

SHORT TAKES

CM TO MEET GOVERNOR TODAY AT 11 AM

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 12

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to meet Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan amidst increased political enthusiasm in the state. The CM has got Governor's appointment and is scheduled to meet him at 11 am on Friday at Raj Bhavan. State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar is preparing to conduct local body elections and has recently conducted a meeting with all political parties. The nexus between the SEC and state government is continuing as the YSRC is unwilling to conduct the elections citing spreading of Coronavirus.

The CM's meeting with the Governor has turned interesting at a time when issues like conducting local body polls, his letter to the Chief Justice of India, mass suicide of a Muslim family in Nandyal had generated enough political heat in the state.

According to sources, the CM is likely to explain about the stand of the government towards local body elections and other issues.

PCC FORMS PANEL FOR PROTECTION OF AMARAVATI

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 12

The PCC has formed Amaravati Pariakshana Congress Committee to fight for the protection of Amaravati as only capital of AP state. APCC president Dr Sake Sailajanath appointed APCC working president Sk Mastan Vali as president of the committee. Kommineni Suresh of Amaravati Capital region is appointed as convenor of the committee.

Former MLA Lingamsetti Eswara Rao and APCC coordination committee member Sunkara Padmasri got place in the committee as special invitees.

APCC general secretaries Chilaka Vijay Kumar and M. Jaganmohan Reddy, APCC secretary Notalapati Ravikanth, Congress Vijayawada city incharge Naraharasetti Narasimha Rao, Sk Saleem and Borra Kiran were appointed as members of the committee.

Dr Sailajanath said the Congress Amaravati Committee will work for the continuation of Amaravati as the only capital of the state.

DUBBAK RESULT WILL REPEAT IN TIRUPATI: SOMU

AVINASH P SUBRAMANYAM |
DC
TIRUPATI, NOV. 12

AP BJP president Somu Veerajulu exuded confidence that the party's victory in Dubbak bypoll will be repeated in the upcoming Tirupati Lok Sabha byelection. The BJP chief took part in a party meeting, organised to prepare the local cadre for the ensuing Lok Sabha byelection, on Thursday.

Addressing the party workers, Veerajulu said the party's victory in Bihar Assembly elections and by-elections in other states is the foundation for the success of the party in both Telugu states, where the BJP will form the government in 2024 elections.

Exuding confidence of the party victory in the Tirupati parliamentary byelection, Veerajulu mentioned that the BJP-led Centre has been providing 60 per cent funds for the development of Andhra Pradesh. Also, the majority of funds were given for the Tirupati smart city development. He asked the cadre to take this to the public and make them understand the efforts of the BJP in developing the state.

He said AP has got immense natural resources and the state government should utilise them with a proper intention for the development of the state and the people.

Meanwhile, addressing the media at Tirumala after having darshan of Lord Venkateswara this morning, Veerajulu alleged that the properties and resources of Tirumala temple were under threat from the governments.

Stressing the need for spending every single rupee donated by the devotees for the devotional and spiritual programmes, Veerajulu asked the government to take necessary steps for safeguarding the properties of Tirumala temple and ensure transparency in spending the temple funds.

Krishnayapalem villagers out on bail



Krishnayapalem villagers hail Amaravati protection JAC while coming out of Guntur district sub-jail after receiving bail on Thursday. The farmers who were released on bail were garlanded by the JAC leaders and their supporters. — TEJO ROY ELETI

Political activity gains momentum in state

Parties are trying to woo people and keep them happy

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 12

Hectic political activity and scenes across the 13 districts, almost on a day-to-day basis, are seemingly similar to what one witnesses ahead of elections.

Although there are no elections in sight, rallies by YSRC leaders and protests by opposition parties have become the order of the day.

The YSRC is taking out rallies as part of awareness programmes under "Prajalalo Nadu-Prajala Kosam Nedu". Interestingly, the locals are happy with the padayatras as it is giving them a chance to bring problems to the notice of the ruling party.

On its part, Telugu Desam is protesting with "Naa Illu-Naa Swantham" demanding allotment of constructed houses to the

● Senior political analysts stated that the ruling YSRC has an upper hand as a majority of the people have benefitted from one welfare scheme or the other.

The TD and other opposition parties are trying to provoke masses in the name of houses allocation, attacks on Dalits, minorities and BC communities and the corrupt practices of the incumbent government.

beneficiaries.

Ruling party MLAs are interacting with influential people and locals while exhorting about the welfare activities of YSRC government despite the financial crisis.

Senior political analysts stated that the ruling and opposition parties are trying to woo people and keep them happy. They stated that the YSRC has an upper hand as a majority of the people have benefitted from one welfare scheme or the other.

The TD and other opposition parties are trying to

beneficiaries.

He has also resolved the sand problems by relaxing norms that are helping the people and the construction sector.

The TD, which appointed new committees to rejuvenate the party, started Naa Illu-Naa Swantham agitations and warned the government about forcible occupation of houses on Sankranti if the government failed to allocate them to beneficiaries before that.

Former minister D. Umamaheswara Rao said that the attacks on Dalits, BCs and minorities were creating unrest among the people.

Meanwhile, Communist parties also staged protests and CPI state secretary K. Ramakrishna warned about occupying houses if the government fails to allot houses after Diwali.

CM seeks comprehensive report on CPS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 12

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed the officials to prepare a comprehensive report (table) on Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS), including 52,000 Road Transportation Corporation (RTC) employees in the list of CPS employees.

The officials told the Chief Minister that they have examined the reports of Cabinet Sub-Committee, Working Committee with the secretaries of the departments headed by the Chief Secretary and Thakkar Committee on Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS).

The officials said the state has 1,98,221 employees in government, grant-in-aid, universities and educational institutions under Contributory Pension Scheme, of whom 1,78,705 are directly government employees, while 3,295 are working under

● The officials said the state has 1,98,221 employees in government, grant-in-aid, universities and educational institutions under Contributory Pension Scheme, of whom 1,78,705 are directly government employees, while 3,295 are working under Grant-in-Aid and the remaining 16,221 are working in universities and educational institutions. The officials gave details of the expenditure to implement different types of pension systems to the employees.

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During a review meeting held on contract employees, the Chief Minister said the previous govern-

ment had released GOs and none of them were implemented. "We have implemented them besides Minimum Time Scale (MTS) for Contract employees."

As regularisation of contract employees is linked with legal issues, the Chief Minister directed the officials to formulate guidelines to provide financial benefits to them without raising any problems.

Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney, finance special chief secretary S.S. Rawat, transportation principal secretary M.T. Krishnababu, General Administration (Services) secretary Sashi Bhushan Kumar, General Administration (Services), Rural Development, Panchayat Raj commissioner M. Girijashankar, municipal administration commissioner Vijayakumar and officials from various departments were present.

Rising suicidal tendencies pose a challenge to police

D. SIVA RAMI REDDY | DC
KURNOOL, NOV. 12

MASS SUICIDE IN NANDYAL

Victims' kin given ₹25 lakh ex gratia

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL NOV. 12

The hearing of the bail cancellation petition filed by Kurnool police on behalf of the state government was again adjourned to November 16 at Nandyal Judicial First Magistrate Court. After the withdrawal of the first defense council V. Ramachandra Rao, the accused cops engaged a new advocate to handle their case.

The new advocate is the brother of Ramachandra Rao who had withdrawn his appearance memo from the JFMC Nandyal on Wednesday. Legal circles felt that Rao should not have withdrawn his appearance as it was his legal right to seek briefs and defend the clients before courts of law.

Meanwhile, district collector G. Veera Pandian handed over ₹25 lakh ex gratia cheque to Mabunneesha, mother-in-law of Abdul Salam on Thursday. Nandyal One Town police circle inspector Soma Sekhar Reddy and head constable Gangadhar had allegedly targeted the family of Salam on the charge of theft in a gold shop.

Unable to bear the harassment by cops, he along with his wife Noor, daughter Salma, and his son Kalandar recorded a selfie

video and ended their life on November 3 by throwing themselves before a running train. A high-level team of three senior police officers is investigating the case.

Meanwhile, the district collector along with Nandyal sub-collector Kalpana visited the bereaved family member of Mabunneesha in Mulasagaram, Nandyal town, and handed over the ex gratia cheque. He said the government will stand by the family and will extend all support.

He said Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy was personally monitoring the issue. The district collector urged the family members to contact Nandyal sub-collector or tahsildar if they faced any problem. Nandyal MP Pochu Bramananda Reddy, MLA Silpa Ravichandra Kishor Reddy, and others were present.

However, when the police tried to contact Mabunneesha on the night of Wednesday, rumors spread across Nandyal town that the police were trying to influence her to divert the case. But investigation officer and Allagadda DSP J. Pothuraju clarified that they went there to collect bank account, Aadhaar number, and mobile number details.

Naidu demands dismissal of policemen, CBI probe

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 12

The Telugu Desam claimed that 'Jagan Jungle Raj' and police torture drove Abdul Salam family to the suicide pact.

TD chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday demanded a CBI probe, dismissal of circle inspector, head constable and suspension of DSP with immediate effect.

Naidu held the AP Police and the YSRC government's 'Jungle Raj' responsible for the heart-rending family suicide in Nandyal. He said that the suicide was culmination of the series of non-stop atrocities being committed against the BCs, SCs, STs and Muslims. He alleged that it was only after the Nandyal police terrorised and mentally tortured Salam that he lost all hope of living peacefully any longer. He deplored that their deaths seemed like an 'animal sacrifice' by the 'diabolical' government.

Terming it as murder, he demanded that the government order CBI probe

NAIDU POLITICISING NANDYAL ISSUE: PARTHASARATHY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 12

YSR Congress MLA Kolu Parthasarathy slammed opposition Telugu Desam for trying to politicise the Nandyal family suicide incident though the government has swiftly and sternly taken action.

Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, the MLA criticised Chandrababu Naidu for politicising the Nandyal issue and reiterated that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy responded quickly and initiated arrests of the accused police officials.

to bring out the facts, demanded the dismissal of the circle inspector and the head constable directly responsible for abetting the family suicide and the DSP's suspension.



Ministers Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy and Botla Satyanarayana release YSR Cheyutha Phase-2 at Tadepalli office near Vijayawada on Thursday. DECCAN CHRONICLE

OFFICIAL | APATHY

Poor server connectivity, double biometric authentication turned bane

FP shops hit by server problems, biometric blues

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 12

The new norm of two-time biometric to get ration and slow server connection is forcing people to stand in long queues at fair price shops across the state and is causing heartburn.

According to reports, there are 1.50 crore ration cards spread over the 13 districts. Earlier, the ration card holders used to give their fingerprint through biometric devices only once to collect their purchases. But the government changed the norms and now the ration card holder should undergo the biometric authentication

process twice-one for rice and the other for commodities like dal.

The ration shops would work from 8 am to 12 noon and 4 pm to 7 pm. According to fair price shops dealers, earlier each shop used to give ration to nearly 250 ration card holders every day.

Poor server connectivity and the process of biometric has slowed down the ration distribution process and only 50 to 60 ration card holders are getting commodities per day in the last one week.

Ration card holders B Ramullah and K Ravi recalled that earlier they used to get ration in 15 to



People wait in a queue at a ration shop in Vijayawada as the server was down.

20 minutes or a maximum of 30 minutes but now it is taking three hours. They

lamented that they were coming to ration shops for the past three days but the

server problem was still troubling them. They sought the government to

increase the capacity of biometric servers for speedy process and continuation of single biometric.

Meanwhile, ration shop dealers fear the spread of Covid-19 as many people were standing in queues outside ration shops.

The FP shop dealers lamenting that many of them had been infected with corona are demanding that the server problem be addressed soon and easing of biometric norms to ensure swift distribution of ration. Minister for civil supplies K. Venkateswara Rao said the officials would resolve the difficulties and ensure hassle free distribution.

OTHER STORIES

PLAINT LODGED
OVER CIRCULATION
OF FAKE AUDIODC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 12

Tadikonda MLA of YSR Congress Dr Vundavalli Sridevi lodged complaint with the police over circulation of fake audio and videos in the social media against her and alleged Telugu Desam behind the malicious campaign.

Earlier audio and video clips about Dr Sridevi abusing YSRC leaders and alleging suppression of Dalit communities by Reddy community largely circulated in various social media platforms.

Addressing a press meet here on Thursday, Dr Sridevi said, "How can a channel play morphed films of a woman (her) without even verifying the authenticity of the same. Abstaining to even make an attempt to seek a response from me shows the intent."

Dr Sridevi said that she herself had filed a report with the local police and that the investigation should reveal things as they are or were. Questioning vernacular TV channels on being selective with playing audios or videos, she said "How many times did the channels play the audio clip of Chandrababu Naidu who got caught in a 5 crore vote for note scam? . Can they answer that?."

