms from GSL Medical College. Suitable for Farm house, Villas & Commercial at Rajanagar Mandal (under GUDA). Contact: 8247700389/809947505. (A/2021/C00621)

FLATS

VUDA APPROVED New 2BHK flat for sale in Madhuravada near NH16. Contact 9353176942 (W/2021/AT001228)

FLAT For sale: Flat No.502 (1248sft.) Sri Sai Residency, situated at Erramanzili (Naveennagar) behind Taj Krishna hotel, Hyderabad. Contact: 9866312324 (R/2021/C00022)

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SHORT TAKES

6 UKRAINIANS DIE, DOZENS HURT IN BUS CRASH

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

The accident occurred around midnight on the A4 motorway near the town of Jaroslaw, which is in south-eastern Poland near the border with Ukraine. *TN24*, a private all-news station, reported that the bus had a Ukrainian license plate and was travelling with 57 Ukrainian citizens, including two drivers.

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

LANDMINE BLAST KILLS 1, SEVERAL HURT IN CROATIA

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

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

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

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

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

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

ITALY SEEKS LIFER FOR U.S. COP KILLERS

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

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

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

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

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

PROTESTS OVER DEFAMATION LAWS IN THAI

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

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

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

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

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

Mount Etna volcano spews lava

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

— AFP

Protests continue in Myanmar

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

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

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

But protesters rallied

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

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

The country's vital sectors have been crippled by an ongoing "Civil Disobedience Movement" — a campaign urging civil servants to boycott working under a military regime.

The impact has been felt at every level of the national infrastructure, with shuttered hospitals, empty ministry offices, and banks unable to operate. On Saturday, state-run media announced that if civil servants continued to boycott work, "they will be fired" with immediate effect from March 8.

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with shuttered hospitals, empty ministry offices, and banks unable to operate. On Saturday, state-run media announced that if civil servants continued to boycott work, "they will be fired" with immediate effect from March 8.

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

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

Activist Maung Saungkha said the movement would persist — even as security forces continued to step up enforcement tactics — as many remember the repression under the previous junta.

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

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

— AFP

Pak PM Imran wins trust vote

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

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

numbers.

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

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

— PTI

**India ties changed life in Afghanistan**

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI | DC NEW DELHI, MARCH 6

It will be very difficult for the Taliban to capture power through force in Afghanistan even if there is a total absence of foreign troops due to the presence now of a well-trained professional Afghan National Army unlike what happened in 1996, Afghan sources have said, adding that a lot has changed in the country since the Taliban were driven out of power two decades ago.

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

Sources indicated that one major difference between the mid-1990s and the situation now is the emergence of Afghan women in all walks of life as equal stake-holders in the

future of their country. Sources pointed out that even during the Afghan peace process talks in Qatar's Capital Doha, Afghan women journalists boldly interacted with Taliban representatives, seeking to know the vision that the insurgent outfit has for the country now.

The Afghan Government in Kabul too seems determined to safeguard the precious gains especially in the field of women's empowerment made in the past several years and is determined not to compromise on that.

The assessment of the Afghan Government now seems to be that even the Taliban have realised that much has changed from the horrific times when they ruled the country with extreme brutality from 1996 to 2001.

The assessment

Amanda Gorman: Followed by guard

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

"He demanded if I lived there because 'you look suspicious.' I showed my keys & buzzed myself into my building. He left, no apology," she wrote. Gorman, whose Twitter account says she

lives in Los Angeles, did not immediately reply for more information.

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

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



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

A dazzling adventure

Raya and the Last Dragon

CAST: Kelly Marie Tran, Awkwafina, Gemma Chan, Daniel Dae Kim, Benedict Wong, Jona Xiao

DIRECTOR: Don Hall, Carlos López Estrada

RATING: ★★★★★

Releases on Disney+ Hotstar

Contrary to what *Game of Thrones* might have you believe, not all dragons are agents of destruction. In the newest offering from Walt Disney Animation, *Raya and the Last Dragon*, they are kind, full of magic and, when needed, the saviors of humanity.

Five hundred years ago, we're told in a prologue, dragons sacrificed themselves for humans when a mystical evil called the Druun passed through the lands of Kumandra and turned many to stone. The kingdom splintered into factions — Tail, Talon, Heart, Fang

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

mise and *Raya* is undoubtedly a visual feast.

