

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | TUESDAY | 24 NOVEMBER 2020



WORLD | 5
Israeli PM flew to Saudi, Riyadh denies



BUSINESS | 7
Rajan criticises RBI's move on new banks

SPORTS | 8
Warner says he won't respond to India taunts



deccanchronicle.com, facebook.com/deccannews, twitter.com/deccanchronicle, google.com/+deccanchronicle

Vol. 25 No. 207 Established 1940 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

WEATHER

Max: 32.0°C
Min: 23.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: Nil

Forecast: Humid and Partly Cloudy.
Max/Min temp. 32/23 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES

(+35,316)

DEATHS

(+462)

91,74,876

1,34,212

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+602)

(+3)

TS: 2,64,128

1,433

(+545)

(+10)

AP: 8,62,758

6,948

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

5,92,52,444

DEATHS

13,98,095

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES

218

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Dakshinayana

Tithi: Kartika Shuddha Dasami till 2.43 am (Wednesday)

Star: Pourvabhadra till 3.33 pm

Varjyam: 2.16 am to 4.03 am (Wednesday)

Durmuhurtam: 8.42 am to 9.27 am; 10.45 pm to 11.37 pm

Rahukalam: 3 pm to 4.30 pm

HIJRI CALENDAR

Rabb-ul Akhir 8, 1442 AH

PRAYERS (ROYAL MOSQUE)

Fajar: 5.00 am

Zohar: 1.30 pm

Asar: 4.15 pm

Maghrib: 5.38 pm

Isha: 8.30 pm

SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.12 AM

SUNSET TODAY 5.26 PM

MOONRISE TODAY 1.16 PM

MOONSET TOMORROW 1.11 AM

COUNTER POINT

Our MLAs are demanding 33% quota in the cabinet for those without criminal cases!

SHORT TAKE

President to visit Tirumala today

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, NOV. 23

With President Ram Nath Kovind scheduled to visit the hill shrine of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala on Tuesday, elaborate security arrangements have been put in place by the Tirupati Urban police wing. On their part, TTD and the Chittoor district administration have made extensive arrangements. Several government and TTD officials have undergone Covid tests on Monday. During his seven-hour pilgrimage, the President will visit the Sri Padmavathi temple at Tiruchanoor by 11 am, Bhuvareddy temple and Lord Venkateswara temple at Tirumala by 12.50 pm and offer prayers.

■ **Page 2: Traffic curbs in Tirupati for Prez visit**

Tarun Gogoi dies due to Covid

Guwahati: Congress leader and a three-term former Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi died here on Monday while undergoing treatment for post-Covid-19 complications, state health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. He was 84 and is survived by wife Dolly, daughter Chandrima and son Gaurav, a Lok Sabha member.

Foggy blanket



Birds take flight in the backdrop of Taj Mahal engulfed in a thick fog in Agra on Monday. Most parts of Uttar Pradesh and also the rest of north India recorded temperature below normal for this part of the year. Cold wave conditions also occurred at isolated places in east Uttar Pradesh.

— PTI

2014-29 important for India's progress: Modi

New Delhi, Nov. 23: Asserting that the 2014-29 period between the 16th to 18th Lok Sabha is “very important” for a young democracy like India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said the last six years have been “historic” for the country’s development and a lot remains to be done in the remaining period.

As the age of 16, 17 and 18 years is very important for the youth, so is the time between the 16th and the 18th Lok Sabha for a young nation like India, he said while digitally inaugurating 76 multi-storied flats in the national capital for Members of Parliament. The 16th Lok Sabha (2014-19) has been historic for the country’s progress, and the 17th Lok Sabha has already become a part



Narendra Modi

of history due to a number of decisions it has taken, he said, referring to the passage of landmark legislations aimed at reforming farm and labour sectors besides abrogation of Article 370 and the citizenship law.

“I am confident the next Lok Sabha (2024-29) will also play a very important role in taking the country ahead in this new decade... There is so much for the

country that we have to achieve. Be it *Aatmanirbhar Bharat* campaign, or economic targets or many other pledges like these, we have to achieve them during this period,” he said to an audience of parliamentarians, including ministers and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla.

“It is our responsibility that when history evaluates different terms of Lok Sabha, this period is remembered as a golden chapter in the nation’s development,” he stated. In his speech, Modi referred to the GST roll-out, enactment of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and a law proposing death sentence for those convicted of raping children as among the major achievements of his government’s first term between 2014-19. — PTI

No severe safety event with Covid vaccine: AstraZeneca

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, NOV. 23

No hospitalisation or severe cases were noted among those who had received the AstraZeneca vaccine AZD1222 according to interim analysis of 131 trial participants, as per an official company release Monday. There were two different dose regimes used by the company. Between them, one regime has shown a better profile, the company said in its detailed analysis.

There were 23,000 participants being assessed, who among them would be following two regimes of half dose and full dose, and two

ON PAGE 5

● COVID-19 SHOTS FOR US HEALTH STAFF BY MID-DECEMBER

● GERMANY LIKELY TO GIVE SHOTS FROM DECEMBER

full doses of AZD1222. In one dose regime (n=72), where the full dose was followed one month apart, the efficacy was 90 per cent. In another dose (n=8) regime, it was found that the efficacy was 62 per

cent. The combined analysis of both the dose regimes (n=11) showed that the efficacy of the vaccine was 70 per cent.

The company said that more data will continue to accumulate with efficacy and safety being of prime importance. “There are no serious safety events related to the vaccine,” the company said. It said that AZD1222 was well tolerated across both dosing regimens. The current trials are going on in the US, UK, Brazil, Japan, Russia, South Africa and Kenya besides some Latin American countries, with more trials being planned in other EU and Asian countries.

WHAT | LIES BENEATH **Army’s security audit to be completed in a few days to prevent infiltration by terrorists during winter**

Security forces hunt for tunnels at LoC with hi-tech gadgets

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 23

Security forces have launched a major security audit using hi-tech gadgets, including satellite imagery, to find tunnels along the entire Line of Control and International Border with Pakistan.

The move comes in the wake of the revelations that Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorists killed in Nagrota encounters on Friday morning had used a tunnel to infiltrate into India from Pakistan. Sources said that the

cross-border underground tunnel unearthed in Samba sector was 160 metres into the Indian side and estimated to be 40 metres on the Pakistani side of International Border.

Security sources claimed that considering the perfection with which the tunnel was dug, there was a possibility of Pakistani establishment’s engineering support.

The exit was in thick bushes meticulously covered with soil and wild growth. The mouth of the tunnel was strengthened and reinforced by sand bags with markings of

Karachi, Pakistan.

The freshly dug tunnel appears to have been used for the first time by the terrorists.

Based on leads available consequent to the Nagrota encounter, it seems that Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorists were picked up by a truck from village Jatwal in Samba on the national highway.

The nearest Pakistani border outposts where the tunnel was found are Chak Bhura, Rajab Sahid and Asif Sahid.

“We suspect that some more such tunnels might have been constructed

close to the border. Due to increased security and the strong anti-infiltration grid it is becoming increasingly difficult for militants to infiltrate. Hence terrorists supported by Pakistani establishment are using alternate techniques to cross into India,” a senior security official said.

Now a detailed survey is being done all along the border to check for more such tunnels.

Sources claimed that this elaborate security audit would be completed within the next few days to ensure no infiltration takes place during winter.

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

The state government has launched Abhayam project, a one-of-its-kind initiative aimed at ensuring safety of women and children while travelling in public transport, particularly autorickshaws.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launched the project in his camp office at Tadepalli on Monday. He said that the Abhayam device would be fitted in autorickshaws and cabs. He said that the Abhayam app will provide emergency help to those in distress.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that his government was taking many steps towards women empowerment. This is the first

● **CHIEF MINISTER Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launched the project in his camp office on Monday. He said the Abhayam device would be fitted in autos and cabs and will provide emergency help to those in distress.**

Internet of Things (IoT) based women safety project. He asserted that this ambitious project was brought not due to lack of trust on auto and taxi drivers, but to bolster confidence levels of women passengers. “It is not just Ola and Uber that offer safe travel, even our local autos and taxis can offer much safer transport, where women need not fear,” he said. The CM said that the pro-

States panic as virus strikes back

VINEETA PANDEY | DC with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, NOV. 23

From night curfews to shutting down markets and now some states even contemplating stopping incoming passengers from places like Delhi — panic has gripped several Indian states as new coronavirus cases are on a sharp rise — in Delhi, Maharashtra, Kerala, West Bengal,

Rajasthan, Gujarat, Assam and Haryana. Upset with the chaos and rising cases, the Supreme Court on Monday pulled up the Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Assam governments, saying that things will get worse in December if they are not prepared, and sought status reports from them in two days.

India on Monday had a total of 91.40 lakh Covid-19

cases, out of which 44,059 were new cases. The toll overall is now 1.34 lakh, with 511 new fatalities.