CAN BURST
CRACKERS FOR
2 HRS: PCBDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, NOV. 12

The AP Pollution Control Board permitted the people to burst crackers on Deepawali festival day only for two hours between 8 to 10 pm because of National Green Tribunal restrictions issued on November 5.

In a press release on Thursday, PCB appealed to the public to use soaps to wash hands and avoid hand sanitisers while dealing with the crackers. The organisation also urged people to avoid explosive items among crackers and opt for only green crackers to prevent pollution.

PCB Environment Engineer Mr Pramod Kumar Reddy has instructed the dealers of crackers to maintain 10 meters distance between each outlet and ensure a physical distance of six feet between the customers.

GODDESS RIDES
PEDDA SSHA
VAHANAMDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, NOV. 12

On the day two of the ongoing annual Karthika brahmotsavam in Tiruchanoor on Thursday, the Goddess charmed devotees in the unique Vaikuntanadha avatara on Pedda Ssha Vahanam.

The Goddess appeared on the seven hooded mighty serpent vahanam as Seshasayani in a resting pose, holding a conch and a disc in her hands.

The vahanam seva was observed in ekantam inside the temple between 8 to 9 am.

Later, Snapana Tirumanjanam was performed to the Goddess Padmavathi Devi.

A special abhishekam with milk, curd, honey, coconut water, turmeric water, Sandal water was performed to Ammavaru at Sri Krishna mukha mandapam.

Later in the evening, the Goddess took a ride on the g o l d e n

Hamsa vahanam.

FESTIVAL
SPECIAL TRAINS
FROM TODAYDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 12

Indian Railways to run one way festival special trains between various destinations from November 12 onwards for the benefit of passengers.

Train no. 05676 Silchar-Bengaluru Cantonment will depart Silchar at 22.00 hrs on November 12 and will arrive at Bengaluru Cantonment at 14.00 hrs on the third day.

Train no. 05678 New Tinsukia-Hubballi will depart New Tinsukia at 07.00 hrs on November 12 and will arrive at Hubballi at 01.30 hrs on the 3rd day.

Train no. 05679 Rangapara North-Secunderabad will depart Rangapara North at 13.15 hrs on November 13 and will arrive at Secunderabad at 15.00 hrs on the second day.

Relief to AP as Covid-19
daily death toll dips

Recovery rate improving among the infected patients

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 12

AP registered the lowest ever daily death toll of Covid-19 infected patients at nine giving much relief to the state government.

Though the state has been registering a two-digit death toll of more than ten every day in the last few days, it has come down to single-digit indicating that the rate of recovery has been improving among the Covid-19 infected patients of late. With the death of nine patients, the cumulative death toll has gone up to 6,837 in the state so far.

The state health authorities released Covid-19 bulletin on Thursday, reporting that out of 77,148 samples tested, 1,728 persons were found infected with Covid-19. With this, the cumulative cases of Covid-19 have gone up to 8,49,705. Out of 89,40,488 samples tested for Covid-19 in the state so far, 8,22,011 patients infected with Covid-19 were recovered while 20,857 patients are still active with the virus.

Among the daily Covid-19 cases, East Godavari registered 290 followed by 239 in West Godavari, 212 in Guntur, 206 in Chittoor, 99 in Anantapur, 91 in Nellore, 88 in Prakasam, 85 in Kadapa, 74 in Visakhapatnam, 43 in Srikakulam, 42 in



An old woman sits on the floor, waiting to give swab sample for Covid-19 test at IGMC Stadium in Vijayawada on Thursday.

— DC

Vizianagaram and 36 in Kurnool.

With regard to the cumulative Covid-19 infections, East Godavari recorded 1,19,791 followed by 89,667 in West Godavari, 81,566 in Chittoor, 70,394 in Guntur, 60,699 in Nellore, 60,777 in Prakasam, 59,851 in Kurnool, 57,063 in Visakhapatnam, 53,454 in Kadapa, 44,863 in Srikakulam, 42,617 in Krishna, 40,150 in Vizianagaram, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries.

The rate of recovery among Covid-19 infected patients has been steady in East Godavari with 1,14,221 followed by 86,592 in West Godavari, 79,227 in Chittoor, 67,297 in Guntur, 64,453 in Anantapur, 59,390 in

Prakasam, 59,348 in Nellore, 59,083 in Kurnool, 55,019 in Visakhapatnam, 52,283 in Kadapa, 43,741 in Srikakulam, 39,574 in Vizianagaram, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries.

Among the daily death cases of Covid-19 patients, Chittoor recorded three followed by two in Krishna and one each in Anantapur, East Godavari, Guntur and West Godavari.

Chittoor recorded the highest number of cumulative death of Covid-19 infected patients at 804 followed by 635 in Guntur, 623 in East Godavari, 602 in Krishna, 577 in Anantapur, 575 in Prakasam, 521 in Visakhapatnam.

Survey launched in Nellore to
find reasons for low attendanceDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, NOV. 12

The School Education Department launched a survey on November 11 to find out the reasons for less attendance from the stakeholders.

The Principals of Institute of Advanced Studies in Education (IASSE), Career and Technical Education (CTE) and District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) to depute ten teaching faculty members of their institutes for the survey.

The teams have been told to collect information for low attendance from the teachers, headmasters, parents and students.

Each faculty member has to visit three high schools, including one private and two ZP Schools from three different villages, and submit the report immediately.

Also, not more than 16 students are allowed to sit in each class and teachers have been told to sound the school bell once in every hour and direct the students to

wash their hands in a bid to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the schools.

The job of maintaining hygienic conditions in the schools has been entrusted to the nearest village Panchayats and Civic bodies concerned.

In addition to this, special permission has been given to release funds from Sarva Siskha Abhiyan to provide sanitisers and masks to students apart from maintaining sanitary conditions.

According to Nellore District Collector KVN Chakradhar Babu, all the

STATE REDUCES
RATE FOR COVID
TEST IN PVT LABSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 12

State government revised the rates downward for the conduct of Covid-19 tests in private NABL and ICMR approved labs. The government issued GO RT No. 699 here on Thursday reducing the rate for the conduct of Covid-19 test.

Accordingly, it costs ₹800 for a sample sent by the state government and ₹1,000 for a sample from an individual.

Earlier, it used to cost ₹1,600 for a sample referred by the state government and ₹1,900 for a sample from an individual for the conduct of Covid-19 test.

The government said that the rate for Covid-19 test was reduced because of increased availability of kits and reduction in the cost of both RNA extraction and RT-PCR kits.

The government instructed all private NABL and ICMR approved labs to follow the reduced rates for the conduct of Covid-19 test as per guidelines issued and directed them to display the rates prominently.



RTC buses are seen stuck in the water as a railway under bridge turned as a pond at Nellore following heavy rain on Thursday.

— DC

SECRETARIATS
SORTED 18 LAKH
PLEAS: COLLECTORDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, NOV. 12

The East Godavari District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that 18 lakhs representations, submitted by the people had been sorted out by the Secretariat system so far in the district and to strengthen the system, the secretariat building constructions should be completed by the end of December.

Participating as a chief guest in a review meeting at Tuni Constituency, presided over by the Peddapuram RDO S. Mallibabu on Thursday, Mr Muralidhar Reddy stood first in the construction of government buildings.

However, the Chief Minister's Principal Secretary Praveen Prakash toured in Tuni constituency recently and expressed his dissatisfaction on the construction.

He said that the review meetings on the construction of secretariat buildings would be held in 19 constituencies soon.

He said that infrastructure facilities should be provided to strengthen the secretariat system and the officials should take it as a challenge.

He also said that executive agencies took up more than four buildings each and it should be avoided. He said that Health Clinics would be set up in the villages to render medical services and information to the people about the Arogyasri scheme, and labs would also be set up in the health clinics.

Kakinada MP Vanga Gita said that the officials and public representatives should work with coordination and complete the works.

Tuni MLA Dadisetty Raja said that if the officials bring the reasons for delaying the constructions into his notice, he will sort it out.

Panchayat Raj Superintendent Engineer Nagaraju, RWS Superintendent Engineer. Gayatri Devi and others were present.

● **CHIEF MINISTER'S** Principal Secretary Praveen Prakash toured in Tuni constituency recently and expressed his dissatisfaction on the construction.

Ex-MP Harshakumar
caught in controversyDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, NOV. 12

The former MP of Amalapuram G.V. Harshakumar is caught up in a controversy as he is alleged to have abused doctors and police at Area Hospital in Razole of East Godavari District.

He referred to the doctors and the police as dogs. This video has become viral in social media and many of the people condemned his comments.

According to sources, a volunteer of Nagaram village Suvarna Jyothi attempted a suicide bid, and she was admitted in the hospital at Razole for two days back.

On Wednesday, Mr Harshakumar informed the Superintendent of the hospital as he would visit the hospital to console the volunteer. When he arrived at the hospital by 1.30 pm, the Superintendent of the hospital said that she was discharged by 12.30 pm. Mr Harshakumar got very angry and allegedly started abusing the doctors, nurses and the police.

On Thursday, the Gannavaram MLA Kondeti Chittibabu condemned the comments of Mr Harshakumar.

He said that Mr Harshakumar worked as

● **WHEN HE** arrived at the hospital by 1.30 pm, the superintendent said that she was discharged by 12.30 pm. Mr Harshakumar got very angry and allegedly started abusing the doctors, nurses and the police.

MP for 10 years and he should not have made such comments as the police and doctors have worked hard during the Covid-19 crisis, and the society was recognising their services and also giving respect to them. He demanded Mr Harshakumar should apologise for his comments immediately.

The United Medical and Health Employees Union (CITU affiliation) strongly condemned the comments of Harshakumar.

The Union District President D.A. Ratna Raju said that Mr Harshakumar could not get the facts and blamed the hospital officials and nurses. If the officials made the mistake, he should inform or complain to the higher officials, but he should not scold them by damaging their self-respect and self-courage. He demanded Mr Harshakumar should apologise.

Vets told to focus on
improving breedsDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, NOV. 12

Minister for Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development Dr Seediri Appala Raju appealed to all the veterinary colleges in the state to focus on improving various types of breeds, feed and fodder for animals.

Addressing a meeting held at the Sri Venkateswara Veterinary University campus in Tirupati on Thursday, the minister told farmers to adopt animal husbandry related activities for some additional revenue.

"Feeding green grass to animals develops immunity and keeps them healthy. Veterinary college professors should create awareness among farmers in this regard. Farmers also have to focus on raising green grass in their lands by availing green powder saplings in the varsity," he noted.

He said that there is no scarcity of medicines and fodder in the state and there are at least 4-5 village secre-

● **ONE VETERINARY** assistant has been deputed for every 1,000 animals in each district. Studies and researches in the varsity should be useful for the farmers and have to guide them.

tariats under one primary veterinary centre. "One Veterinary assistant has been deputed for every 1,000 animals in each district. Studies and researches in the varsity should be useful for the farmers and have to guide them in increasing their revenues," he added.

Meanwhile, the minister also observed the ambulances – procured for conducting medical tests for animals and for creating awareness among farmers on various issues. MLAs B. Madhusudhan Reddy, P. Dwarakanath Reddy, Veterinary University Vice-Chancellor Padmanabha Reddy and others were present.

Crackers can be burst
only for 2 hrs: OfficialDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, NOV. 12

The East Godavari District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy appealed to the people to blast only Green Crackers which don't harm the environment on the occasion of Diwali Festival. He said that the people should blast the crackers only for two hours from 8 pm to 10 pm on the festival day.

He said that according to the directive by the National Green Tribunal, the people should cooperate with the society as many of the people contracted the Covid-19 infection and those people would suffer respiratory problems due to the smoke, discharging from the blasting crackers. He said that the cracker sellers

should maintain 10 feet distance from shop to shop and be available soaps and water. Either the sellers or buyers should not make use of sanitizers as they are inflammable. He said that the police, sub-collectors, revenue and Municipal Officials should implement these instructions strictly.

The District Fire Officer said that 774 firecracker shops under 16 fire station limits in the district had been allowed to sell their crackers only for three days from Thursday. He said that the sellers should arrange fire equipment and extinguishers and both sellers and buyers should wear masks. He said that seven wholesale shops and four cracker manufacture shops had been given licenses during this Diwali.

SHORT TAKES

YES BANK SCAM
ACCUSED ROSHNI
KAPOOR GETS BAIL

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, NOV. 12

A magistrate court here on Thursday granted bail to Yes Bank founder Rana Kapoor's daughter Roshni Kapoor, an accused in the Yes Bank fraud case linked to DHFL, after she appeared before the court in response to summons issued to her.

A non-bailable warrant could have been issued had she not appeared before the court on the summons issued to her. The court had issued summons to her last month at the time of taking cognisance of the charge sheet filed by the Central probe agency CBI. The agency has named her as one of the eight accused.

The CBI had filed charge sheet against Rana Kapoor and others under the provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act and IPC. However, the charges of corruption were dropped by the special CBI court because the prosecution did not obtain the sanction needed to prosecute under the PC Act. As a result the case was transferred to the magistrate court for trial.