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

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



In Truffle Hunters, an enchanting but beset world

The Truffle Hunters

CAST: Piero Botto, Sergio Cauda, Maria Cicciù, Aurelio Conterno, Enrico Crippa

DIRECTOR: Michael Dweck, Gregory Kershaw

RATING: ★★★★★

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



The disorientation of dementia

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

"I am not leaving my flat!" he shouts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Father

CAST: Anthony Hopkins, Olivia Colman, Mark Gatiss, Olivia Williams, Rufus Sewell

DIRECTOR: Florian Zeller

RATING: ★★★★★

Coming 2 America charms cut can't match the original

I'm Your Woman

CAST: Eddie Murphy, Arsenio Hall, Shari Headley, Jermaine Fowler, Leslie Jones, Tracy Morgan

DIRECTOR: Craig Brewer

RATING: ★★★

Streaming on Amazon Prime

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHORT TAKES

Pooja beats world champ, 9 in finals

New Delhi: Asian Championship gold medallist Pooja Rani (75kg) defeated world champion Atheyna Bylon of Panama in the semi-final bout as 9 Indians stormed into the finals of 35th Boxam International Boxing tournament in Castellon, Spain, on Friday.

Pooja dominated her opponent from the beginning and looked unfazed throughout and assured a unanimous win. Other Women boxers joining Pooja in the final are debutant Jasmine (57kg) and Simranjit (60kg). However, it was a flawless day for the Indian male boxers as all 6 of them marched into the finals. CWG bronze medallist Mohammed Hussamuddin (57kg) continued his fine run and displayed technical superiority over Panama's Orlando Martinez to win 4-1. He will be facing Puerto Rico's Paul Rivera in the final.

Srinu, Sudha eye Tokyo qualifiers

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

At the eve of the event, the two elite athletes disclosed the tough training regimens that they have been going through with their sights firmly fixed on berths for the flight to Tokyo later this year.

Srinu declared that he was aiming to clock the required under-2:11.30s timing to turn his dream into a reality.

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

Nagal out of Argentina Open

Buenos Aires: Playing fearless brand of tennis, India's Sumit Nagal ran world number 46 Albert Ramos-Vinolas close before exiting the ATP Argentina Open after suffering a three-set defeat in the men's singles quarter-final here.

His relentless hitting kept Nagal in the match despite trailing 2-5 in the decider. Eventually errors at key moments spelled his ouster, losing 6-4, 2-6, 5-7 in the quarter-final that lasted two hours and 26 minutes.

It is Nagal's best performance on the ATP tour after entering the event as a qualifier.

The gutsy show earned Nagal 45 main draw ranking points that will push him to 132 from the current 150th slot.

Yet again Nagal's trademark inside-out forehand was at work as he put the Spaniard under the pump. — PTI

Spinners help Lanka level series

St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda: Sri Lanka's spinners bamboozled world champions West Indies to claim a 43-run win in the second Twenty20 International on Friday.

Having lost by four wickets in the opening game on Wednesday, in a game where West Indies skipper Kieron Pollard launched six sixes in an over, the tourists successfully defended 160 on Friday to level the three-match series.

West Indies were all out for 117 in the 19th over as Sri Lanka ended an eight-game losing streak in T20. Leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga finished with 3-17, off-break bowler Akila Dananjaya had 1-13.

Wrist spinner Lakshan Sandakan took 3-10, including Pollard's wicket. — AFP

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 160/6 (Gunathilaka 56, Nissanka 37, Bravo 2-25) beat **West Indies 117** (McCoy 23, Sandakan 3-10, Hasaranga 3-17).

Live on TV

BADMINTON

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

FOOTBALL

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

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INDIA LORD IT OVER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GAVASKAR FELICITATED ON 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF TEST DEBUT

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

The 71-year-old former skipper received a commemorative Test cap from BCCI secretary Jay Shah during the lunch break on day three of the fourth and final Test between India and England at the Narendra Modi Stadium here.

Gavaskar is doing commentary for the match.

"Celebrating 50 glorious years of the legendary former #TeamIndia Captain Mr. Sunil Gavaskar's



Sunil Gavaskar poses with the commemorative Test cap. — PTI

Test debut today," the BCCI tweeted.

Shah also posted pictures of the brief ceremony on his official Twitter handle.