The SC sought status reports from the Delhi, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Assam governments on the steps taken by them on the Covid situation and what more efforts were being made to deal with the pandemic. “Things worsened in the last two weeks, in November. Our

question is: What is your present situation? What more steps are you taking? That is what we are going to look into,” the bench asked the Delhi government.

Saying the Gujarat situation was the worst after Delhi and Maharashtra, the court also pulled up the Gujarat government for allowing weddings and gatherings despite the rising Covid-19 cases.

IMD issues orange alert, landfall expected today

Officials ready plan to deal with cyclone’s aftermath

DC CORRESPONDENTS
VISAKHAPATNAM/
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

Clouds were seen on the horizon of Andhra Pradesh under the influence depression formed over the southern Bay of Bengal on Monday. The tropical system is expected to intensify into a cyclone and make landfall on Wednesday afternoon between Karaikal and Mallapuram in Tamil Nadu.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an orange warning to AP. The projected path as per the GFS model of the IMD takes the cyclone just south of Chennai, but the European model ECMWF takes Cyclone Niv ar right over Chennai with an expected landfall at around Wednesday midnight.

Peripheral clouds due to depression are seen over Andhra and Telangana state. Post-landfall of the system, isolated places in Rayalaseema may receive heavy to extremely heavy

No water problem for farmers in Rabi

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, NOV. 23

The prospects of Rabi crop, which will begin on December 1 in Godavari delta, appear to be encouraging given the fact that there may not be scarcity of water.

At present, enough water is available and sufficient water flows are in Sileru and Sabari, the main water sources for Rabi crop for the past seven to eight years.

According to sources,

heavy rains and floods filled important reservoirs like Sileru, Yeleru, Sabari river and others. The officials said that there is no scarcity for Yeleru Ayacut this year.

Some irrigation officials expressed doubts about the availability of water to Godavari delta as more water may be impounded upstream in Telangana from the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project.

■ **Page 2: Revive Laskar system, state told**

rainfall. North coastal AP may receive scattered rainfall. The depression layover southwest and adjoining southeast Bay of Bengal about 600 km south-southeast of Puducherry and 630 kms south-

southeast of Chennai.

Commissioner, Health, Katamaneni Bhaskar instructed district authorities to prepare an action plan for the pre and post cyclone period.

All medical teams con-

sisting of a medical officer, one staff nurse and an MPHA (multipurpose health assistant) are needed to be available at the identified relief centres round-the-clock.

He suggested sufficient quantities of necessary drugs at their disposal and use of disinfectants during the period. Any requirement of epidemic drugs may be indented immediately.

Commissioner of Health Bhaskar asked staff to keep working generators and inverters ready at all health institutions in affected areas and ensure uninterrupted power supply. He asked for keeping two ambulances at all PHCs in affected areas.

He asked them to take rescue operations in case of affected people with physical and mental trauma and identify vendors for supply of drinking water and milk. He wanted pregnant women with due date within a week to be shifted to the nearby health facilities.

TELANGANA LETS FILM THEATRES TO FUNCTION

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, NOV. 23

The Telangana state government on Monday issued orders permitting reopening of cinemas, in areas outside containment zones.

Chief secretary Somesh Kumar, citing a ministry of home affairs order on the subject, issued a GO declaring that management of cinemas, theatres and multiplexes should ensure that all persons use masks at all times; ensure hand sanitisers at entry and exit points; follow physical distancing; ensure sanitisation of premises after every screening and ensure temperature setting of all air-conditioning devices are set in the range of 24-30 degree Celsius.

SHORT TAKES

TRAFFIC CURBS
IN TIRUPATI FOR
PREZ VISIT

FROM PAGE 1

Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and a host of ministers and officials will receive the President on his arrival at the Tirupati airport by 9.45 am.

TTD chairman Y.V. Subba Reddy reviewed the arrangements. He along with TTD EO K.S. Jawahar Reddy, Chittoor district collector Dr Narayana Bharat Gupta, TTD's additional EO A.V. Dharma Reddy and Tirupati SP Avula Ramesh Reddy inspected the temples and the Sri Padmavathi guest house at Tirumala.

Meanwhile, Tirupati and Tirumala have come under tight security cover of the urban police wing, who also imposed several traffic curbs at various places. Urban SP appealed to the public to cooperate with the police and follow traffic directives issued by the department.

SEC WRITES
TO CS ON AP'S
SUPPORT TO ITDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

State Election Commissioner N. Ramesh Kumar has written one more letter to the Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney on state government's support to the State Election Commission to discharge its duty including conduct of gram panchayat polls in the state.

PAWAN TO MEET
BJP CHIEF IN
DELHI TODAYDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan to meet BJP national president J.P. Nadda in New Delhi on Tuesday.

The Jana Sena chief and the party's political affairs committee chairman Nadendla Manohar went to Delhi on Monday evening to meet BJP national president and other top leaders in the party. The Jana Sena chief will discuss several issues pertaining to both the AP and TS during his meeting with BJP top leadership.

REVIVE LASKAR
SYSTEM, STATE
TOLD

FROM PAGE 1

If Telangana bags the highest quantity of water, Godavari delta may face scarcity problems.

However, the farmers are not buying this argument. YSRC Rythu wing state organising secretary and former General Secretary of AP Water Management Committees Kovvuri Trinatha Reddy said that the Godavari delta has suffered water scarcity for the past seven to eight years, but, the Sileru and Sabari flows saved the Rabi crop every year.

"This year, Tamilluru, Yerra Kaluva and other canals are brist and there may be no scarcity of water for Rabi crops. But, the problem is that non-functional 'Laskar' system", he said and added that the irrigation department, as well as the government, should strengthen the 'Laskar' system'.

Though the government-appointed some of the Laskars, they are being used for other works and are not being paid salaries. He explained that it would be difficult to supervise water management with only assistant engineers. He urged the government to strengthen 'Laskar' system' to save the Rabi crop.

According to agriculture department officials, it is expected that nearly 1.63 lakh hectares of paddy crop may be cultivated in the Rabi season and water would be needed up to April 10. If Rabi begins from December 1, the Rabi season may end on time. However, the water should be needed for the last three or four weeks to save the crops. At present 10,000 cusecs of water are discharged into the sea from Dowleswaram Barrage and 2,000 cusecs into canals.

Meanwhile, CPI state secretary K. Ramakrishna said that the future of AP and Polavaram project is in danger due to decision of the Central government. He said CPI would organise a roundtable meeting on Polavaram project inviting all parties on November 30 in Guntur. He said the Centre is breaking all rules of the AP Reorganisation Act.

MAN ARRESTED
FOR SELLING
NUDE VIDEOS
OF HIS WIFEDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

The Guntur police arrested a husband who sold his wife's nude videos through porn sites and pressuring her to indulge in extramarital affairs. Guntur urban SP R.N. Ammi Reddy said that the accused person to earn easy money secretly filmed his wife's videos and started to upload them to porn websites.

Mr Ammi Reddy addressing a press meet at Guntur on Monday said that B. Vamsikanth Reddy, resident of Giddalur of Prakasam district got married to a woman of RTC Colony Guntur in the year 2017 and they were living in AT Aghraharam in Guntur. The husband used to work in a private company during the time of marriage, and later he shunned the job. The woman was doing a job, and Vamsikanth Reddy planned to earn easy money by uploading nude videos of his wife.

He filmed nude videos of the wife without her knowledge and started to upload them on social media apps against payment. He further offered live streaming of his sexual intercourse with his wife without her knowledge to several others.

Strangely the husband offered physical relations with his wife to his friend Santosh for money and forced his wife to accept the same. He gave the phone number of his wife to Santosh who started harassment over the phone.

Accused Vamsikanth Reddy with his parents started harassing his wife to do immoral activities with the help of his parents. Vexed over the harassment, the wife lodged a complaint in the Disha women police Guntur hence the police conducted a thorough investigation and arrested the husband and client Bachu Sivakumar, who used to watch the content by paying money online.

Safety first



Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy launches "Abhayam" project App at the camp office on Monday, Home minister M. Sucharitha, other officials also seen.

State govt staff up their
ante for delay in PRC, DA

Section of employees unhappy over the delay in release of 50% salaries

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

A section of state employees has upped the ante, claiming the government has not resolved issues that they had highlighted. The employees said their resentment may be reflected in the ensuing local body polls if the issues are not addressed immediately.

These employees are not happy with the prolonged delay in implementation of the 11th Pay Revision Commission (PRC) recommendations. They say that though the 10th PRC was supposed to be implemented from July 2013, it was enforced from February 2015. Similarly, though the 11th PRC was supposed to be implemented from July 2018, the state government delayed its implementation even as nearly 30 months are over, they

alleged.