SCORPENE CLASS
SUBMARINE
LAUNCHED

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, NOV. 12

The fifth Scorpene class submarine Vagrir for the Indian Navy was launched in Mumbai on Thursday.

The submarine will now undergo comprehensive and rigorous tests and trials for more than a year to ensure delivery of a combat worthy submarine, capable of operation in all modes and regimes of deployment.

The crew will also, at some point of time, sail the submarine for "sea acceptance trials" after which the submarine will be delivered to the Navy. The addition of the submarine will be critical for the Indian Navy which is operating at a less than ideal strength given India's vast coastline.

The Vagrir submarine has the ability to launch a crippling attack on an enemy with torpedoes as well as tube-launched anti-ship missiles whilst underwater or on surface.

Vagrir has the ability to carry out multifarious missions typically undertaken by any modern submarine, which include anti-surface warfare, anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine laying and area surveillance. Six Scorpene submarines were to be manufactured by Mazagon Dock Limited, Mumbai, under programme Project-75 with a \$3 billion contract.

Shivraj rules
out expansion
of his ministry

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUHURY | DC
BHOPLA, NOV. 12

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday ruled out expansion of his ministry in near future indicating that he was in no hurry to accommodate the 2 former ministers who resigned from his cabinet on October 21 when their 6-month mandatory period to continue in their position as non-MLAs ended.

Former ministers Tulsi Silawat and Govind Singh Rajput were among 22 ex-Congress MLAs who had resigned from the Assembly and subsequently from their party in March to pull down the 15-month-old Kamal Nath government.

All the 22 former MLAs later joined BJP. 14 of them including Silawat and Rajput were later inducted in the Shivraj ministry.

As per the constitutional provision, a non-MLA can join a state ministry, but he or she needs to be elected to the House within 6 months of being inducted in the ministry.

Accordingly, Silawat and Rajput, who were inducted in the Shivraj cabinet on April 2, resigned from the Shivraj

SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN indicates that he is in no hurry to accommodate the 2 ex-ministers who resigned from his cabinet on October 21 when their 6-month mandatory period to continue in their position as non-MLAs ended.

Both of them were however elected to the Assembly in the November 3 by-elections in the state.

"Ministry expansion is not in my agenda right now", Chouhan told reporters here.

He also refused to commit as to when he was planning to expand his ministry.

Meanwhile, out of the 12 non-MLA ministers in the Shivraj ministry, three have lost the elections, while the rest nine have won the polls.

The three ministers who lost the polls are Imarti Devi, Anand Singh Kansana and Giriraj Dandotia.

Kansana announced his resignation from the ministry immediately after he lost the polls.

The other two ministers who lost the polls were yet to announce their resignation from the ministry.

Flouting Covid-19 norms



A view of crowd at Sadar Bazar due to Diwali shopping in New Delhi on Thursday. Single-day increase of 47,905 infections took the country's Covid-19 caseload to 86,83,916, while the number of people who have recuperated from the disease have surged to 80,66,501. The coronavirus death toll climbed to 1,28,121 with 550 new fatalities.

— PTI

Have made no claim
to CM's post: Nitish

Nitish likely to meet Guv soon after meeting with NDA partners

NAYEAR AZAD | DC
PATNA, NOV. 12

After the victory of NDA in Bihar polls, Nitish Kumar is all set to take oath as Bihar Chief Minister for the next term.

On Thursday, he visited JD(U) office to greet party workers and said that the NDA was currently assessing the poll results and the dates for oath ceremony has not been finalised yet. Reports suggest that he is expected to meet Bihar governor after meeting with all four NDA partners soon.

While interacting with the media at the JD(U) office he said, "I have made no claim for the Chief Minister's post, the decision will be taken by NDA. It has not been decided yet when the oath ceremony is going to take place, whether after Diwali or Chhath Puja. At the moment we are assessing the poll results and all four NDA partners will also meet soon".

The NDA led by Nitish Kumar's JD(U) has won 125 seats, three more than the number required to form the government in Bihar. Reports suggest that Nitish Kumar has been upset over the performance of his party in the polls.

- THE NDA led by Nitish Kumar's JD(U) has won 125 seats, three more than the number required to form the government in Bihar.
- THE JD(U) has been holding Chirag Paswan responsible for the low tally and has been accusing him of 'cutting votes' on most of the seats fielded by the party.

This is the first time in 15 years that the JD(U) has slipped to number three position in the state after the RJD and NDA partner BJP.

The RJD with 75 seats has emerged as the single largest party followed by the BJP which has won 74 seats. The JD(U) got only 43 seats and two smaller partners Hindustani Awam Morcha and Vikasheel Insan Party won four seats each.

The JD(U) has been holding Chirag Paswan responsible for the low tally and has been accusing him of "cutting votes" on most of the seats fielded by the party.

On Wednesday, while talking about his party's performance in the Assembly elections Chirag Paswan had said that it was his party's goal to cause a dent to the JD(U) and make the BJP stronger. Sources said that the

JD(U) leadership has urged the BJP to initiate action against Chirag Paswan and his party for aggressively campaigning against Nitish Kumar and fielding candidates on most of the seats where JD(U) had fielded its candidates.

As per an assessment, the LJP harmed the JD(U) on 20-30 seats during the polls.

"It's the BJP which has to decide whether any action is to be taken against him (Chirag Paswan) or his party. It's for the BJP to decide whether or the LJP should remain in the NDA", Nitish Kumar said.

Meanwhile, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav in his first remark after the Assembly election raised doubts over the electoral process in the state.

He also alleged discrepancies in postal ballot count and demanded recounting in more than 20 seats where the grand alliance candidates lost by a thin margin.

Talking to the media after being declared as the legislative party leader of the Grand Alliance on Thursday, Tejashwi Yadav said, "They have hijacked the people's mandate once again. In 2015 also people's mandate was in favour of the Grand Alliance but it was the BJP which made backdoor entry to gain power".

Chief Electoral Officer H.R. Srinivas, meanwhile, submitted the list of winning candidates in the Assembly elections to Governor Phagu Chauhan at Raj Bhavan.

Tejashwi Yadav also announced that he would soon take out a "Dhanyawad Yatra" to thank the people of the state for voting in favour of the grand alliance.

He said that "The verdict was in our favour but the results were declared in their favour. I am confident that the grand alliance would have won at least 130 seats if the counting was done in a free and fair manner. We have also decided to demand video footage of the counting process. The grand alliance also wants to know that under whose pressure postal ballots were cancelled".

PM2.5 levels in Delhi will be lowest
if no crackers burnt, says SAFAR

BJP SAYS DIDI
IS PLAYING
'KHOONI RAJNITI'

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 12

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi slammed the killing of BJP workers and supporters in TMC-ruled West Bengal and advised the state's ruling party that the "dance of death" will not help in winning a mandate, the BJP on Thursday accused the TMC supreme and chief minister Mamata Banerjee of playing "khooni rajniti."

On a day BJP's state unit and MP Dilip Ghosh's convoy was attacked in Alipurduar allegedly by TMC workers and one of its workers Gokul Jana was "murdered" in East Medinipur, the party claimed that these incidents are a proof that Bihar poll verdict has unsettled Banerjee.

High on the BJP's radar, West Bengal has crucial Assembly polls lined up early next year and former BJP president and Union home minister Amit Shah had recently visited the state to take stock of the party's poll preparedness.

West Bengal is one of the few states where the BJP has never been in power and has been aggressively expanding its organisational and support base.

New Delhi, Nov. 12: The PM2.5 concentration in Delhi on Diwali is likely to be the "lowest" in the last four years if no firecrackers are burnt, a central government agency said on Thursday.

The ministry of earth sciences' air quality monitor, SAFAR, said pollution levels in Delhi during the Diwali period are likely to

remain in the higher end of the "very poor" category in the absence of emissions due to fireworks.

"Under 'zero-firecracker' scenario, the level of PM2.5 is likely to be the lowest in the past four years as not so calm surface winds in Delhi will help in dispersion (of pollutants)," it said.

PM2.5 is particulate matter which is about three per cent the diameter of a human hair and can lead to premature deaths from heart and lung diseases.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very

poor", and 401 and 500 "severe". SAFAR said stubble burning-induced impact on AQI is expected to increase from negligible to moderate in the next two days. A spike in PM2.5 in the early hours of November 15 is likely in case of fire-related emissions, it said.

— PTI

10 students selected to participate
in NASA's human rover challenge

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, NOV. 12

As many as 10 students from Odisha's Navonmesh Prasar Student Astronomy Team (NaPSAT) have been selected to participate in National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Human Rover Challenge scheduled to be held next year.

This is for the first time when a school team will be representing India at the international-level event. The team formed by the Bhubaneswar-based Navonmesh Prasar Foundation comprises schoolchildren and some Industrial Training Institute (ITI) students from across the state.

According to sources, the

Human Exploration Rover Challenge scheduled in April 2021 will witness the participation of various teams from across the globe. For this challenge, the teams will develop human rovers that can move on the surface of Mars.

Excited over the selection, Anil Pradhan, founder of Navonmesh Prasar Foundation said, "It is for the first time that a school team from India has been selected for the NASA Human Exploration Rover Challenge. We have identified 10 students from the state, and the team was formed during the pandemic."

"Initially we imparted training to the students and then applied for the international event. The team is now sweating it out to make

a rover that can move on Mars' surface," Pradhan informed, adding that they are also raising funds for the competition.

The team from Odisha is quite optimistic of giving a tough fight and aims to develop the rover in 4-5 months. The students are quite ecstatic after their selection. "I knew about NaPSAT. I decided to try out for this and got selected as well. We have been selected for the NASA Human Exploration Rover Challenge 2021. We are the first team from Odisha to get selected and the first high school student team from India. We are going to Alabama in April 2021 and will represent India in this competition."

Ankan Mondal, another student, said that their

rover can handle the weight of two people while moving on terrains of Mars and moon. "We will be making a human-powered rover for Mars and the moon. We have to ensure that the rover can handle the weight of two people. 100 teams are participating in the event," he said.

The NaPSAT is a project taken up by Navonmesh Prasar Foundation to create curiosity among school, skill development & university students in the field of Space and Astronomy. We are an interdisciplinary team of Space enthusiasts across disciplines, who are engaged in projects ranging from the design of space systems, rovers, rockets, satellites and astronomy to participate in various international events.

'Paatal Lok' actor
Asif Basra ends life

Dharamshala (HP), Nov. 12: Actor Asif Basra, a familiar face in several movies and TV shows including "Jab We Met", "Kai Po Che!" and "Paatal Lok", was found hanging in a private residential complex here on Thursday, police said. He was 53.

He hanged himself around 12-12.30 pm on Thursday. We are investigating the matter. We have sent the body for post-mortem... Prima

facie it is a case of suicide," Kangra Senior Superintendent of Police Vimukt Ranjan told reporters here.

The actor's body was recovered by police officials, he said. Further details are awaited, Ranjan added.

Basra had reportedly leased a property in McLeodganj, Upper Dharamshala, about five-six years ago and visited the place regularly. The news of the sud-

den death of the character actor, which comes months after Bollywood star Sushant Singh Rajput was found hanging at his residence in Mumbai on June 14, led to shock in the industry with several of his colleagues expressing their grief.

"What? This is too shocking!! Shot with him just before Lockdown!!! Oh My God!!!" tweeted actor Manoj Bajpayee.

— PTI

ASEAN KEY TO
INDIA'S ACT EAST
POLICY: MODI

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 12

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday participated in the 17th Asean-India virtual summit at the invitation of the Prime Minister of Vietnam Nguyen Xuan Phuc. Vietnam is the current chair of Asean.

"ASEAN-India engagement has evolved over the years into a deep, robust and multi-faceted partnership. Asean and India became summit-level partners in 2002, and strategic partners in 2012. The breadth of our partnership is covered by several dialogue mechanisms cutting across various sectors like defense, cyber security, counter terrorism, commerce, telecommunications, agriculture, energy, environmental issues, tourism, etc," said Riva Ganguly Das, secretary (East) in ministry of external affairs.

The annual Asean-India summits provide the opportunity for India and Asean to engage at the highest level.

The 17th ASEAN-India Summit is the eighth summit attended by Prime Minister. He attended the 16th ASEAN-India Summit in Bangkok in November last year.

Speaking at the summit, Modi underlined the centrality of Asean in India's Act East Policy and noted that a cohesive, responsive and prosperous Asean is central to India's Indo-Pacific vision and contributes to security and growth for all in the region.

The Prime Minister underscored the importance of strengthening convergence between India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative and ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific to ensure a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific region.

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, NOV. 12

A special PMLA court on Thursday rejected the bail plea filed by Deepak Kochhar, husband of former ICICI Bank CEO Chanda Kochhar, in a money laundering case. Kochhar had sought default bail on the ground that the probe agency failed to file chargesheet against him within a stipulated time frame.