Ganguly, also a former skipper, paid his tribute via twitter. — PTI



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

SCORECARD

England 1st Innings: 205
India 1st Innings (overnight 294-7): S. Gill lbw b Anderson 0, R. Sharma lbw b Stokes 49, C. Pujara lbw b Leach 17, V. Kohli c Foakes b Stokes 0, A. Rahane c Stokes b Anderson 27, R. Pant c Root b Anderson 101, R. Ashwin c Pope b Leach 13, W. Sundar not out 96, A. Patel run out (Baird/Root) 43, I. Sharma lbw b Stokes 0, M. Siraj b Stokes 0. Extras (b10, lb6, nb3) 19. **Total (all out in 114.4 overs) 365.**
FOW: 1-0, 2-40, 3-41, 4-80, 5-121, 6-146, 7-259, 8-365, 9-365, 10-365.
Bowling: Anderson 25-14-44-3, Stokes 27.4-6-89-4 (nb1), Leach 27.5-89-2 (nb1), Bess 17-1-71-0 (nb1), Root 18-1-56-0.
England 2nd Innings: Z. Crawley c Rahane b Ashwin 5, D. Sibley c Pant b Patel 3, J. Bairstow c R. Sharma b Ashwin 0, J. Root lbw b Ashwin 30, B. Stokes c Kohli b Patel 2, O. Pope st Pant b Patel 15, D. Lawrence b Ashwin 50, B. Foakes c Rahane b Patel 13, D. Bess c Pant b Patel 2, J. Leach c Rahane b Ashwin 2, J. Anderson not out 1. Extras (b4, lb8) 12. **Total (all out in 54.5 overs) 135.**
FOW: 1-10, 2-10, 3-20, 4-30, 5-65, 6-65, 7-109, 8-111, 9-134, 10-135.
Bowling: Siraj 4-0-12-0, Patel 24-6-48-5, Ashwin 22.5-4-47-5, Sundar 4-0-16-0.

NUMBERS GAME

INDIA'S FOURTH BIGGEST WIN OVER ENGLAND:

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

— S. PERVEZ QAISAR

Kohli lauds bench strength

SHASTRI PRAISES PANT'S GAME-CHANGING INNINGS

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

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

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

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

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

"Our bench strength is extremely strong and that's a good sign for Indian cricket. When the transition happens, the standards won't fall and Rishabh and Washy's partnership showed exactly that in a crucial juncture of the match," Kohli added. — PTI

Sindhu in final, all other Indians out

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

Sindhu, the reigning world champion, beat fourth seeded Blichfeldt 22-20, 21-10 in 43 minutes to avenge her first-round loss to the Danish world number 12 at the Yonex Thailand Open in January.

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

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

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

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



P. V. Sindhu

Rasmussen in the last-four stage. The Indian duo had a last four finish in their last event at Toyota Thailand Open in January.

Sindhu thus emerged as the lone Indian survivor in the \$140,000 event, the first tournament in the extended Olympic qualification period which ends on June 15.

On Friday night, Srikanth had beat sixth seed Kantaphon Wangcharoen of Thailand 21-19, 21-15 to enter the semifinals. — PTI

Man City up for Red Devils test

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BCCI source reveals IPL 2021 to begin on April 9

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

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

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

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

England's shortcomings cannot undermine India's big win



Ayaz Memon
Over The Top

India's 3-1 series win was a function of excellent all-round performances and collective self-belief. After losing the first match, the team was under enormous pressure. The rubber was at stake, and with it also a place in the final of the inaugural World Test Championship final, a matter of great prestige.

In the event, India did it in style, winning the third Test in less than two days (by 10 wickets), and the fourth in under three by an innings. Victory can't get more comprehensive.

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

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

defensive mode.

In 2012-3 series they won, England had Cook to bat long, and Pietersen to take the attack to the bowlers. This time, with Stokes mesmerized by Ashwin, there was overreliance on Root to play bulwark as well as aggressor. It didn't work beyond the first Test.

England weren't terribly rich on players with experience of Indian conditions. A quirky rotation policy further robbed them of key players (Jos Butler) and was compounded by flawed selections, like 4 pacers in the day/night match on a spinner's track.

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

little technical skill, nerve, or conviction.

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

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

England's shortcomings

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

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

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

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

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

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

with his chutzpah and bold strokeplay.

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

It's not just Pant's adventurous batting — always a threat to opponents — that has been of high value to the team. He's improved enormously as wicket-keeper too, as 8 catches and 5 stumpings in this series on difficult pitches testify.

He may lack eye-catching finesse, but has worked on his fitness and flexibility, sharpened his reflexes, which has reduced the margin of error in his wicket-keeping. He's made himself indispensable.