Though a committee was set up on the 11th PRC recommendations and it had submitted its report to the government, the latter is yet to take a decision as it is supposed to hold talks with stakeholders. The employees said that those who are retiring from service in the interim will be at a loss if the 11th PRC recommendations are not implemented by the date of their superannuation. Such employees may not get lakhs of rupees each.

So is the case with implementation of dearness allowance which is due for July 2018, January 2019 and July 2019. This section of employees is unhappy over the delay in release of remaining 50 per cent of their wages for March and April, 2020 when the government had imposed a cut of 50 per cent in wages due to Covid-19.

Assistant professors working on an ad hoc basis in state universities are upset over the delay in announcement of Minimum Time Scale and job security.

The government has assured that it will release the DA instalments in phases and pay the remainder of the salary from December, but the employees are unhappy.

The employees are also unhappy that Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has not yet acted on his poll promise to revoke the contributory pension scheme and revert to the old pension scheme.

Bopparaju Venkateswarlu, AP Revenue Services Association state president, said, "Though it is true that some employ-

ees are a disgruntled lot for the inordinate delay in getting financial benefits, it is also for the first time that the state government is consulting the employees and taking their views into consideration before taking a final decision. We are hopeful of getting our issues resolved soon."

Government teachers said that they have been inducted to supervise construction work at schools under the Nadu-Nedu programme from May onwards and claim that eight headmasters died after getting infected with Covid-19 while doing the job. They said the biometric attendance left them open to risk.

United Teachers Federation state president Sheik Sabji said, "It is unfair on the part of state government to subject us to severe financial stress by not releasing DA, not

implementing the PRC and not revoking CPS while forcing us to attend to non-academic work of construction supervision."

Assistant professors working on an ad hoc basis in state universities are upset over the delay in announcement of Minimum Time Scale and job security. Besides, there are several cases in the courts on the recruitment of assistant professors which have not been resolved.

Healthcare professionals including teaching doctors are pointing to the inordinate delay in implementation of UGC-PRC and disparity in age of superannuation between graduates and postgraduates. They said they had no time to prepare for the possible second wave of Covid-19 due to heavy workload.

67,447 TO GET
HOUSE SITES IN
VIJAYAWADADC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

Minister for endowments Velampalli Srinivas said that 67,447 beneficiaries would get pattas for their house sites in Vijayawada city.

The minister participated in a review meeting on free house sites, TIDCO houses, regularisation of houses, Gunadala ROB at the collector camp office on Monday.

Addressing the gathering the minister said that apart from taking these works, the officials shall take measures to ensure houses to 2,600 eligible beneficiaries. As many as 3,562 houses spread over 39.73 acres government land in and around Vijayawada shall also be regularised.

₹10K-crore for
food processingDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

AP to spend ₹10,000 crore for food processing clusters development. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy held a review meeting on food processing clusters and said that the aim of the government is to provide remunerative prices to farmers. He announced that the State Government would be spending around ₹10,000 crore on construction of godowns, Janata Bazaars, primary processing centers within Rythu Bharosa Kendras and also on secondary processing.

The Chief Minister said, during the meeting held at the camp office here on Monday the State Government has been taking steps to provide

remunerative prices to farmers and ₹10,000 crore is being spent for all activities from constructing godowns at Rythu Bharosa Kendras, Janata Bazaars to primary and secondary food processing.

The farmers are being informed in advance on MSP of agricultural products. The State has been buying crop products if they are not getting MSP, he said and added food processing units and clusters are being set up to add value to the purchased products.

The Chief Minister said the Marketing Division of the Agriculture Department should be able to provide raw materials for the processing units and to market the processed products, they should be handed over to various companies.

War of words in DRC
meeting of East GodavariDC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, NOV. 23

The East Godavari District Review Committee (DRC) meeting on Monday ended abruptly and on a stormy note following a no-holds-barred verbal showdown between Rajya Sabha member Pilli Subhash-chandra Bose of YSRC Congress and his party's Kakinada MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy with the latter also being involved in a fracas with TD's Peddapuram MLA Nimmakayala China Rajappa.

The DRC meeting was presided over by the district in-charge minister and also the Deputy Chief Minister Dharman Krishna Das.

When the meeting was

about to conclude, Mr Bose alleged that there was large-scale corruption in allotment of TIDCO houses and the gravel contract was awarded only to contractors. He also said that the construction of a new bridge across the salt creek near Indrapalem by private contractors for development of Medalline area may pose a threat to Kakinada, which could be inundated in a future flood.

Mining department officials explained that the contract was awarded in three ways and if necessary, there would be a resurvey to take corrective steps. But Mr Bose was not satisfied with the explanation and demanded immediate action against those officials and

staff of the mining department, who conducted the first survey.

While this was going on, Mr Chandrasekhara Reddy intervened and said that there was no corruption in TIDCO houses. He said that about 1,600 houses were available but 4,000 people applied for it. The allotment is being done to the beneficiaries on a lottery basis and those who miss out would be repaid their deposit amounts.

This resulted in heated arguments between Mr Bose and Mr Reddy. When Mr Reddy objected to the tone and tenor of Mr Bose, the latter retorted that he had every right as the party's reputation was at stake. CM Jagan Mohan Reddy took serious note of the meeting.

BABA | BIRTHDAY Devotees were restricted from other countries due to Covid

Festive mood at Prashanthi Nilayam

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, NOV. 23

Prashanthi Nilayam witnessed festive atmosphere on the occasion of the 95th birth anniversary of Sri Sathya Sai Baba on Monday.

Devotees were permitted in limited numbers into Sai Kulwanth Hall for darshan of Mahasamadhi of Baba.

Baba's birthday celebrations started with chanting of Vedam followed by soulful music programme by Prashanthi Bhajan group at Mahasamadhi.

Naganand, trustee of Sri Sathya Sai Central Trust had presented the gist of the annual report followed by the video discourse of

The trust had launched YouTube channel — Sri Sathya Sai Amrutavani for Kannada audience. Groceries were distributed instead of food

Baba during previous birthday celebrations. The trust distributed groceries at doorstep of people in surrounding villages of Puttaparthi instead of serving food at Prashanthi Nilayam.

The trust had launched YouTube channel — Sri Sathya Sai Amrutavani for Kannada audience. Devotees were restricted from other countries and states following Covid pandemic.

SUDHA MURTHY TO DONATE ₹13 CRORE FOR GHATS

DC CORRESPONDENT
ANANTAPUR, NOV. 23

Infosys foundation chairperson Sudha Murthy came forward to spend ₹13 crore for reconstruction of bathing ghats for devotees of Sri Raghavendra Swamy at Mantralayam in Kurnool district, sources said. Sri Raghavendra Math authorities were also asked to complete the works within a year to provide facilities for devotees to have a holy dip in Tungabhadra river at the abode of Guru Raghavendra Swamy. Ms Sudha Murthy, an ardent devotee of Sri

A priest and a sub inspector from Kurnool district reportedly infected with covid positive. Both were at pushakar ghats in Kurnool. A priest was tested positive on Sunday but he participated in the rituals for devotees to offer pinda pradanam

Raghavendra Swamy was also TTD board member has been a regular visitor to Mantralayam for darshan of Sri Raghavendra Swamy. She had also established a school for students of Mantralayam. According to Math

sources, the Tungabhadra river bed closer to Sri Raghavendra Swamy Math was badly damaged for the past few years after floods hit the town. It may be noted that the entire math and also Mantralayam was submerged in Tungabhadra floods and massive damage occurred for Math. However, devotees came forward and renovated the structures including the main entrance.

But, the Tungabhadra river bed was not totally repaired according to conveniences of devotees. Sources said Ms Sudha Murthy came forward.

AUTO USERS
CAN SEND
DISTRESS ALERT

FROM PAGE 1

If women using a smartphone encounter difficulty in their journey, they can send the vehicle number to the police from the app and the whereabouts of the vehicle can be tracked through GPS.

Passengers who do not have a smartphone can press the panic button on the IoT device attached to the vehicle and the information is sent to the Command Control Centre.

This causes the cab or auto to stop immediately and alert the nearest police station.

Reiterating that the state government is giving top priority to law and order, safety and security of women, the Chief Minister said that there should be no compromise on this issue. He pointed out that the government has provided financial assistance through schemes like Aasara, Cheyutha to empower them. He recalled that similarly, the government had also brought 50 per cent reservation to women in nominated posts and also appointed women as Home Minister and Deputy Chief Minister.

They have also established special police stations in every district and are taking steps to set up special courts and bringing Mahila Police Mitras in every village. The police wing has launched Disha App.

Home minister M. Sucharitha, transport department secretary Krishnababu, transport commissioner P. Sitaramanjaneyulu and other officials were present at the event.

FOUR MEMBERS
OF FAMILY END
LIFE BY SUICIDEDC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, NOV. 23

Four members of a family ended their lives on Monday over marital dispute. The incident took place in Ambedkar Nagar near Thadithota area.