He had filed the bail application on merits too and his bail plea on merits is yet to be decided.

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED), while investigating the ICICI-Videcon money laundering case, had arrested Deepak Kochhar in September and since then he is behind bars.

Even though special judge Prashant Rajvaidya rejected the default bail application filed by Kochhar, he asked the ED to file its reply on the plea filed on merits and deferred hearing on it till November 23.

In its reply to Kochhar's claim that the charge sheet has not been filed in time, the ED claimed that the same was filed on November 3, but it is pending scrutiny by the concerned department, as there are five trunks full of documents that needed to

● THE PROSECUTION has claimed that the Kochhars and their business entities illegally sanctioned loans amounting to ₹1,875 crore to the Videocon Group of companies.

be verified. Hence, the court is yet to take the cognisance of the prosecution's complaint.

Accepting this contention the court rejected his bail plea.

The prosecution has claimed that the Kochhars and their business entities illegally sanctioned loans amounting to ₹1,875 crore to the Videocon Group of companies. Based on these allegations, the central probe agency slapped money laundering charges against the accused.

The ED had earlier said an amount of ₹64 crore, out of the ₹300 crore loan sanctioned by a committee headed by Chanda Kochhar to Videocon International Electronics Ltd, was transferred to Nupower Renewables Pvt Ltd (NRPL) by Videocon Industries Ltd on September 8, 2009, just a day after disbursement of the loan by ICICI Bank.

NRPL was earlier known as Nupower Renewables Ltd (NRL) and is a company of Deepak Kochhar.

₹5L COMPENSATION
TO TWO 'WRONGLY'
ACCUSED OF MURDER

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BARGARH, NOV. 12

The Odisha Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has ordered compensation of ₹2.5 lakh each to two persons of Bargarh district who were 'wrongfully' arrested on charges of killing a boy in 2016 who was later found alive following his return to home after two years.

The panel has recommended that the compensation amount of ₹5 lakh be recovered from the salary of Prakash Kumar Karana, former inspector of Paikamal police station, who had arrested the two.

As per reports, one Jitu Dandasena of Piplipali village in Bargarh district went missing on Dec. 7, 2016. During the course of investigation, police arrested Hahu Gurla and Raghab Naik of Bargarh town on December 24, 2016 on the charges of murder and destruction of evidence.

The two were later sent to jail. However, Dandasena returned home in 2018 and the two wrongly accused had moved the OHRC seeking justice after their release from jail.

As questions were raised over the carelessness of police in investigating the case, human rights activist Biswapriya Kanungo had moved the OHRC seeking justice for the arrestees.

Speaking to reporters, Jitu said he had fled his village after he lost his memory following an attack by miscreants.

"In 2016, I was attacked by some miscreants who hit my head and looted my mobile and money. I could not return home as I lost my memory and moved here and there. I returned home after regained my memory," he said.

IN BRIEF

Shots fired at Saudi embassy in Dutch

The Hague: Several shots were fired early Thursday at Saudi Arabia's embassy in The Hague, Dutch police said. Nobody was injured and police were investigating. Spokesman Steven van Santen said police were alerted around 6 am (local time) to shots being fired at the building on a stately avenue in the Dutch city. Officers found several bullet casings outside the building and local media showed images of bullet holes in windows. The motive for the shooting was unclear. Police appealed for witnesses. Calls to the embassy went unanswered early Thursday.

Radio Liberty scribe killed in bombing

Kandahar: An Afghan journalist working for a US-funded radio network was killed in a blast in southern Afghanistan on Thursday, officials said, just days after a former television presenter was murdered in Kabul. Radio Liberty reporter Aliyas Dayee was killed when a sticky bomb attached to his car exploded in the city of Lashkar Gah in Helmand province, said Omar Zwak, the spokesman for the province's governor. Targeted killings of prominent figures, including journalists, clerics, politicians and rights activists, have become more common in recent months as violence surges in Afghanistan, despite ongoing peace talks between the government and the Taliban. Dayee, 33, was on his way to the local press club with his brother when the car exploded, Radio Liberty's chief editor Rateb Noori said.

Democracy bloc set to resign in HK

Hong Kong: Hong Kong's legislature opened on Thursday ahead of the planned mass resignation of its pro-democracy bloc, one day after the government ousted four of its members. One of the pro-democracy lawmakers, Lam Cheuk-ting, unfurled a banner from a balcony of the legislative council building saying the city's leader Carrie Lam had brought disaster to Hong Kong and its people. The group had said they would hand in resignation letters on Thursday, but it was not immediately clear when they would do it or even what the proper procedure was. One said the removal of their four colleagues could sound the "death knell" for democracy in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory. The resignation of the 15 remaining pro-democracy lawmakers would rather put tensions over the future of Hong Kong, a former British colony, regional financial hub and bastion of Western-style civil liberties where China's government has increasingly tightened its control.

CARDI B SORRY FOR GODDESS DURGA LOOK

Los Angeles, Nov. 12: American rapper Cardi B has apologised for appropriating Goddess Durga's image for a magazine cover shoot. The 28-year-old musician recently appeared on the cover of Footwear News magazine, posing as Goddess Durga with shoes in her hands, while promoting her first line of sneakers with Reebok.

In the magazine's cover photo, Cardi B is seen holding a shoe while multiple arms stretched out around her from her shoulders.

The singer was then slammed on social media with many Indian users claiming that she has insulted the Hindu goddess, while others took offence to her outfit. On Wednesday, Cardi B took to her Instagram story and apologised to her Indian fans.

In a video message, the musician said, "When I did the shoot, the creatives told me I was going to represent a Goddess; that she represents strength, femininity and liberation, and that's something I love and I'm all about."

"And though it was dope, if people think I'm offending their culture or their religion I want to say that was not my intent. I do not like offending anyone's religion; I wouldn't like it if someone did it to my religion," she added.

Cardi B maintained that her intention was not to disrespect anyone's god. "When people dress as Virgin Mary and Jesus, as long as they do it in a beautiful, graceful way it is ok". But I wasn't trying to be disrespectful; maybe I should have done my research. I'm sorry. I can't change the past but I will do more research for the future," she added.

Typhoon Vamco strikes Philippines

Rescuers pull a rubber boat carrying residents through a flooded street after Typhoon Vamco hit in Marikina City, suburban Manila on Thursday. — AFP

Biden transition picks up, Klain chief of staff

Long road ahead for duo to fight Covid, heal divided nation

Washington, Nov. 12: US President-elect Joe Biden pressed ahead with his transition on Wednesday despite Donald Trump's refusal to acknowledge defeat, naming a seasoned Democratic operative as chief of staff in his first public White House personnel choice.

Biden tapped longtime aide Ron Klain, who previously served as his first chief of staff while vice president, acknowledging the two had a long road ahead in fighting the Coronavirus pandemic as well as healing a deeply divided nation.

"His deep, varied experience and capacity to work with people all across the political spectrum is precisely what I need in a White House chief of staff as we confront this moment of crisis and bring our country together again," Biden said.

He made the announcement after visiting the Korean War Memorial in Philadelphia earlier in the

US military won't be used as political pawn, says Gen Mark

Washington, Nov. 12: The words spoken by America's top military officer carried a familiar ring, but in the midst of a chaotic week at the Pentagon, they were particularly poignant.

"We are unique among militaries," said Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "We do not take an oath to a king or a queen, a tyrant or a dictator. We do not take an oath to an individual."

Milley was speaking

Wednesday at the dedication of an Army museum in a week that saw President Donald Trump fire Defense Secretary Mark Esper and install three staunch loyalists to senior Pentagon policy positions.

The abrupt changes have raised fears about what Trump may try to do in his final two months of office — and whether the military's long held apolitical nature could be upended.

Milley's comments, made as he stood alongside

Esper's successor, acting defense chief Christopher Miller, reflected a view he has long been passionate about: the military's unequivocal duty to protect and defend the Constitution — what he called the "moral north star" for everyone in uniform.

But his message in a time of turmoil — Trump has refused to concede his election loss — was unmistakable: The military exists to defend democracy and is not to be used as a political pawn. — *PTI*

The president made no public remarks during the somber wreath-laying ceremony, his first official appearance since the November 3 vote. — *AFP*

ARMENIA DETAINS CRITICS OF KARABAKH DEAL

Yerevan, Nov. 12: Armenia on Thursday arrested 10 leading opposition figures for violently protesting against a Russian-brokered peace deal that ended weeks of fighting with Azerbaijan and sparked fury with Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Prosecutors announced the arrests hours ahead of a fresh demonstration called by the opposition against the accord that sees Armenia give up swathes of disputed territory in Nagorno-Karabkh to their long-standing foe.

The 10 politicians face up to a decade behind bars for their role in "illegal violent mass disorder", prosecutors said. — *AFP*

\$500 mn to be pledged at Paris forum for cure UK crosses 50,000 Covid-19 deaths

Paris, Nov. 12: Several countries and foundations are set to pledge more than \$500 million on Thursday for a global pool aimed at ensuring equitable access to coronavirus tests, treatment and vaccines for all nations, organisers of a French forum said.

The third edition of the Paris Peace Forum, which seeks to address governance issues with concrete projects, takes place Thursday and Friday in the French capital and is dedicated to finding ways to ease and get out of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It takes place as the number of cases is rising rapidly across Europe and beyond.

It also comes just days after American pharmaceutical giant Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech reported highly promising results for their vaccine candidate, raising hopes globally.

During the forum, several countries are expected to announce funding for the so-called ACT-Accelerator, a mechanism led by the World Health Organisation that aims to ensure access to tests, treatments and vaccines for all. According to a statement by organisers, France will be announcing a commitment of 100 million euros, Spain 50 million and the European Commission 100 million specifically for the vaccines part of ACT-A.

The British government is also set to declare a contribution of one additional pound for each four dollars announced.

Organisers added that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was also due to "announce an important commitment during the discussion." WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, French President Emmanuel Macron, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, will take part in an online discussion due to be streamed online.

In September, the United Nations estimated that the ACT-Accelerator had only received around \$3 billion of the \$38 billion needed to meet the goal of producing and delivering two billion vaccine doses, 245 million treatments and 500 million diagnostic tests over the next year. — *AP*

CREATIVE TROLLS SLAM W.H.O. ON FB FOR TAIWAN CENSOR

Taipei, Nov. 12: Alleged censorship of Taiwan on the World Health Organisation's Facebook page inspired some creative trolling on Thursday, with special characters and foreign scripts used to bypass filters that also censored Winnie the Pooh, a character used to poke fun at Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The deluge came after Taiwan politicians and social media users shared screenshots showing messages containing "Taiwan" or "Taiwan can help" failing to upload underneath a banner advertising a WHO livestreamed event on the Coronavirus. — *AFP*

becoming clearer as the months have gone on," he said. — *PTI*

Turkey prohibits smoking in public

Istanbul, Nov. 12: Turkey's interior ministry has banned smoking in public places across the country to curb the spread of Covid-19.

In a statement late Wednesday, the ministry said smoking would be banned in busy streets, bus stops and public squares when necessary. It said the nationwide mask mandate in public spaces, which has been in effect for several months, must be followed at all times and smokers were routinely violating the mask rule.

The ministry also said provinces can decide to impose curfews on senior citizens above the age of 65 if they are seeing increases in the number of critical patients. The governors of Istanbul and Ankara have already reintroduced measures this week, allowing senior citizens to leave their homes only between 10 am and 4 pm. — *AP*

Johannesburg, Nov. 12: When Coronavirus placed the world in lockdown, a gospel-influenced anthem with Zulu lyrics brought people together through social media, lifting spirits and instantly becoming a global phenomenon.

Today, "Jerusalem" has clocked more than 230 million YouTube views in less than a year — and lured an army of people into mimicking its dance moves.

"The feedback was crazy," says 24-year-old South African artist Master KG, who co-wrote and performs the disco-house track with Nomcebo Zikode. The viral "Jerusalem dance challenge" saw thousands across the world posting clips of themselves copying the video choreography. — *AFP*

Asian leaders to sign huge China-backed trade pact

Hanoi, Vietnam, Nov. 12: Fifteen Asia-Pacific nations are set to sign an enormous free trade deal at an online summit that started on Thursday, with the pact seen as a coup for China in extending its influence across the region.

Once signed, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) will be the world's largest trade pact in terms of GDP, according to analysts. The pact, which was first proposed in 2012 and viewed as a Chinese-led rival to a now-defunct US trade initiative, loops in 10 Southeast Asian economies along with China, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia.

"After eight years of negotiating with blood, sweat and tears, we have finally come to the moment where we will seal the RCEP Agreement this Sunday," said Malaysia's trade minister Mohamed Azmin Ali, ahead of the virtual meeting.

Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc also confirmed the pact would be signed this week during opening remarks at the online summit.