According to One Town police, Bjpathi Siva Pavani married Bhupathi Nagendra 10 years back. The couple had two children Nishan, 9, and Rithika, 7. But later, it is alleged that Nagendra was already having an affair with another woman and that led to quarrel between the husband and wife. The husband allegedly tortured Siva Pavani. Unable to bear torture, Siva Pavani, 27, along with her mother S. Krishnaveni, 55, came to Rajamahendravaram five months back and was residing at Ambedkar Nagar.

GO BY LAW FOR
ADOPTION OF
KIDS: SPEAKERDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, NOV. 23

State Assembly Speaker Tammineni Sitaram suggested that childless couples should follow the law and guidelines for their security and that of the child they are adopting to avoid complications in the future.

The Speaker was addressing a meeting organised by the Child Rights Protection Forum (CRPF) Visakhapatnam City and rural committees, department of Women and Child Welfare, ICPS and DCPU after releasing pamphlets titled "Adoption Rules and Regulations by Law" jointly printed by the ICDS branches and CRPF. At a subsequent function, Mr Sitaram said that it was unfortunate that IVF centres were illegally trading children in violation of the CARA Act.

He said the government should initiate stringent measures against the violators.

OTHER STORIES

₹100 CRORE
FACELIFT FOR
FISHING HARBOURDC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, NOV. 23

Joint collector M. Venu Gopala Reddy said the Visakhapatnam Fishing Harbour, one of the biggest in the country, would be modernised and developed with ₹100 crore.

Presiding over the fishing harbour high-level management committee here on Monday, the joint collector said a detailed project report has been made for basic infrastructure facilities would be improved in the harbour which include construction of a compound wall, two additional halls, installation of CCTV system, ice crushing machine, solar lighting system and repairs to the jetties.

Prof. D.V. Rao gave a power point presentation on the detailed project report to the members.

When the joint collector sought suggestions from the members, some of them said a sub-committee should be appointed to oversee the developmental activities and facilities created for repair of the mechanised boats in the fishing harbour premises only.

Chairman of the fisheries welfare association and the chairman of the management committee Kola Guruvulu, joint director of fisheries K. Phani Prakash and AP Mechanised Boat Owners Association president P.C. Appa Rao.

DETACHED LEG
REJOINED AFTER
RARE SURGERYDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

A rare surgery of rejoining a left leg that was 95 per cent cut was successfully performed at Guntur. Vascular and cardiothoracic surgeon Dr I. Maruti Prasad said that during a group clash of two political parties, the left leg of B. Krishnaiah was cut 95 per cent and the leg was rejoined performing a rare surgery that lasted 10 hours.

Family members of Krishnaiah took him to various hospitals but because the veins, arteries and nerves were damaged, no hospital came forward to treat. They rushed to Lalitha Super Specialty Hospital at Guntur where Dr Maruti Prasad, took up the challenge to rejoin the almost detached leg. He said that he had earlier also performed three similar surgeries.

Dr Prasad said that rejoining veins, arteries and nerves turned a big task but he, plastic surgeon Dr Viswanath along with orthopaedic surgeon Dr Sivaramakrishna did a successful surgery.

He added that the patient is responding well and soon his leg would be completely healed and he could resume normal activities.

RUB works on Rayala
Cheruvu road beginDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, NOV. 23

The dream of Tirupati people crossing the Rayala Cheruvu (RC) railway gate without any hassles is going to become a reality soon, as the construction of proposed Road Under Bridge (RUB) got off to a start on Monday.

A bhoomi puja, the ground-breaking ceremony, was performed by Tirupati MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy to mark the inauguration of the construction work. Municipal Commissioner P.S. Girisha, Guntakal division DENs Gurumurthy, Thulasi Ram and other officials also took part in the programme.

The works for the proposed RUB had been pending for the last four years. It is a crucial need for the local public as well as the Tirumala-bound pilgrims, as it connects both the south and north sides of the temple city.

While the southern side of the city hosts big commercial and residential establishments, the northern side has many government offices as well as ITD, corporation and private offices.

With an estimated 2.5 lakh vehicles passing through this railway gate daily, it will be closed as many as 80 times a day for the traffic to facilitate movement for about 40 trains and also for shunting and other purposes too. Each time the gate gets closed, the entire stretch on either side of the gate gets packed with vehicles, leaving residents to curse their

AP records dip in daily
Covid-19 cases at 545

10 deaths were reported taking the toll to 6,948 in state

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

AP registered lowest ever daily Covid-19 cases of 545 against the average daily cases of over 1,000 giving much relief to the state government.

On November 16, the state recorded the lowest number of daily Covid-19 cases of 753 cases, and on Monday, the number of daily cases further dipped. With the addition of 545 cases, the state's tally rose to 8,62,758 while 10 deaths were reported taking the toll to 6,948.

The state health authorities released Covid-19 bulletin reporting that out of 47,130 samples tested, 545 persons were found infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of 96,62,220 samples tested so far in the

● **AP CONDUCTED** Covid-19 tests on 1,80,940 samples per one million population and recorded Covid-19 positive rate at 8.93.

● **OUT OF** a total number of 96,62,220 samples tested so far in the state, 8,42,416 patients were discharged after recovery while 13,394 patients are still active with the virus.

state, 8,42,416 patients were discharged after recovery while 13,394 patients are still active with the virus.

Among the daily cases of Covid-19, Guntur topped the state with 117 followed by 104 in East Godavari, 76 in West Godavari, 44 in Krishna, 32 in Chittoor, 31 in Kadapa, 30 in Nellore, 25 in Prakasam, 21 in Visakhapatnam, 19 each in Anantapur and Srikakulam, 17 in Vizianagaram and 10 in Kurnool.

Among total Covid-19

active cases, East Godavari recorded the highest with 4,353 followed by 1,746 in Krishna, 1,552 in Guntur, 1,191 in Visakhapatnam, 1,095 in West Godavari, 906 in Nellore, 639 in Chittoor, 538 in Prakasam, 415 in Srikakulam, 349 in Anantapur, 264 in Kadapa, 177 in Vizianagaram and 169 in Kurnool.

AP registered daily Covid-19 deaths to be 10 in the last 24 hours and out of them, Krishn and Visakhapatnam, recorded two each followed by

one each in Anantapur, East Godavari, Guntur, Kurnool, Nellore and West Godavari.

With regard to the cumulative cases Covid-19 deaths, Chittoor recorded the highest with 822 followed by 645 in Guntur, 633 in East Godavari, 624 in Krishna, 587 in Anantapur, 577 in Prakasam, 534 in Visakhapatnam, 519 in West Godavari, 494 in Nellore, 485 in Kurnool, 448 in Kadapa, 346 in Srikakulam and 234 in Vizianagaram.

The authorities discharged 1,390 Covid-19 infected patients after recovery from various hospitals in the state. AP conducted Covid-19 tests on 1,80,940 samples per one million population and recorded Covid-19 positive rate at 8.93.



Women lighting the traditional lamps in the early hours of Monday at Sri Rajarajeswari temple in Nellore on the occasion of Karthika Somavaram. — DC

Devotees offer special
pujas at Siva templesDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, NOV. 23

Lord Siva temples witnessed heavy turnout of devotees in view of auspicious Karthika Somavaram (Monday in Karthika month) all over the district.

The devout lit the traditional lamps as per the custom and performed *abhishekams* to the presiding deity at the ancient Moolasthaneswara temple, Sri Rajarajeswari temple, Sri Ayyappa temple at Nellore and Sri Kamakshi Thayee Sametha Mallikarjuna Swamy shrine at Jonnavada.

Temple managements arranged for special rituals including *abhishekams* and *Rudra Homams* on the occasion.

The temple authorities had a tough time in implementing the guide-

Devotees take holy
dip at Patala GangaDC CORRESPONDENT
SRISAILAM, NOV. 23

Huge number of devotees thronged at Srisailem, Mahanandi, Bugga Ramalingeswara Swamy, Lepakshi and Hemavathi temples in the region.

Huge number of devotees took holy dip at Patala Ganga and had darshan of Lord Siva and Goddess Bramarambhika. Temple authorities provided necessary facilities including food and water to devotees

lines of Covid-19 such as social distancing because of the large turnout

who were on long queues at Srisailem.

Devotees lit deepams on the occasion of holy Monday during Karthika Masam.

Vishaka Sharada Peetam Uttarakshikari Sri Swatmananda Saraswathi offered pujas for Tungabhadra river at Sankalbhag Ghat in Kurnool city on Sunday. The priest performed pujas and participated *homam* at ghat. He offered offerings to river Tungabhadra on the occasion.

of devotees especially women on the holy Karthika Monday.