India had been due to sign the pact but pulled out last year over concerns about cheap Chinese goods entering the country, though it can join at a later date if it reverses its position.

The RCEP — whose members account for around 30 percent of global GDP — would be a "major positive step forward for trade and investment liberalisation" in the region, said Rajiv Biswas, Asia Pacific chief economist at global business consultancy IHS Markit. "RCEP will be the world's biggest free trade area measured in terms of GDP," he said.

The pact's expected signing comes as the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) fight to mitigate the crippling cost of the Covid-19, which has ravaged their economies and left many battling a severe public health crisis. — *AFP*

China lays out tech roadmap to catch up with US: Report

Beijing, Nov. 12: China must apply cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence if it wants to transform its military into a modern fighting force on a par with those of other leading powers, according to new guidelines and comments from President Xi Jinping and other officials.

The statements come from a booklet published this month by the state-run People's Publishing House, in which senior officials, including President Xi, outlined the latest five-year plan for the country's development.

The military modernisa-

tion is being pushed by 67-year-old Xi, who besides heading the ruling Communist Party (CPC) and the Presidency is also the Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), which is the overall high command for China's 2-million strong military.

China this year approved about \$179 billion defence budget, the second-highest after United States defence spending of \$732 billion. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) military expenditure figures, China defence spending in 2019 amounted to \$232 billion. — *PTI*

DYNASTY | JUBILEE | Bashar Assad, has an unquestioned grip on what remains**Syria marks 50 yrs of Assad family rule**

Beirut, Nov. 12: On Nov. 13, 1970, a young air force officer from the coastal hills of Syria launched a bloodless coup. It was the latest in a succession of military takeovers since independence from France in 1946, and there was no reason to think it would be the last. Yet 50 years later, Hafez Assad's family still rules Syria.

The country is in ruins from a decade of civil war that killed a half million people, displaced half the population and wiped out the economy. Entire regions are lost from government control. But Hafez's son, Bashar Assad, has an unquestioned grip on what remains.

His rule, half of it spent

in war, is different from his father's in some ways — dependent on allies like Iran and Russia rather than projecting Arab nationalism, run with a crony kleptocracy rather than socialism. The tools are the same: repression, rejection of compromise and brutal bloodshed.

Like the Castro family in Cuba and North Korea's Kim dynasty, the Assads have attached their name to their country the way few non-monarchical rulers have done.

It wasn't clear whether the government intended to mark the 50-year milestone this year. While the anniversary has been marked with fanfare in previous years, it has



Syrian mourners wave portraits of President Hafez Assad, right, and his two sons Bashar, centre, and Basil who died in a car accident in 1994 to mourn the death of their president, in Damascus, Syria on June 10, 2000. — *AP file photo*

been a more subdued celebration during the war. "There can be no doubt that 50 years of Assad family rule, which has been

ruthless, cruel and self-defeating, has left the country what can only be described as broken, failed and almost forgotten,"

said Neil Quilliam, an associate fellow at Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa program.

After his 1970 takeover, Hafez Assad consolidated power. He brought into key positions members of his Alawite sect, a minority in Sunni-majority Syria, and established a Soviet-style single-party police state.

His power was absolute. His Mukhabarat — or intelligence officers — were omnipresent.

He turned Syria into a Middle East powerhouse. In the Arab world, he gained respect for his uncompromising position on the Golan Heights, the strategic high ground lost to Israel in the 1967 war. — *AP*

DECCAN
Chronicle

13 NOVEMBER 2020

Digital oversight: Don't try to regulate, censor

The Central government's move to bring the digital space under the purview of the information and broadcasting ministry, with President Ram Nath Kovind approving the Government of India (Allocation of Business) 357th Amendment Rules, 2020, gives it the power to regulate policies and rules for online content, including news and creative material broadcast through over-the-top platforms. This comes soon after the Supreme Court expressed concern over the lack of oversight on OTT content and seeking the government's views on the subject.

At present, most content in India is regulated by statutory or autonomous bodies. The Press Council of India and the Central Board of Film Certification, both statutory bodies, monitor the print media and films respectively, while the News Broadcasters Association represents television news channels and the Advertising Standards Council of India regulates advertising. However, there is no law or body that governs online content, or OTT platforms. The attempt by a group of video streaming services to formulate a self-regulatory code that laid down a set of guiding principles for content on these platforms had failed to take off. In this background, the new rules fill in a lacuna, and thus welcome.

It is learnt that the programme code that governs content on TV and which found an outlet in the Cable Television Network Regulation Act, 1995 may serve as the template for guidelines, and the code lists several don'ts.

While it is necessary that there is a regulatory body which can oversee the content, there are too many apprehensions and challenges that such a body will face. This is basically because of two factors. One, it should work within the limits of Article 19 (1) of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to speech and expression. Any attempt to muscle information or opinion expressed online will fall foul of the Constitution, and hence untenable. The media is best left to regulate itself, and a statutory regulator should not take on the role of a censor or do the bidding of the government in power. There are laws in our statute book to punish those who break them; and thus it must function solely as an overseer and not as a regulator, in the strict sense of the term. Second is the role that technology plays while trying to regulate online platforms. In the case of the press, television, advertisements or films, the products are made and/or distributed physically within the territory of India but when it comes to online, none of this is applicable, thanks to technology. One can produce content sitting anywhere in the world and make it available in the country, and imposing restrictions on them would be a tough, if not impossible, task. At the same time, those from within the country are easy to be brought under control. It is incumbent on a regulator to ensure that every player gets a level-playing field.

A knowledge society demands an open and free exchange of ideas. Regulators do have a role, but only a very limited one. The government must ensure that the new regulator promotes India's transformation into a knowledge society, and not impedes it.

A fitting finale for IPL

The smiles on the faces of not only the record winners of the Indian Premier League said it all. There was an immense sense of satisfaction to the event having been held as a glorious tribute to the sporting spirit of mankind with the popular multi-billion IPL 2020 season transplanted in the UAE desert and gone through virtually without a hitch. Five-time champions Mumbai Indians may have pulled one more away from the pack but they were just one great part of a wonderfully uninhibited final in which bright cricket of the enterprising T20 variety was served as entertainment in the face of one of humanity's greatest challenges in the form of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The super hero frame may have frozen prematurely on Marcus Stoinis as Delhi Capitals' opening gambit backfired, but denied by one of the great weapons of the 2020 season — pace attack. Even on Asian pitches there was plenty for quicks like Trent Boult to show the way. A methodical thoroughness may have exemplified the extent to which Mumbai Indians have revolutionised the format but they displayed that long after attacking batsmanship saw the likes of Kagiso Rabada being toyed with. This was not a nail-biting final, but an almost clichetic DC captain had realised that setting a target is as much a way of trying to win in this format. The flow of then attacking game was owed primarily to getting on with it rather than complicating it excessively.

The slow bowlers held their own too, so too did athletic fielders who bring excitement in their new gravity-defying, boundary riding ways even as the batsmen went through the vicissitudes, sometimes run ragged by just the thought of winning when near enough to the threshold. Many of the youth of India embellished the competition in unfolding their unique talents while the experienced often left us marvelling at how they reproduce skills as if from muscle memory. The public, drawn even more into interaction with the Dream XI IPL fantasy games, was laughing too as a great IPL edition went by.

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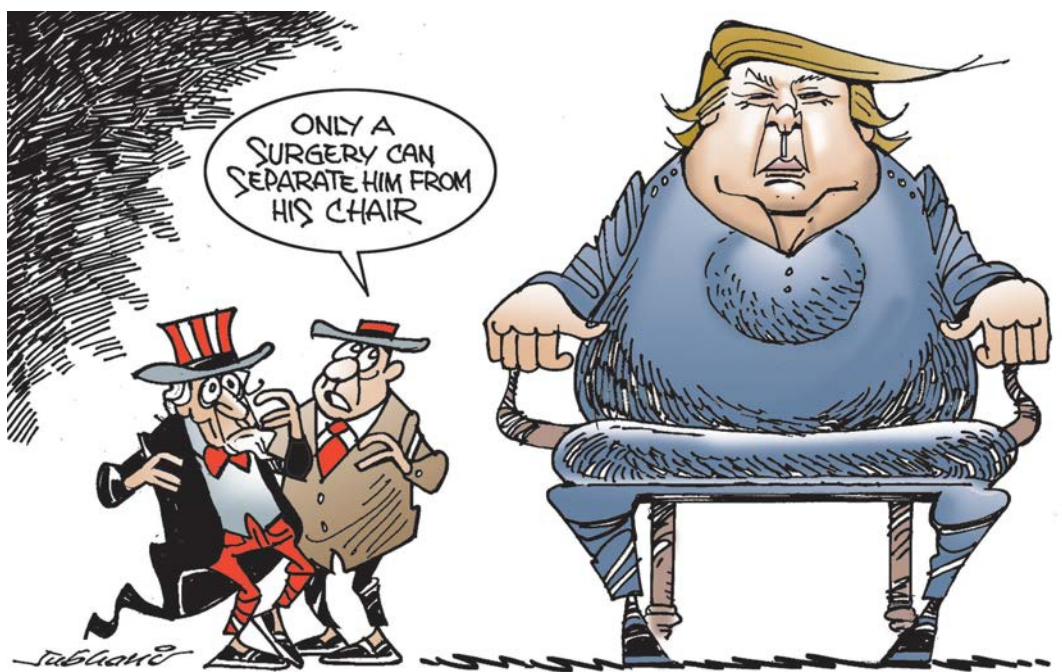
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Subhani



New insights on Rajiv, but questions remain



Karan Thapar

As I See It

Biographies written by friends can be both revelatory and exasperating. Because the author knows the subject intimately there's a lot you can learn from them which otherwise you might never have found out. But, equally, for the same reason the book is likely to ignore or gloss over incidents that could embarrass the subject. Such books are fascinating but not always satisfying.

That is largely true of Wajahat Habibullah's recent book *My Years with Rajiv*. First, however, a word about their relationship. Habibullah and Indira Gandhi's two sons, Rajiv and Sanjay, studied together at Doon School and earlier at Welham. Their families knew each other and Habibullah's mother even served as a Congress MP. Later, the adult Wajahat served in both Rajiv Gandhi's and his mother's office. As he reveals, Habibullah accompanied Mrs Gandhi "on every tour within India, from Kashmir to the Andamans". Consequently, he got to know and, perhaps, understand the Gandhis better than any other civil servant.

Now, let's come to the book. The new bits suggest that a lot happened when he was Prime Minister of which Rajiv Gandhi knew very little. In fact, he was often kept in the dark. By politicians, by generals and even, it seems, by his close friends. If true — and I'm prepared to accept Habibullah's word — it's hardly a flattering portrait of India's youngest Prime Minister.

Habibullah reveals that Rajiv was totally clueless when, in February 1986,

the gates of the Babri Masjid were unlocked. "Was Rajiv Gandhi involved in the decisions leading up to this unlocking?" he asks. This is the answer that Rajiv Gandhi gave him: "I had not been informed of this action and have asked Vir Bahadur Singh (then chief minister of Uttar Pradesh) to explain. I suspect it was Arun (Nehru) and Fotedar (Makhan Lal) who were responsible, but I am having this verified. If it is true, I will have to consider action."

Unfortunately, Habibullah does not explain how a Prime Minister could be ignorant of something as important as this, or what that suggests of his leadership and of his control of events. Yet Habibullah does write of himself that he was "completely taken aback". Therefore, it's a mystery why he doesn't dig deeper to find an explanation for Gandhi's ignorance. Or ask how Rajiv's cousin, Arun Nehru, could have placed the Prime Minister in this predicament.

Even more surprising is what Habibullah has to reveal about Operation Brasstacks. In 1986-87, this operation was viewed as unwarrantedly provocative and many feared that it could spark a conflict with Pakistan. Although Habibullah says that it involved "the entire Indian Army", it emerges that Rajiv Gandhi had no idea of its planning or that it was actually happening. Habibullah reveals he only found out as a result of a casual comment to Lt. Gen. P.N. Hoon, then Western Army commander, at an Army Day reception.

Habibullah's account of Rajiv's conversation with Lt. Gen. Hoon is both

funny and frightening. "When Rajiv saw him, he sauntered up to him and asked cheerfully: 'How is the Western Front?' " Lt. Gen. Hoon then started to speak about Operation Brasstacks. "Rajiv looked taken aback and asked Hoon what he was talking about." As Habibullah adds, it soon become crystal clear that "the Prime Minister of India had in fact no inkling of an exercise that had brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war".

Once again, Habibullah does not bother to ask the obvious questions. What does Rajiv Gandhi's ignorance of Brasstacks reveal of his relationship with the Army Chief and, more importantly, Arun Singh, the minister of state for defence and Rajiv's closest friend? Indeed, what does this sorry state of affairs reveal of Rajiv Gandhi's hold on the government? Habibullah's silence doesn't mean the questions don't exist or that they can conveniently not be answered.

The third revelation is from Rajiv Gandhi's brief term as Leader of the Opposition. During Operation Desert Storm, launched by a 35-nation coalition led by the United States in 1991, to liberate Kuwait from Saddam Husain's control, Rajiv Gandhi "launched a tirade against the USA focused on refuelling permissions given by India to US planes". Gandhi claimed this was a surrender of Indian sovereignty.

However, Habibullah points out that such criticism overlooked the fact "India itself was routinely given such permission by a host of countries".

The author goes a step further to reveal Gandhi's hypocrisy was a lot worse.

Behind closed doors he was in touch with the US embassy to convey a very different message. "Rajiv was at pains to quietly explain to the US embassy in New Delhi the domestic compulsions behind his actions and stressing that he had no desire to

undermine India-US relations that he had himself so caringly wrought". Once again, Habibullah has no comment to make on this distressing two-facedness.

However, where this book falls horribly short is in its discussion of the massacre of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984.

It has very little to say of the killings and almost nothing of the enormity of what happened. There's no attempt to assess the response of the new Prime Minister or the failure of his government to act effectively.

In fact, Habibullah describes the gathering at Teen Murti House, where Presidents and Prime Ministers queued up to pay their last respects to Indira Gandhi, but seems to ignore what was happening outside. Over 3,000 Sikhs were killed but his account suggests Rajiv Gandhi, standing beside his mother's body, was unaware or uninformed of the pogrom taking place in his capital. Habibullah as good as admits this when he writes: "We were later to learn that Sikhs were assaulted on the streets".

Habibullah quotes Rajiv Gandhi's November 2, 1984 broadcast: "As Prime Minister of India, I cannot and will not allow this". But it happened and most people believe he did little to stop it. Yet this is not a subject Habibullah pays any attention to.

I guess when a Dosco writes about another Doon School boy, friendship comes in the way of an honest and objective account.

Between chums that might be understandable, but for a biographer it's less forgivable. But then Habibullah doesn't hide his enormous admiration for his subject. That's apparent from the introduction. Quoting what Marc Antony said of Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, Habibullah says of Rajiv Gandhi: "This was a man".

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

WAKE UP CALL

The author has rightly analysed that the TRS has built an enviable election machinery, good campaign strategy and media dominance (*Dubbaka nail-biter may have changed Telangana politics, DC, Nov. 12*). Even then, it could not make the grade. The defeat is a wake-up call for the TRS and it calls for introspection.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

DIGITAL CONTROL

The government's move to bring OTTs and other digital platforms under purview of Information and broadcast ministry is good. They have become very popular and most of them are telecasting sleazy content and fake news with impunity. They are not shying away from crossing the limits of civility. As the consequences of misuse of such platforms are dangerous to society, they should be made accountable.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

SHOCKING LAPSE

It is shame on TTD's Bhakthi channel (*Hyd devotee gets porn link from TTD channel, DC, Nov. 12*). It has become clear that the administration of TTD has failed miserably as more employees of SVBC were found watching porn. This kind of incidents hurt the sentiments of devotees and spoils the reputation of world famous temple and also reduces its importance.

P. Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu, Krishna district

50 YEARS AGO IN
DECCAN
Chronicle

Man becomes woman

TORONTO, Nov. 12

A 24-year-old Toronto office worker who flew to New York as a man and as a woman said here, "It is like being born again."

The office worker underwent a four-hour operation in New York which changed her sex physically and legally.

"Sometimes I still find myself waiting for a woman to step out of an elevator, opening a door for a woman or getting up when a woman enters the room. I attract a lot of puzzled looks," she said.

She said she would like to marry some day but would tell the man about her history beforehand — because she can never have children.

Sanjiwan Sahni



An idea whose time has come". This was among the responses following my earlier article in these columns, which proposed the creation of a forum comprising the chief ministers and Leaders of the Opposition in states not governed by the ruling party.

The fulcrum would be to reinforce the federal structure, with national issues getting a collective voice, rather than individual efforts. Over time, it was hoped, with more credibility, a potential challenger would emerge.

The second dominant response was over implementation, which is even normally problematic and would be a challenge.

Let us look at the proposed alternative in these contexts.

First, the establishment of a forum, if it finds acceptance by even a few CMs or LOPs, will help to create an enabling structure as a first step. Not having to negotiate alliances to join a larger collective would be an advantage. Its membership will be limited to CMs and LOPs, and participation voluntary. This would extend to issues as well.

In other words, there need not be a consensus on all issues. There could be a consensus on major national

issues, where the forum will allow the CMs' viewpoints to get wider national acceptance than in their areas of influence. Success could be reinforcing.

The point is that this would be a democratic forum as all members would be representatives chosen on the basis of their success in the electoral process in their states. Collectively, the forum would be representative of 60 per cent of the electorate that had not voted for the ruling party. This is a small attempt to address the lacuna in our first-past-the-post system. The majority vote gets divided and permits even a minority to get majoritarian power. A collective forum for the voice of 60 per cent seems worth exploring.

There is enough expertise available in the system to put a structure together that would incentivise and promote collaboration. At the same time, it will leave scope for dissent. Dissent by abstention from issues isn't acceptable to some.

How could the forum's voice be more effectively disseminated?

The CMs and LOP will be supported by experts selected by them in multiple domains including but not limited to economics, law, diplomacy and even politics. Ideally, this forum will

have a fair measure of younger people, who not only have the relevant domain knowledge but are also articulate and have acceptability at an individual level, that will be enhanced by their collective credibility. Some names that come to mind include Mahua Moitra, Kanhaiya Kumar, Prashant Kishore, Sachin Pilot, Chetan Bhagat, Priyanka Chaturvedi and Raghav Chadha.

Another key question: It is all very well to find fault with the government's viewpoint but what is the alternative vision. Currently, different state-level politics brings out the relevant issues, but restrictively. Nobody has the mandate to credibly propagate an all-India national vision. Besides policy, the administrative capabilities of the states are only well known where they are in power.

Many states have demonstrated progress in multiple but limited spheres of activity. If this experience is pooled in the forum, the likelihood of national issues gaining acceptance will probably increase exponentially. The forum could generate shared experience. It could also incentivise a competitive streak. Both of these are positives.

Where the advisory team can be helpful is in focusing and bringing to

the CMs' and LOPs' attention, in a structured way, key issues that should be taken up on a priority basis. Its mandate should be to:

a) Segment — economic, defence/foreign affairs, political, administrative reforms, technology, etc. Identify — key issues in these segments.

b) The effort should be to try and arrive at a consensus on three (illustrative) issues in each segment. This would become the core alternative agenda to propound collectively.

This would be a combination of political, managerial and technological prowess. Segmentation and prioritisation would put the focus on what must be done with immediacy across the country. The powerful team of spokespersons using the best technologies, carrying credibility with the bulk of voters, should make an impact.

For clarity, the team will be required to focus on the positives that need to be done. Political parties will be left to fight their battles independently, as is currently the norm.

The intention is to "cut the clutter" and bring forward issues that pass the test of experiential and intellectual rigour, including multi-disciplinary analysis.

Electoral, in a Utopian world, the 60 per cent of the electorate outside the establishment would be incentivised to vote together. However, in a real world, that is not going to happen. But, it is hoped this proposed forum will enable better communication, understanding on several issues, a collective desire to effectively reinforce the democratic process, the federal structure, as well as formulate policies relevant to alleviate poverty, to ensure India's progress in many respects. To summarise, there is a distinct hope and possibility that at least at the national level, not necessarily at state level, even electoral solidarity will become more visible.

The hope is that we could help create an institution for the voice of 60 per cent of the non-establishment electorate, create a direction for an alternative vision, bring closer multi-party state leaderships and employ multimedia technology to disseminate positive possibilities.

All this will enable an alternative leadership to become more visible across India. From among this leadership, it is hoped a challenger would emerge.

The writer is a management and economic adviser

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	43,357.19	-0.54
Nifty 50	12,690.80	-0.46
S&P 500*	3,558.67	-0.39
Dollar (₹)	74.63	-0.34
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.40	0.23
Euro (₹)	88.15	-0.52
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	50,057▼81	0.16
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	44.28	0.48
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.903	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.916	-0.073

* As of 8:30 PM IST

China's online Singles Day sales exceed \$74 bn

China is gripped by "Singles' Day" online shopping frenzy this month as sales on e-commerce giant Alibaba's e-commerce platform Tmall exceeded \$74.1 bn, a new record for the 12-year-old event. Sales on Tmall exceeded 498.2 bn yuan (\$74.1 bn) between Nov. 1 and Nov. 11, state-run Xinhua news agency said. Another e-com giant JD.com, which started promotions from Nov. 1, said it generated \$41 bn since.

TCS to acquire select assets of Pramerica Ireland



TCS said it has inked an agreement with Prudential Financial, Inc (PFI), under which the Indian firm will acquire over 1,500 employees and select assets of Pramerica Systems Ireland Ltd. The move will help strengthen TCS' delivery capability in Ireland, it said. Pramerica is PFI's subsidiary based in Letterkenny, Ireland. PFI will retain the Pramerica Ireland entity, which will continue to operate from Letterkenny.

Emirates posts \$3.8 billion in half-year losses

Emirates Group, the owner of the Middle East's biggest carrier, reported it lost \$3.8 billion in the first half of the year, its first net loss in over three decades after the pandemic wiped out air travel. The state-owned company said revenue for its Dubai-based airline, Emirates, had dropped 75 per cent to \$3.2 bn from the same period a year ago, even with this year's 52 per cent reduction in operating costs and rise in cargo traffic.

Festive kits for Maruti Alto, Celerio, WagonR

Maruti Suzuki India said it has launched festive edition kits for three models—Alto, Celerio and WagonR. The kits, which could only be bought with a new car, are priced at Rs 25,490 for Alto, Rs 25,990 for Celerio and Rs 29,990 for WagonR. The Alto kit comes with features like touch-screen music system, security system, dual tone seat covers, among others. Celerio kit comes with designer mats, double din audio with bluetooth.



Measures likely to increase fiscal deficit of central govt Incentives seen costing ₹1.2 L cr

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, NOV. 12

Though the government has estimated that the benefits of Atmanirbhar Bharat 3.0 will amount to Rs 2.65 lakh crore, the measures are likely to cost the exchequer Rs 1.19 lakh crore to Rs 1.2 lakh crore, find analysts. The measures are likely to increase the fiscal deficit of the Centre.

According to Barclays India, the measures announced on Thursday will cost the exchequer Rs 1.19 lakh crore, or 0.6 per cent of the GDP. Ica said the cost would be around Rs 1.2 lakh crore.

Among the measures announced, the enhancement in the outlay for fertiliser subsidies is Rs 65,000 crore. This will directly raise fiscal spending, says Aditi Nayar, principal economist, Ica.

The Rs 1.46 lakh crore production-linked incentive scheme for ten sectors will be spent over a period of five years. If at all it is evenly distributed across five years, the cost will be around Rs 29,000 crore in FY21.

The government also raised allocations for urban affordable housing by Rs 18,000 crore in order to offer some relief for construction and infrastructure companies. The government has also promised an equity injection of Rs 6,000 crore for the National Infrastructure and Investment Fund (NIIF) to encourage greater debt financing.

The government has also added an extra Rs 10,000 crore for rural employment assistance, and is looking to provide Rs 10,200 crore for capital

ECONOMY SEEING STRONG RECOVERY: FM

New Delhi, Nov. 12: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said the Indian economy is witnessing a strong recovery after a long and strict lockdown. Addressing the media, she said macro-economic indicators are pointing towards recovery.

She noted that Covid-19 active cases have declined from over 10 lakh to 4.89 lakh with case fatality rate (CFR) at 1.47 per cent. Giving out details of recovery, she said composite purchasing managers index (PMI) rose to 58.9 per cent in October versus 54.6 per cent in the previous month, registering strongest increase in output in close to nine years.

Energy consumption



Nirmala Sitharaman

growth trended higher in October at 12 per cent year-on-year, while GST collections have grown 10 per cent to over Rs 1.05 lakh crore. Daily railway freight tonnage grew by an average 20 per cent year-on-year versus 12 per cent, she said adding bank credit has improved 5.1 per cent. Also, FDI inflows in April-August at \$35.37 billion was a 13 per cent year-on-year.

— PTI

equipment spending. It may also release Rs 3,000 crore for the Export-Import Bank of India to boost exports.

However, there is no indication that the borrowing programme will remain unchanged at Rs 12 lakh crore, or estimated 6 per cent of GDP, says Barclays.

"While activity indicators are improving, government revenues continue to significantly trail estimates. The finance minister indicated that the new fiscal projections remain a work in progress. But we believe that Thursday's extra spending will raise the deficit. As such, we raise our consolidated deficit forecast to 13 per cent of the GDP for fiscal year 2020-21, from 12.4 per cent previously. Of this, we expect the centre's

fiscal deficit to rise to 7 per cent of GDP, from 6.4 per cent earlier," said Rahul Bajoria, chief India economist, Barclays.