DIG pats to Nellore police for
obtaining ISO certificationDC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, NOV. 23

Guntur range DIG C.M. Trivikram Varma has appreciated the Superintendent of Police of SPSR Nellore District, Bhaskar Bhushan for obtaining ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation) Certi-

fication to the District Police Office for the first time in the country.

Addressing a large gathering of police officers of the district after handing over the certificate to the SP in the presence of ISO secretary Abhilash Sunny here on Monday, the DIG advised the district

police force to offer quality service maintaining the standards of ISO.

He instructed the officers to pay special attention to resolve the cases pertaining to POCOS (protection of children from sexual offences), section 376 (rape), SC ST Atrocities and missing on war-footing.

INDUSTRIAL BOOST Demand for skilled workforce to go up

Land being acquired for MSMEs

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, NOV. 23

District administration has been planning to acquire land to establish medium, small and micro enterprises (MSMEs) around the proposed Greenfield Airport at Dagadathi near Nellore. The idea was to fully explore the availability of the airport and the port in Krishnapatnam and the railway line to boost the industrial development in SPSR Nellore district.

District Collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu said, "Except for few legal issues, the land required

for the airport has been acquired already and revenue officials have been instructed to procure additional land to develop infrastructure for MSMEs."

After a visit to the lands acquired for the airport on Monday, Collector said the district is poised for a big leap in industrial front and employment generation thereby.

He said he directed the revenue officials to handover 1,900 acres being procured for the airport and MSMEs to the SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle) formed for Airport Project as soon as possible.

According to Mr

Chakradhar Babu, they have been taking steps to offer skill training to the unemployed to meet the future demand for a skilled workforce.

As part of the initiative, a district-level committee with heads of 14 departments has been constituted to offer training skills that are essential for various industries.

In a bid to guide the unemployed youth, Skill Development Counselling Centres are also being established at five revenue divisions of Nellore district.

They are being equipped with a toll-free number which will be

Muezzin tries to end life,
alleges harassment by YSRCDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

A person working as muezzin in a mosque made a selfie video and tried to commit suicide unable to bear alleged harassments of YSR Congress leaders at Tadikona. The alerted family members immediately shifted muezzin Sk. Hanif to GGH at Guntur for treatment.

Telugu Desam AP president K. Atchannaidu alleged that YSRC leaders carried attack on Hanif when he tried to stop digging in the Muslim graveyard and condemned the attack.

In the selfie video, Hanif alleged that YSRC leaders conducting soil digging in the Muslim graveyard hence he tried to stop the same. He lamented that

YSRC leaders continuing abusing him and carried out physical attacks. He alleged that YSRC leaders are harassing him and his family, and hence unable to bear the harassment he is committing suicide by consuming pesticides.

TD Guntur east incharge and party national spokesperson Mohammed Naseer Ahmad and former MLA Tenali Sravan Kumar with other leaders went to GGH and inquired about the incident.

Mr Naseer Ahmad alleged that YSRC leaders did not spare religious place and they dug holy Khabarasthan (graveyard) of Muslims at Tadikonda. He demanded the government to take stern actions against YSRC leaders for carrying attack on muezzin Hanif and to protect holy

Khabarasthan.

Meanwhile, Mr Atchannaidu condemned the latest attack on muezzin Hanif in the home minister's district Guntur, which is alarming and despotism.

He deplored that hate crimes and murders were increasing day by day against the Muslim all over the state in the past 18 months of the Jagan Reddy regime. He stated that doubts were arising whether the Muslims had no right to life at all under the present dispensation in the state.

Mr Atchannaidu demanded the YSRC government should explain to the Minorities as to why it was failing to take deterrent action against those responsible for the atrocities against the Muslims.

CPI working for
TD's agenda: AnilDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

YSR Congress alleged that Communist Party India (CPI) leaders are working for Telugu Desam's agenda and such a big gathering coming to Polavaram shows their real intentions.

Addressing the media on Monday, the minister for water resources P. Anilkumar Yadav said that the Communist leaders coming in large numbers only shows that they wanted to create a scene and has no intention to seek clarifications. He claimed that earlier CPI used to fight for public issues, but they lost their credibility over time by joining hands with TD.

Mr Anil Kumar dared CPI

secretary K. Ramakrishna to answer why they didn't agitate regarding the Polavaram project during the TD regime or questioned Mr Naidu when they failed to complete the project and sanction of relief and rehabilitation package in his five-year term.

He criticised the CPI leaders' visit to Polavaram, saying that 10 people can go to oversee Polavaram works, but there is no need to go with 200 members, while over 3,000 people are working at the site. He claimed that all this is to create chaos at the construction site, and the government doesn't tolerate such cheap politics.

The minister said the project would be ready by 2021,

TD: 400 poll promises
not kept by YSRCDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 23

Telugu Desam MLC G. Deepak Reddy on Monday demanded the ruling YSR Congress ministers to explain to the people whether they had asked for another chance from the voters to usher in all-round demolitions and destruction of Andhra Pradesh in utter disregard for the golden future of the state.

He deplored that two years before the 2019 polls, Mr Jagan Reddy along with a private election consultancy firm did social engineering to divide AP along caste, religious and regional lines while the then CM Chandrababu Naidu was busy completing various

development projects for the unjustly divided AP.

Addressing a press conference, Mr Deepak Reddy said that after coming to power, CM Jagan and his ministers had started misusing their power for their selfish goals and they did not bother to fulfil over 400 promises made during his statewide Padayatra. He alleged that YSR cancelled over 34 programmes launched by the TD and lamented that even Anna Canteens were withdrawn despite their popularity.

Claiming that the YSRC had no moral right to boast of its rule as Rythu Rajyam, Mr Deepak Reddy said that AP came to stand in 3rd place in the country in farmers' suicides.

BJP SENIOR LEADER
KANAKA SUNDARA
REDDY PASSES AWAYDC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, NOV. 23


Bharatiya Janata Party former president of Rajamahendravaram city and senior advocate Mallidi Kanaka Sundara Reddy (85) passed away on Monday. He worked as the BJP first Rajamahendravaram Corporation president and also worked hard for victory of the BJP in Rajamahendravaram parliamentary constituency in 1998 and 1999.

BJP senior leader Garimella Chittibabu expressed his deep condolences on the death of Sundara Reddy and said that he was an asset to the party and he worked hard to strengthen the party during his regime.

ONLY CONG CAN
GIVE SCS TO AP:
OOMEN CHANDIDC CORRESPONDENT
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM, NOV. 23

Kerala former Chief Minister and the Congress AP affairs incharge Oomen Chandi said that only Congress can give Special Category Status to Andhra Pradesh.

Amalapuram former MP G.V. Harsha Kumar joined Congress party on Monday evening. Participating in the meeting here, Mr Chandi said that when the AP was separated from Telangana, the then PM Manmohan Singh promised in the Parliament that SCS would be given to the AP for its development. However, the NDA could not give SCS and has done injustice to the state, he added.

 VIJAYAWADA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION (VMC)		
'E' Procurement Notice No.35/VMC/AE/2020-21, Dt.23-11-2020		
Sl. No.	Name of work	Estimate Amount Rs. in Lakhs
1	Repairs and maintenance of CVR FlyOver, Re-Construction of Central median VMC Guest House, Improvements to Vinayaka Temple Flyover Road, Widening of BT Road and improvement of Drains in Cir-1&3 areas in Vijayawada Municipal Corporation	471.00
Contact: Superintending Engineer (Works), VMC, Vijayawada-520 001 Further details can be seen @ 'e' procurement market place @ www.tender.aeprocurement.gov.in Download of bid documents starts from - 25-11-2020 @ 4.00 P.M. Last date / time for receipt of tenders from - 09-12-2020 up to 4.30 P.M. Reverse Tendering cum Auction 1 work Starts - 10-12-2020 from 2.00 P.M. Sd/- For COMMISSIONER		

SHORT TAKES

SHRINGLA TO VISIT NEPAL FROM NOV. 26

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 23

In a bid to smoothen rough edges between India and Nepal, Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla will visit Kathmandu on November 26 and 27. This will be the first visit of the Foreign Secretary to Nepal since he assumed charge.

“The visit is in keeping with the tradition of regular high-level exchanges between the two countries and the priority India attaches to its relations with Nepal. During the visit, Foreign Secretary will meet his counterpart and other Nepalese dignitaries to discuss the wide ranging bilateral cooperation between the two countries. India has historical and civilisation linkages with Nepal. In recent years, bilateral cooperation has strengthened, with several major infrastructure and cross-border connectivity projects completed with India’s assistance. The visit will be an opportunity to further advance our bilateral ties,” ministry of external affairs said in a statement on Monday.

The ties between the two nations took a dive after Nepal PM changed the map of his country by adding some parts of Indian territory which Nepal claims as its own. However, though the anti-India tone in Nepal has softened a bit of late, the diplomatic ties still need some rejuvenation.

C’GARH: 3 NAXALS KILLED, 1 JAWAN INJURED IN CLASH

Raipur, Nov. 23: Three dreaded Naxals, including a woman, were killed and a Sashastra Seema Bal jawan was injured in a fierce gun-battle between ultras and security forces in Chhattisgarh’s Kanker district on Monday, police said.

The three Naxals were collectively carrying a reward of ₹18 lakh on their heads, they said.

The gunfight took place around 8 am in a forest between Padkaelbeda and Kosranda villages when separate joint teams of the SSB and local police were out on an area domination operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P. said.

The patrolling teams, comprising personnel from SSBs 33rd and 28th battalions and local police, had launched the operation in forests of Tadoki and Rowghat areas, located around 150 km from the state capital Raipur, he said.

These two battalions of SSB have been deployed in the area since 2016 exclusively for guarding the under-construction DallirajharaRowghat railway project.

Dallirajhara falls in Balod district while Rowghat is in Kanker.

When one of the patrolling teams was cordoning off a forest area close to Kosranda village, a group of Naxals opened fire on security personnel, leading to the gun-battle, the police official said.

MAN SETS MINOR DAUGHTER ON FIRE

AKSHAYA KUMAR
SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, NOV. 23

A 17-year-old minor girl was on Monday admitted to the Bhima Bhoi Medical College and Hospital in Bolangir with critical burn injuries.

The maternal uncle of the girl alleged that her father set her on fire by pouring kerosene late on Sunday night. She was rescued by her neighbours from her house at around 3 am and rushed to Bhima Bhoi Medical College and Hospital, Bolangir.

Later, the girl was shifted to VSS Medical College and Hospital at Burla in Sambalpur districts.

The latest report said the doctors at VSS Medical College and Hospital referred the girl to SCB Medical College. The victim has reportedly suffered over 70 per cent burn injuries.

The girl’s father, identified as Arakhita Nag of Debripali village of Bolangir district reportedly has two wives and the girl is his first wife’s daughter. The girl used to live with her uncle since childhood. However, after a village meeting a few days ago, she was sent to stay with her father.

The uncle of the girl alleged that Nag didn’t want to keep his daughter and therefore attempted to kill her.

Kashmir Valley receives season’s first snowfall

Srinagar, Nov. 23: Most of the plain areas in Kashmir experienced the season’s first snowfall on Monday, even as the higher reaches witnessed heavy precipitation, leading to the closure of Srinagar-Leh road which connects the valley with Ladakh, officials said here. The MeT office has issued an ‘Orange colour’ weather warning for the higher reaches of J&K and Sonmarg-Zojila axis on the Srinagar-Leh road, asking the administration and people to be prepared and to maintain vigil.

An official said light to moderate snow with heavy falls at isolated places was reported from many areas of Kashmir, a few places of Jammu and Sonmarg-Dress axis.

The famous ski-resort of Gulmarg, in north Kashmir, recorded four inches of fresh snowfall during the night, while Pahalgam tourist resort in south Kashmir, recorded 10 cm of snow, the official said.

He said most of the areas in the plains of the valley also received light snowfall. It was still snowing, especially in the higher reaches, when the last reports came in and the weather system is likely to continue, he said. — PTI



People walk down a road amid fog and snowfall on the outskirts of Srinagar on Monday. The Srinagar-Ladakh road was closed due to heavy snowfall on the higher reaches and rains in plains.

— PTI

Kerala puts changes to Police Act on hold

Ordinance had okayed 3 year imprisonment, ₹ 10,000 fine for offensive or defamatory remarks on social media

GILVESTER ASSARY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
NOV. 23

Relenting to the strong protest from within and outside, the CPM-led LDF government in Kerala on Monday decided to put on hold the controversial amendment to Kerala Police Act which made posting offensive remarks on social media, liable for imprisonment and fine or both.

The amendment was made to Kerala Police Act by introducing 118 A through ordinance route triggering widespread criticism from Left sympathisers, human rights activists and legal experts. Under the provisions of the new law, “Whoever makes, expresses, publishes or disseminates through any kind of mode of communication, any matter or subject for

threatening, abusing, humiliating or defaming a person or class of persons, knowing it to be false and that causes injury to the mind, reputation or property of such person or class of persons or any other person in whom they have interest shall on conviction, be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years or with fine which may extend to ten thousand rupees or with both.”

This means that a person can face three years in jail and a fine of ₹10,000 for any social media post that is considered “offensive” or “defamatory”.

“The amendment has met with criticism from those who supported the LDF and also those who have always safeguarded democratic values. Under these circumstances the government has decided

● **CHIEF MINISTER** said the matter will be placed before the Assembly for detailed discussions and opinion of all sections will be elicited before deciding the future course

● **THOSE WHO** opposed the new law said it was similar to the 66A of IT Act and 118D of Kerala Police Act which were repealed by the SC in 2015.

to put the ordinance on hold. The matter will be placed before the Assembly for detailed discussions and opinion of all sections will be elicited before deciding the future course,” the Chief Minister said in a statement.

The central leadership of the CPM and CPI also expressed displeasure over the manner in which the ordinance was promulgated. With the criticism gaining momentum, the government sought to put the controversy to rest by shelving the ordinance for the moment. Governor Arif Mohammad Khan had given his assent to the ordinance here the other day.

Those who opposed the new law said it was similar to the 66A of IT Act and 118D of Kerala Police Act which were repealed by the Supreme Court in 2015 saying these were against freedom of speech.

At that time, the CPM was in the forefront opposing the provisions of 66A of the IT Act calling those draconian. So when the Marxist party led government itself brought the amended law which also had similar provisions, even those who were close sympathizers of the Left came out in strong disapproval.

Shah’s visit to tribal family a show off: Didi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, NOV. 23

In a blistering attack, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday called Union home minister Amit Shah’s lunch during his visit to Bankura in his last tour to the state earlier this month at a tribal family’s home a “show off” and his garland tribute to a hunter’s statue, passed off by the BJP as of Birs Munda, an “insult” to the tribal freedom fighter.

Charging Shah of “lying”, the Trinamul Congress supreme announced that her party would build a statue of Birs Munda in the district to woo the tribal vote-bank.

She also declared the tribal icon’s birthday to be celebrated by her government as a state holiday from next year.

“Few days ago our honourable Union home minister came here for a ‘show off.’ *Dikhane ke liye aaye the!* He had brought cooked food and people including Brahmin from outside to a Dalit family’s home. He did not allow the family to do anything,” she alleged at Khatra in Bankura after launching a list of government projects.

Lashing out at Shah, Banerjee claimed, “The poor man’s daughter suffers from a disease like Thalassaemia. With the assurance of help, he was told that the minister would have his lunch sitting at his home. Though it was shown that vegetables were chopped for

● **MAMATA BANERJEE** announces that the Trinamul Congress will build a statue of Birs Munda in the district to woo the tribal votebank

● **THE CHIEF MINISTER** launched *Dore Dore Sorkar* (government at doors) to reach out to the public ahead of the next year’s Assembly Election among other projects.

cooking his lunch, he (Shah) did not have the food made of it. Neither coriander leaves nor cabbage was used in cooking. From the newspapers I found he had Basmati rice and Postor Bora (Poppy Seed Fritters).”

The Chief Minister told the audience, “He (Shah) also garlanded a statue which you later said was not of Birs Munda. The statue might be of a hunter. I respect a hunter also because he is my brother too. But why do you lie? It can not be accepted that you would vandalise Vidyasagar’s statue and garland a different statue instead of Rabindranath Tagore and

Birs Munda.”

She added, “A statue of Birs Munda will be built in that place by the followers of Maa-Mati-Manush in revenge of the insult you (Shah) inflicted. On my government’s part, I declare Birs Munda’s birthday will be a state holiday because we respect him.”

Among the projects launched by the Chief Minister is *Dore Dore Sorkar* (government at doors) to reach out to the public ahead of the next year’s Assembly Election. Daily camps will be run in each district in between 11 am and 3 pm from December 1 to January 30, 2021.

BIG LOSS Three-time Assam CM was battling post-Covid health complications

Former Assam CM Gogoi passes away

MANOJ ANAND | DC
GUWAHATI, NOV. 23

Three-time former Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi, who has been battling post-Covid health complications for a month, passed away on Monday at about 5.34 pm at Guwahati Medical College and Hospital. He was 84.

Assam’s longest serving chief minister suffered multiple organ failure and on Sunday, doctors performed dialysis on him as he was unable to pass urine naturally due to kidney problems.

He had tested positive for Coronavirus on August 25 and had spent two months

in hospital.

Assam Chief Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal on Monday rushed back to Guwahati from Dibrugarh after cancelling his programmes.

The report of Gogoi’s demise came hours after the Chief Minister tweeted that he was flying back to Guwahati from Dibrugarh to visit the veteran Congress leader.