Financing pressures should remain manageable, in our view, with the RBI supporting market yields through sustained Open market purchases, he added.

"At present, our forecast for Indian real GDP in FY2021, is of a contraction of 11 per cent. We will revisit this projection in early December 2020, after the data for Q2 FY2021 is released by the NSO. By then, there will be greater clarity on the likelihood of the endurance of the festive season uptick, as well as the pace of new covid-19 infections domestically and in major trading partners during the colder months," said Nayar.

Moody's raises forecast, sees 8.6% growth in 2021

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, NOV. 12

Global rating agency Moody's Investors Services on Thursday revised India's GDP growth forecast for the calendar year 2020 upwards to -8.9 per cent contraction from -9.6 per cent contraction forecast earlier. Similarly, GDP forecast for calendar year 2021 has been revised upwards to 8.6 per cent from 8.1 per cent projected earlier. In September, the agency had forecast the economy to shrink by 9.6 per cent in 2020.

The revision comes in the backdrop of slowing spread of novel coronavirus cases in the country and gradual pick up of economic activity after seeing a 23.9 per cent contraction in April-June. The country, however, saw a worst phase of economic slowdown when consumer spending,

private investments and exports collapsed during one of the world's strictest lockdowns.

"India's economy to shrink by 8.9 per cent in the 2020 calendar year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, compared to an earlier forecast of a 9.6 per cent contraction. The steady decline in new and active (Covid-19) cases since September, if maintained, should enable further easing of restrictions. We, therefore, forecast a gradual improvement in economic activity over the coming quarters," Moody's said in a note, adding that there is limited room for further rate cuts in emerging markets like India.

The agency also noted that the global economic recovery over the coming year will be highly dependent on the development and distribution of a coronavirus vaccine, effective

pandemic management and government policy support. However, Moody's expects pandemic management will continue to improve over time, thereby reducing fear of contagion and allowing for a steady normalisation of social and economic activity. As a result, the virus is expected to become a less important macroeconomic concern throughout 2021 and 2022.

The report further said the geopolitical and trade risks will remain a key focus in the year ahead, as the relationship between the US and China, has deteriorated. "The agency does not believe that the Biden administration would differ materially from the current administration with regard to these issues. Decoupling of the Chinese economy from the US is likely in the areas of trade, technology and investment," it said.

Tax sops to help clear unsold homes; realtors may cut prices

New Delhi, Nov. 12: Home developers facing a liquidity crunch may reduce rates to clear their unsold inventories following the government providing income tax relief, realty industry said on Thursday even as they pointed out that overall housing prices are unlikely to come down as builders are already working on thin profit margins.

The Centre on Thursday

relaxed income tax rules to allow primary or first sale of housing units of up to Rs 2 crore at a price that can be 20 per cent below the stamp duty circle rate.

Currently, the law restricts differential between circle rate and agreement value at 10 per cent.

This relaxation, which is applicable till June 2021, is aimed at helping builders clear their unsold stocks, estimated to be around 7

lakh in major eight cities.

"We do not anticipate overall reduction in housing prices. Rates are already low and margins are low. But, the income tax relief will allow those developers who are facing liquidity challenges to clear their unsold inventories by reducing prices," Credai national chairman Jaxay Shah said.

He said the housing prices have already gone

down below circle rates.

Naredco and Assocham president Niranjan Hirani welcomed the tax relief. "Differential above 10 per cent between circle rates and agreement value translates into tax penalties under Section 43CA of IT Act. This has been a major stumbling block for price rationalisation. This pinches when it comes to liquidating unsold inventory," he said.

RBI may keep rupee weak to boost exports

FALAKNAZ SYED MUMBAI, NOV. 12

Despite positive factors such as foreign portfolio investors returning back to domestic equities, stronger Asian currencies and weak dollar, the rupee continues to be the one of the worst performers against the dollar.

According to traders, the central bank continues to aggressively buy dollars to keep the rupee weak in order to boost exports. Experts said that 75 level would be a crucial resistance for the rupee.

A trader said, "While the RBI maintains that it intervenes only to remove volatility and has no targeted level for the rupee, we have been noticing aggressive dollar buying whenever the rupee touch-

es 73.90 level. The RBI aggressively intervenes and heavily buys dollars through the public sector banks. Since the last one month, the RBI has been aggressively buying dollars. Even yesterday, there was an aggressive intervention by the RBI."

During the calendar year, the rupee has been one of worst performers having depreciated by 4.5 per cent. In comparison, the Thai baht and the Korean won have appreciated, with the yuan trading at a 28-month high at 6.6. On Thursday, the rupee continued its losing streak to the fourth straight session and dived 28 paise to end at 74.64 against the US dollar.

Darshit Purohit of IFA Global said, "The domestic equities are trading at



an all-time high but the rupee has continuously remained weak. The primary reason for the rupee remaining weak vis-a-vis other Asian currencies is the aggressive RBI intervention as reflected in the robust build-up in forex reserves. The motive

Anti-dumping duty on acrylic fibre removed

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, NOV. 12

Close to the heels of announcing production-linked incentives (PLI) for man-made fibre (MMF) products, the government has revoked anti-dumping duty on acrylic fibre exported from Thailand. The industry feels this will give a major fillip to the MMF segment that employs more than 10 lakh people.

Acrylic fibre, known as poor man's wool, is used for making sweaters and shawls for domestic and international market. The anti-dumping duty had made the fibre costly and stunted the growth of the sector for more than two decades.

"Removing the anti-dumping duty on acrylic fibre, which was long overdue, will be a game changer for the Indian AF sector and it will go a long way in boosting the growth of the MMF industry. The move will act as an impetus to this labour-intensive sector by generating additional employment and increasing the competitiveness of the entire value chain," said Sanjay Garg,

president, Northern India Textile Mills Association (Nitmra).

According to Nitmra, only three players in India produce acrylic fibre and due to the high anti-dumping duty on imported fibre, the downstream industries were forced to buy it from them. This made the fibre-made products expensive in both domestic and export markets.

The value-add industry has more than 1,500 unorganised players, employing over 10 lakh. The move will make the fibre cheaper for them and make Indian products competitive in the export market.

The government had earlier removed the anti-dumping duty on purified terephthalic acid, a raw material of polyester staple fibre, thus providing a boost to the production of polyester products. The industry has been asking the government to remove anti-dumping duty on viscose staple fibre (VSF) as well in order to make Indian MMF competitive in the global market.

Nitmra expects that the government will soon remove the anti-dumping duty on VSF as well.

Federal Bank, said, "While going by the macro economic indicators, green shoots are visible and we may see the current account becoming positive by the end of the financial year. But the RBI will remove the excess supply of the dollars as the government wants to boost exports. So, the intention of the policy makers would likely be prevention in the appreciation of the rupee."

"The rupee would trade between 74 and 74.25 in the short-term and between 73.75 and 74.50 in the long term," added Khajuria.

The country's foreign exchange reserves rose by \$183 million to touch a record high of \$560.715 billion in the week ended October 30, RBI data showed.

Industrial output leaves contraction zone in September

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, NOV. 12

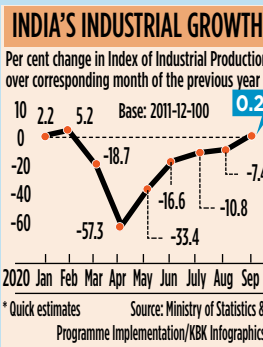
The country's industrial output moved back to positive territory after six months contraction to clock a modest 0.2 per cent year-on-year (YoY) growth in September, while retail inflation inched up to 7.61 per cent in October, over elevated food prices, government data released on Thursday showed.

The rise in industrial output, measured by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), is significant when contrasted against 8 per cent contraction in August and 4.6 per cent contraction a year ago in September 2019.

"With the gradual relaxation of restrictions, there has been a relative improvement in economic activity by varying degrees as well as in data reporting," the government said in a statement, adding that it may not be appropriate to compare the IIP in the post-pandemic months with the IIP for months preceding the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The September IIP growth was marked by a positive rise in both electricity and mining whilst the key category of manufacturing is still in the negative territory, registering a decline of 0.6 per cent. The speedy recovery is cushioned by a turnaround in the core sector output which shrunk at its slowest pace at 0.8 per cent this fiscal," the release said.

As the core sector output constitutes over 40 per



cent of the IIP, the output of mining and power segments grew by 1.4 per cent and 4.9 per cent, respectively.

Joseph Thomas, head of research, Emkay Wealth Management, said, "The IIP is almost flat at 0.20 per cent, from a deeply negative number for the period before that there is some economic recovery happening at present, but the price level too is rising. To sustain the early gains in recovery, control of the price level is critical."

As per data, the retail inflation stood at 7.61 per cent in October against 7.27 per cent in September. It was at 4.62 per cent in October 2019.

In October, inflation in meat and fish rose to 18.7 per cent while vegetable prices rose 22.51 per cent.

"This may have an impact on the trajectory of interest rates, and RBI may have to continue to focus on liquidity provision rather than rate action... Persistently high inflation could invite action from the RBI by way of even reducing the free liquidity," Thomas said.

SINGAPORE PLANS NEW VISA TO DRAW TOP GLOBAL TECH TALENT



YOOLIM LEE NOV. 12

Singapore is rolling out the red carpet for top talent, launching a program to initially attract 500 individuals with a proven track record of contributing to the global technology ecosystem.

Under the so-called Tech.Pass programme, qualified individuals will be able to secure a new type of visa, allowing them to start and operate more than one company and become an investor; consultant or mentor for local startups, according to the Economic Development Board. This offers more flexibility than current government regulations, which require firms to sponsor an employment pass for talent they want to bring in.

The two-year visa isn't designed for mid-tier tech workers who might compete with locals for jobs, a political issue that has prompted the government to tighten its framework for issuing employment passes to foreigners this year. It's targeted at highly accomplished entrepreneurs and technical experts who can bring in capital, networks and knowhow, as Singapore aims to become the region's technology and innovation hub.

"Tech.Pass will add to the critical mass of established tech talent in Singapore and create a flywheel effect to further strengthen our position as a leading tech hub for the region," minister of trade and industry Chan Chun Sing said.

— Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Mother of tennis star Evert dead

Deerfield Beach (UK): Colette Evert, the matriarch of a tennis family that produced five children who were successful in the age-group and professional ranks, including 18-time Grand Slam champion Chris Evert, has died. She was 92.

She died last Thursday in Deerfield Beach, Florida, according to a tweet by Chris Evert and an online obituary posted by Fred Hunter's Funeral Home in Fort Lauderdale.

Born Jeanne Colette Thompson on June 15, 1928, in New Rochelle, New York, she went by her middle name and was the youngest of 10 children. In 1952, she married Jimmy Evert, a tennis teaching professional in Florida whom she met at the wedding of a mutual friend in New York.

The couple's five children played tennis collegiately or professionally. — AP

Foreign players pull out of PSL

Karachi: The efforts of Pakistan Cricket Board to complete the Pakistan Super League have received setbacks due to the unavailability of some more overseas players ahead of the play-offs matches due to Covid 19 related travel restrictions.

The PCB is holding the four remaining play-off matches and the summit clash this weekend and next week in Karachi. But for the first time since the PSL was launched in 2016, former West Indian captain Darren Sammy, who has one of the leading faces of the league, is not available to play for his franchise. Sammy, who has also captained Zalmi, will not be flying to Karachi because of Covid-19 related travel issues. New Zealand's Mitchell McClenaghan has also pulled out due to his country's travel guidelines. — PTI

Nizam Club are cricket champs

Hyderabad: Nizam Cricket Club emerged champions of the Winter Premier League junior cricket championship organised by Emerging Cricketers Development Group (ECDG) in collaboration with School Sports & Games Federation (SSGF) at the SKN Cricket Grounds in Boduppal, Hyderabad.

In the final, they beat Legala Cricket Academy by one wicket. Batting first, Legala cashed in on Vasu's 92 to make 191 for 7 in 35 overs even as Sooraj (3/27) and Ansh Gupta (4/30) were among the wickets. Nizam chased down the target with four balls to spare, riding on a 52-run partnership for the eighth wicket between Dharmik (50) and Aryan Saiyed (34). **Brief scores:** Legala Cricket Academy 191/7 in 35 overs (Vasu 92, Ashwin Sooraj 3/27, Ansh Gupta 4/30) lost to Nizam Cricket Club 195/9 in 34.2 overs (Dharmik 50, Aryan Saiyed 34, Om Karthik 3/25, Arshdeep 3/29)

Online chess at the weekend

Hyderabad: The Brilliant Chess Academy is conducting the 174th Brilliant Trophy Open online chess tournament on November 14 and 15. A total of Rs 10,000 will be given away to the top 20 finishers in the Open category. The organisers promise special prizes to the top two places in Juniors category (Under 7, 9, 11, 13, 15 age groups) for boys and girls separately. For further details contact J. Subrahmanyam on phone number 9247399717.