“Flying back to Guwahati from Dibrugarh after cancelling my programmes midway to be on the side of respected Tarun Gogoi da and his family as the former CM’s health deteriorates. He has always been a father figure to me,” he tweeted.



Tarun Gogoi

Earlier, state health minister Himanta Biswa Sarma along with his wife and two children visited the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital on Monday morning to

enquire about the health of the ailing chief minister.

Gogoi’s family, including his wife, son and daughter, have been at the GMCH since Sunday night. A host of MPs, MLAs, former ministers and senior Congress leaders have also been camping at the hospital since Saturday night.

State cabinet ministers and AGP leaders Atul Bora and Keshab Mahanta, Assam BJP president Ranjeet Dass, minister Chandra Mohan Patowary, BJP leader Ramen Deka and AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal were among those from other parties to visit the facility to enquire about

his health.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, defence minister Rajnath Singh, former prime minister Manmohan Singh and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had also spoken to Gaurav asking after Gogoi’s health.

Sarma who announced the demise of the former chief minister told reporters that the body of the late chief minister would be kept at Sankardev Kalakshetra where people can pay their last respect since Tuesday morning.

Earlier, prayer meetings were held across the state for the former chief minister’s speedy recovery.

INTERMEDIATE JET TRAINER COMMENCES SPIN FLIGHT TESTING

Bengaluru, Nov. 23: Indigenous Intermediate Jet trainer (IJT) designed and developed by the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, which will replace the ageing Kiran aircraft fleet of the Indian Air Force, has commenced spin flight testing here.

The flight was piloted by HAL’s test pilots Gp. Capt H.V. Thakur (Retd) and Wg. Cdr P. Avasti (Retd), the Bengaluru-headquartered HAL said in a statement on Monday.

“The spin testing of an aircraft is the most crucial phase of its flight testing. Accordingly, the testing will be gradually progressed to assess the behaviour of the aircraft till six turn spins to either side to meet the targeted requirement”, the PSU Defence major said.

The IJT has already been tested to its full envelope in terms of speed, altitude and load factor (G envelope) and has also been integrated with drop tanks as well as bombs, according to HAL.

For spin test, HAL redesigned the aircraft by moving the vertical tail aft and extending the rudder surface.

These changes for ensuring a satisfactory spin behaviour required extensive redesign of the rear fuselage and the rudder, the company said.

The changes have been incorporated in two aircraft with the involvement and clearance from certification agencies at every stage.

Post modification, the two aircraft underwent significant flight tests to assess the general handling with the new configuration of fin and rudder, it was stated.

These aircraft have now been incorporated with the necessary safety devices (Anti-Spin Parachute Systems).

During the first flight, initially the aircraft was taken through one turn spin to the left hand and right hand sides to test the spin characteristics, the statement added.

— PTI

● **INDIGENOUS INTERMEDIATE** Jet trainer is designed and developed by the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited to replace the ageing Kiran aircraft fleet of the Indian Air Force.

SC extends parole of Rajiv Gandhi’s assassin by 1 week

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, NOV. 23

The Supreme Court on Monday extended by one week the parole of A.G. Perarivalan – a convict in Rajiv Gandhi assassination conspiracy case – so that he could meet doctors for his treatment.

A bench headed by Justice L. Nageswara Rao and also comprising Justice Hemant Gupta and Justice Ajay Rastogi extended Perarivalan’s parole as bench was informed that he could not get himself treated because he was not provided with a police escort that is mandatory for him to go to the hospital.

The top court ordered the extension of parole for one week as senior counsel Gopal Sankaranarayanan appearing for Perarivalan told the bench that he was granted parole by Madras High Court on November 9 till November 23 for going to hospital but he could not reach the hospital on the appointed date as there was no police to escort him to the hospital.

“We are informed that the High Court extended the parole of the petitioner (Perarivalan) from 09.11.2020 to 23.11.2020, since the police escort was not provided to the petitioner, he could not visit the hospital to meet his doctor, we further

extend the parole of the petitioner by one week from today and direct Tamil Nadu to provide the necessary police escort to the petitioner to enable him to visit the hospital for treatment”, the court said in its order.

The court directed the listing of the matter on January 19, 2021, when it will hear arguments by the Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and senior counsel Gopal Sankaranarayanan on the larger issues and decide the matter on that day itself.

Tamil Nadu government’s Additional Advocate General Balaji Srinivasan told the court that let Gopal Sankaranarayanan indicate the date and time when Perarivalan will be going to the hospital and he will be provided with a police escort.

Tamil Nadu government had decided to release Perarivalan by granting him remission of sentence but the matter is still pending with the Governor Banwarilal Purohit.

The Governor has sought a report from the Central government relating to the probe being carried out by CBI headed Multi Disciplinary Monitoring Agency into the larger conspiracy behind the assassination of former Prime Minister.

IN BRIEF YEMENI REBELS STRIKE SAUDI OIL FACILITY

Dubai, Nov. 23: Yemen's Houthis rebels said they struck a Saudi oil facility in the port city of Jiddah on Monday with a new cruise missile, just hours after the kingdom finished hosting its virtual Group of 20 leaders summit.

The kingdom did not immediately acknowledge any attack as videos on social media suggested a fire at an Aramco oil facility.

Brig. Gen. Yehia Sarie, a Houthi military spokesman, tweeted that the rebels fired a new Quds 2 cruise missile at the facility.

He posted a satellite image online that matched Aramco's North Jiddah Bulk Plant, where oil products are stored in tanks.

3 PAK BURGLARS ATTACK INDIAN MAN IN THE UAE

Dubai, Nov. 23: A 33-year-old Indian man was attacked by three mask-wearing Pakistani burglars who also stole his laptop, mobile phone and some cash while he was asleep at his home in Dubai, according to a media report.

During a hearing in the Dubai Court of First Instance on Sunday, the man said the Pakistani burglars broke into a villa in the Bur Dubai area in August, assaulted the residents with a metal bar, and stole several items, the *Gulf News* reported on Sunday. He said the attackers put a plastic bag over his face and tape on his mouth. "They were wearing medical masks. One of them muzzled me and the other attacked me with a metal bar. I tried to resist but they overpowered me. I pulled the mask of one of the attackers and saw his face," the victim told the court. "I managed to remove the plastic bag and the tape and went outside the room. I went to my roommate and tried to chase the attackers," he said.

The burglars stole the man's laptop, mobile phone, cash, and credit cards, the report said. While one of the burglars was arrested by a police patrol as the victim identified him, the other two remain at large.

UK SC TO DECIDE IF I.S. BRIDE CAN RETURN

London, Nov. 23: Britain's Supreme Court is set to decide whether a woman who ran away from her London home as a teenager to join the Islamic State group in Syria can return to the UK.

The British government is fighting to keep Shamima Begum from coming back to the country where she was born. At a hearing beginning on Monday, it is challenging a lower court's ruling that Begum can return to Britain to mount a legal challenge aimed at restoring her UK citizenship, which was revoked on national security grounds.

The Court of Appeal said in July that "the only way in which she can have a fair and effective appeal is to be permitted to come into the UK."

But James Eadie, a lawyer for the UK government, told the Supreme Court that Begum "is considered to pose a real and current threat to national security." Begum was one of three east London schoolgirls who travelled to Syria in 2015.

US RENEWS VOW TO DEFEND PHILIPPINES

Manila, Nov. 23: President Donald Trump's administration provided precision-guided missiles and other weapons to help the Philippines battle Islamic State group-aligned militants and renewed a pledge to defend its treaty ally if it comes under attack in the disputed South China Sea.

National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien represented Trump in Monday's ceremony at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila, where he announced the delivery of the cache of missiles and bombs to the Philippine military. Trump pledged to provide the \$18 million worth of missiles in a phone conversation with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte in April.

O'Brien expressed condolences to the Philippines after back-to-back typhoons left a trail of death and devastation in the country and ousted US help to the country battle the coronavirus pandemic. The US assistance projects normalcy in Washington's foreign relations as Trump worked to challenge the results of the Nov. 3 presidential election.

Blinken to be US Secretary of State, Sullivan next NSA

Washington, Nov. 23: Joe Biden intends to pick his trusted foreign policy advisor Antony Blinken as the US Secretary of State and Jake Sullivan as National Security Advisor, media reports said on Monday, as the President-elect is poised to make his first round of Cabinet announcements on Tuesday.

Blinken, 58, has served as the Deputy Secretary of State in the second term of the Obama administration and National Security Advisor to Biden when he was the vice president.

A strong India-hand, Blinken was the top foreign policy advisor to the Biden campaign.

"President-elect Joe Biden intends to nominate Antony Blinken to serve as secretary of State, turning to a trusted diplomat and foreign-policy adviser to oversee his work to rebuild US relationships around the globe, according to people familiar with the decision," *The Wall Street Journal* reported.