Live on TV

CRICKET
Women's Big Bash League: Perth Scorchers vs Melbourne Renegades from 6.45 am (Saturday) on Sony Six

FORMULA ONE
Turkish Grand Prix: First practice from 1.25 pm, Second practice from 5.25 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

GOLF
Augusta Masters: From 11.30 pm on Star Sports Select 1, HD

WWE
SmackDown: Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1

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Finland pip France

Forss, Onni spoil Thuram's party; Portugal rock Andorra

Paris, Nov. 12: Finland spoiled Marcus Thuram's party on Wednesday after beating France 2-0 on the day the Borussia Moenchengladbach attacker emulated his father Lilian Thuram by making his debut for Les Bleus.

Thuram was picked by Didier Deschamps for the friendly at the Stade de France over 22 years after his dad won the World Cup at the same ground, but despite a strong performance on the left wing could not stop the Finns from coming out on top.

The 23-year-old hit the bar with less 15 minutes gone and soon after flashed a difficult volley over as he and Lucas Digne caused continual problems down the left flank for the away side.

However, Marcus Forss stunned the hosts when he collected the ball after a Moussa Sissoko mistake and rammed home at Steve Mandanda's near post.

France barely had any time to react before Onni Valakari doubled the away side's lead with a stunning effort after being left to stroll towards goal.

RONALDO CONTINUES GOAL QUEST

Cristiano Ronaldo continued his quest to snatch the all-time record for most international goals when he struck his 102nd Portugal goal in their in a 7-0 win over Andorra.

Pulinho netted brace as Pedro, Sanches, Felix scored one goal each to get past Andorra.

France's opponents on Saturday in what could be a Nations League 'A', Group 3 decider strolled past their weak opponents in Lisbon despite not starting a single player from the team that beat Sweden 3-0 last month.

Ronaldo missed that match after testing positive for Coronavirus and was introduced at half-time on Wednesday, but had to wait until there were only five minutes remaining to boost his record bid with a close-range header.

Former Iran striker Ali Daei holds the record on 109 goals.

Italy extended their unbeaten streak to 20 games after a second-string line-up comfortably beat Estonia a 4-0. — AFP



Belgium's Michy Batshuayi (left) vies for the ball against Switzerland's Loris Benito during an international friendly football match at the King Power stadium in Leuven, Belgium, on Wednesday. Belgium won 2-1. — AP

Belgians boss over Swiss

THE RESULTS

Finland (Forss 28, Onni 31)	2	Netherlands (Van de Beek 47)	1
France	0	Spain (Canales 19)	1
Portugal (Neto 8, Paulinho 29, 61, Sanches 56, Garcia 76-og, Ronaldo 85, Felix 88)	7	Germany (Waldschmidt 13)	1
Andorra	0	Czech Republic	0
Belgium (Batshuayi 49, 70)	2	Turkey (Tosun 23-pen, Turuc 41, Under 58)	3
Switzerland (Mehmedi 12)	1	Croatia (Budimir 32, Pasalic 53, Brekalo 56)	3

Leuven (Belgium), Nov. 12: Striker Michy Batshuayi scored twice to help a makeshift Belgium side come from behind to beat Switzerland 2-1 in a friendly game.

Batshuayi showed clinical efficiency to convert Belgium's two best chances in the second half after Switzerland deservedly took the lead with an early goal that rewarded its intense pressing.

Ahead of upcoming Nations League matches against England and Denmark, Belgium coach Roberto Martinez played mostly his backups and handed debuts to youngsters Dodi Lukebakio, Hannes Delcroix and Charles De Ketelaere.

Regular starters Kevin De Bruyne, Dries Mertens and Romelu Lukaku were

rested. FIFA's top-ranked team was also without Real Madrid star Eden Hazard, who remained quarantined in Spain following a positive Covid-19 test. Switzerland pressed high in the early stages

and took the lead in the 12th minute following a defensive error from Sebastiaan Bornauw, who failed to control a long ball and headed it back into the path of Admir Mehmedi. — AFP

DUTCH DRAW WITH SPAIN

Amsterdam, Nov. 12: Frank de Boer's wait for a first win as Netherlands coach goes on after his team drew 1-1 with Spain in a friendly in Amsterdam on Wednesday. De Boer has now gone four matches without a victory since being appointed in September to succeed Ronald Koeman, who left to take over at Barcelona.

But Donny van de Beek's equaliser shortly after half-time ensured the Dutch at least avoided defeat at the Johan Cruyff Arena after Spain had taken an early lead through Sergio Canales. — AFP

Shreya, Rishab tennis toppers

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, NOV. 12

Rishab Agarwal and T. Shreya emerged winners in the men's and women's categories respectively at the tennis tournament conducted by the ACE Tennis Academy in Hyderabad.

India No.53 Shreya, who had participated in the World Universities event, defeated last year's Under 18 national champion and India No. 15 Shrivalli Rashmika in two tight sets 7-6 (8-6), 7-5.

Rashmika was the top seed in the tournament while Shreya was third.

On the contrary, India No.13 and top seed Rishab proved too good for Ganta Sai Karteek Reddy, beating the second seed and India No.33 in straight sets at 6-3, 6-1.

THE RESULTS

Men's final (number in brackets denotes seeding): Rishab Agarwal (1) bt Ganta Sai Karteek Reddy (2) 6-3, 6-1. **Semifinals:** Rishab Agarwal bt Grahith Reddy 6-3, 6-1. Ganta Sai Karteek Reddy bt Tanishq Malpani 6-1, 6-7(4), 6-3. **Quarterfinals:** Grahith M bt Raj Bagdai 3-6, 6-2, 10-5; GSK Reddy bt M. Vineeth 6-1, 6-1. **Second round:** Rishab A bt Aayush B 9-5; Aaditya V bt M. Manveer 9-4; Raj Bagdai bt Rishi B 9-3; Grahith M bt

Nitin K 9-4; Hitesh Y bt T. Siddharth 9-6; T. Malpani bt L. Suhith. R 9-5; M. Vineeth bt Karthik G 9-3; GSK Reddy bt M. Yeshwanth 9-0. **First round:** Aayush. B bt G. Raghunandan 9-1; M. Manveer bt Sahar 9-5; Aaditya bt Dhanush V w/o; Raj Bagdai bt Siva S 9-3; Rishi B bt Showrya S 9-4; Nitin K bt Naishik R 9-2; Grahith M bt Sahadev S 9-2; Hitesh Y bt M. Kalyan 9-5; T. Siddharth bt Sai Harshit 9-1; T. Malpani bt Abhinav M 9-2; L. Suhith R bt Rawal K 9-2; Karthik G bt K. V. Ramana 6-2; M. Vineeth bt Deepak V 9-8; M. Yeshwanth bt Siddharth R w/o.

Women's final (number in brackets denotes seeding): T. Shreya (3) bt Shrivalli Rashmika (1) 7-6 (8-6), 7-5. **Semifinals:** Shrivalli Rashmika bt Bala Snigdha 6-2, 6-1; T. Shreya bt Avishka Gupta (2) 6-3, 6-1. **Quarterfinals:** Srivalli R bt Sanjana S 6-0, 6-2; Snigdha bt Veda Raju 7-6, 5-7, 10-5; T. Shreya bt Sahitya 6-4, 6-0; Avishka bt Aarni Reddy 7-5, 3-6, 12-10. **Second round:** Srivalli R bt S. Kaavya 9-1; Sanjana S bt V. Vaishnavi 9-4; Veda Raju bt Vanshika 9-6; Snigdha bt Kum Kum 9-3; Sahitya bt Renee S 9-8; T. Shreya bt Bipasha 9-2; Aarni Reddy bt Ashwita 9-3; Avishka bt V. Apoorva 9-3. **First round:** Srivalli R bt Sameeksha w/o; S. Kaavya bt Tribhuvani C 9-2; V. Vaishnavi bt Gaddam S 9-5; Sanjana S bt Tanisha R 9-1; Vanshika bt S. S. Anesha 9-2; Veda Raju bt Abhaya V 9-9; Kum Kum bt Neharika D 9-8; Snigdha bt Tanisha S 9-3; Renee S bt M. Srivalli 9-9; Sahitya R bt Nikita Tiwari 9-0; Bipasha bt Nikita 9-7; T. Shreya bt J. Jeeba 9-0; Ashwita B bt Divija 9-3; Aarni Reddy bt Ika Raju 9-0; V. Apoorva bt Rahin 9-0; Avishka G bt Rishita 9-2.



Winners and runners-up are all smiles after the tourney.

Team India reach Sydney for series

Sydney, Nov. 12: A 25-strong Indian squad, led by its star skipper Virat Kohli, reached here on Thursday for a gruelling two-month Australia tour that starts with a 14-day quarantine-cum-training period on the outskirts of the city.

The Indian contingent along with Australian stars such as David Warner, Steve Smith, Pat Cummins arrived late in the afternoon and were whisked away to the Sydney Olympic Park.

With New South Wales government allowing the Indian team to train during the two-week quarantine period, their sessions will be conducted at the Blacktown International Sports Park, which has also been turned into a bio-secure venue.

Captain Kohli, who will return home after the opening Day/Night Test in Adelaide (from December 17 - December 21) for the birth of his first child in early January, is set to get a special treatment during quarantine period, according a report in *Daily Telegraph*.

The Pullman Hotel where the Indian team would put up for next two weeks was also the base for rugby side New South Wales Blues, who have now shifted to another hotel.

According to *Telegraph*, the hotel authorities will provide the Indian captain a special penthouse suite where Australian rugby legend Brad Fittler normally puts up. — PTI

YOUNG GUNS IN AUSTRALIAN TEST SIDE vs INDIA

Melbourne, Nov. 12: The prodigiously talented pair of Will Pucovski and Cameron Green were among five uncapped players picked in a 17-member Australian Test squad for the big-ticket four-match series against India, starting on December 17.

The other uncapped Test players in the Tim Paine-led side are fast bowler Sean Abbott — whose bouncer had accidentally hit Phil Hughes during a Sheffield Shield game in 2014, leading to his tragic death — leg-spinner Mitchell Swepson and all-rounder Michael Neser.

Each of these players, though, has represented Australia in other formats.

Up against a strong Indian line-up and seeking to regain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy they lost for the first time in 2018-19, the fresh faces in the Australian Test squad will join the seasoned stars. — PTI

The Team: Tim Paine (captain), Sean Abbott, Joe Burns, Pat Cummins, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Michael Neser, James Pattinson, Will Pucovski, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Mitchell Swepson, Matthew Wade, David Warner.

Recovered Kapil turns up for golf

New Delhi, Nov. 12: Two weeks after undergoing an angioplasty, World Cup-winning former India captain Kapil Dev was back to playing golf, a sport he took up passionately after bidding adieu to cricket.

The 61-year-old had said that he would like to get back to playing golf as soon as the doctors allowed him and on Thursday he was seen teeing off at the Delhi Golf Club.

"You can't express in words what fun it is to be back on the golf course or a cricket ground. It is beautiful to be back at the golf course, having fun and playing with friends. That's what life is all about," Kapil posted a video message on his *Twitter* handle.

Kapil has been an avid amateur golfer since his retirement from international cricket back in 1994 and also taken part in many events over the years.

Last month, he suffered a heart attack and was



In this screengrab Kapil Dev is seen posing with the golf club after recovering from a heart-attack.

rushed to a hospital where he underwent an emergency angioplasty.

He was back home in a couple of days and since then has kept his fans posted and updated about his health status and also started his job as TV analyst for a reputed channel. — PTI



This handout photo released by the press officer shows Argentine football legend Diego Maradona (right) shaking hands with his doctor Leopoldo Luque in Olivos, Buenos Aires province, Argentina, on Wednesday. — AFP

Maradona out of hospital

Olivos (Argentina), Nov. 12: Argentine football legend Diego Maradona left hospital on Wednesday followed by a convoy of supporters, eight days after undergoing surgery to remove a blood clot on his brain.

Maradona did not speak to the crowd of journalists and chanting fans gathered outside in masks as he left the Olivos clinic in Buenos Aires by ambulance shortly after his doctor Leopoldo Luque told reporters he could go home.

Private security personnel held up dividers to screen the ambulance before it left. A convoy of Maradona's supporters fol-

lowed the ambulance after dozens had waited outside the clinic for days, holding photos of him and chanting their encouragement.

Maradona is expected to continue his rehabilitation in Tigre, 30 kilometres from Buenos Aires, near his daughter Giannina's home.

"Diego has gone through perhaps the hardest time of his life," his lawyer Matias Morla said on Wednesday, adding it was a "miracle" that the clot which could have taken his life, was detected. "What is needed now is family togetherness and being surrounded by health professionals," said Morla. — AFP