"President-elect Joe Biden is planning to announce that he has selected Antony Blinken, one of his closest and longest-se-

rving foreign policy advisers, as secretary of state," *The Washington Post* said.

"Jake Sullivan, another top Biden adviser, is expected to be named as national security adviser, according to two people familiar with the announcement," the daily said.

Last week, Biden said he had decided on his name for the Treasury Secretary. "The announcement of Blinken's selection is expected by Tuesday at the latest, people familiar with the selection said," the *Journal* reported.

Blinken also spoke during the virtual celebration of India's Independence Day organised by the Biden Campaign and addressed by Biden himself and his running mate Kamala Harris, who is now the Vice President-elect.

"The Vice President (Biden) has long been a champion of stronger ties with India. I saw this firsthand. I started working for him in 2002 on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Then, of course, the Obama-Biden administration and his years as Vice President."

— PTI

China to launch 1st unmanned mission for moon's samples

Beijing, Nov. 23: China said on Monday that it will launch its first unmanned space mission on Tuesday to collect samples from the moon's surface and return to earth, which its scientists say is one of the country's most complicated and challenging space missions.

China National Space Administration (CNSA) said that the fuelling of the Long March-5 rocket, currently China's largest launch vehicle, began on Monday ahead of the launch on early Tuesday.

The rocket, which will send the Chang'e-5 spacecraft to Earth-moon transfer orbit, is scheduled to be launched from the Wenchang Spacecraft Launch Site in south China's Hainan Province in the early hours on Tuesday.

The mission is the country's first attempt to launch a spacecraft to collect and return samples from the moon, the CNSA said. The Chang'e-5 mission aims to conduct unmanned lunar sample collection and return to Earth, one of the country's most complicated and challenging space mis-

sions, state-run *Xinhua* news agency reported. It will contribute to the scientific studies in fields such as the formation and evolution of the moon, it said. China's lunar exploration program is named after the legendary Chang'e, the "Moon Lady," who took a potion and floated into the sky, eventually landing on the moon, where she became a goddess accompanied by a jade rabbit.

A major space power, China launched its first Mars mission 'Tianwen-1' on July 23 this year. The Mars spacecraft which included an orbiter, lander and rover is on its way to the red planet. China launched its first lunar probe, Chang'e-1, in 2007 which orbited 200 km above the moon and mapped 3D images of the lunar surface followed by Chang'e-2 in 2010 which had sent high resolution photos of the moon's surface. Chang'e-3 was launched in 2013 which softly touched down on the Sinus Iridium 12 days later. Chang'e-3 included a lander and a moon rover called Yutu (Jade Rabbit). — PTI

Shringla to visit Nepal from Nov. 26, talk bilateral issues

Kathmandu, Nov. 23: India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla will arrive here on Thursday on a two-day official visit to Nepal during which he would hold talks with his Nepalese counterpart Bharat Raj Paudyal and discuss wide ranging areas of bilateral cooperation.

Shringla is visiting at the invitation of Foreign Secretary Paudyal. This will be a continuation of the regular exchange of



Harsh Vardhan Shringla

high level visits between the two friendly neighbours, the Nepalese Foreign

Ministry said on Monday. "On the first day of the visit, the Foreign Secretaries of the two countries will hold bilateral meeting and discuss wide ranging areas of cooperation between Nepal and India," the ministry said in a statement here.

He is scheduled to call on the high level dignitaries of Nepal, it added. Shringla will also hand over Covid-19 related support to the Government of Nepal. — PTI

Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine 70% effective on an average

Becomes third drugmaker to announce promising results to contain Covid

London, Nov. 23: Pharma major AstraZeneca said on Monday that an interim analysis of clinical trials of its Covid-19 vaccine in the UK and Brazil showed that it was 70 per cent effective on average, becoming the third drugmaker to announce promising results to contain the deadly virus. The vaccine, developed with the University of Oxford, showed 90 per cent efficacy in one dosing regimen when the vaccine was given as a half dose, followed by a full dose at least a month later, and another dosing regimen showed 62 per cent efficacy when given as two full doses at least one month apart, AstraZeneca said in a statement.

"The combined analysis from both dosing regimens resulted in an average efficacy of 70 per cent," it added. An independent Data Safety Monitoring Board determined that the analysis met its primary endpoint showing protection from Covid-19 occurring 14 days or more after receiving two doses of the vaccine, AstraZeneca said.

No serious safety events related to the vaccine have been confirmed. The ChAdOx1 nCoV-2019 or code-named AZD1222 was well tolerated across both dosing regimens, it said. The company "will now immediately prepare the regulatory submission of the data to authorities around the world that have a framework in place for conditional or early approval," the statement said.

AstraZeneca will seek an Emergency Use Listing from the World Health Organisation for an accelerated pathway to vaccine availability in low-income countries, it added.

"These findings show that we have an effective vaccine that will save many lives. Excitingly,



German health minister Jens Spahn wears a protective mask as he is shown around the vaccine production company IDT Biologika by its general manager Juergen Betzing in Dessau, Germany on Monday as the race to develop a Covid vaccine continues. — AFP

we've found that one of our dosing regimens may be around 90 per cent effective and if this dosing regimen is used, more people could be vaccinated with planned vaccine supply," explained Professor Andrew Pollard, Director of the Oxford Vaccine Group and Chief Investigator of the Oxford Vaccine Trial. The result of the Oxford vaccine compares with the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, which were recently shown to be 95 per cent and 94.5 per cent effective, respectively.

The Oxford vaccine is comparatively cheaper and easier to store. "This vaccine's efficacy and safety confirm that it will be highly effective against Covid-19 and will have an immediate impact on this public health emergency," AstraZeneca Chief Executive Officer Pascal Soriot said.

— PTI

4 Indo-Americans Rhodes Scholars

New York, Nov. 23: Four Indian-Americans are among the cohort of 32 students chosen from the US as Rhodes Scholars virtually for the first time this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The diverse group, that won scholarships to the Oxford University in England, comprises immigrants and students of colour.

American Secretary of the Rhodes Trust Elliot Gerson announced the

names of the 32 Americans chosen as Rhodes Scholars representing the US on Sunday. The four Indian-American students include Swathi R Srinivasan, Vijayasundaram Ramasamy, Garima P Desai and Savarni Sanka. "Never before has a class of Rhodes Scholars been elected entirely virtually, with both candidates and selectors participating safely, independently and digitally," Gerson said. — PTI

Saudi Arabia denies Bibi met crown prince

Jerusalem, Nov. 23: Israeli media reported Monday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu flew to Saudi Arabia for a clandestine meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, which would mark the first known encounter between senior Israeli and Saudi officials.

But, Saudi Arabia on Monday denied Israeli media reports of landmark talks Netanyahu and bin Salman during a visit by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

"I have seen press reports about a purported meeting between HRH the

Crown Prince and Israeli officials during the recent visit by @SecPompeo," Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said in a tweet.

"No such meeting occurred. The only officials present were American and Saudi," Israeli public broadcaster *Kan* and other outlets had reported that the meeting took place Sunday, weeks after the Jewish state reached historic deals to normalise ties with two Saudi allies, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Those deals, known as the Abraham Accords,

were brokered by the administration of US President Donald Trump, who leaves office in less than two months.

Hebrew-language media cited an unnamed Israeli official as saying that Netanyahu and Yossi Cohen, head of Israel's Mossad spy agency, flew to the Saudi city of Neom on Sunday, where they met with the crown prince. The prince was there for talks with visiting US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Flight radar24, which provides live worldwide flight tracking, showed a plane taking off

from Tel Aviv on Monday at around 7:30 p.m. local time and vanishing from radar near Neom around an hour later.

It shows the same flight appearing on radar near Neom and landing at Tel Aviv at around 1 a.m. (local time) Monday. It did not provide any details on the flight. The Israeli PM's office did not respond to requests for comment. Israel recently signed normalisation agreements with Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates and has long maintained clandestine security ties with Saudi Arabia. — Agencies

NEW | STUDY Research hints at possibility that life may have existed on the Red Planet 4 billion years ago

Nasa rover data hints at ancient megaflood in Mars

New York, Nov. 23: Giant flash floods once washed through Gale Crater on Mars' equator around four billion years ago, according to a study which hints at the possibility that life may have existed on the Red Planet.

The research, published recently in the journal *Scientific Reports*, assessed data collected by Nasa's Curiosity rover — launched in November 2011 — and found that "gigantic flash floods," likely touched off by the heat of

a meteoritic impact, unleashed the ice stored on the Martian surface. Based on the analysis, scientists including those from Cornell University in the US, said these floods of "unimaginable magnitude" set up gigantic ripples that are tell-tale geologic structures familiar to scientists on the Earth.

"We identified megafloods for the first time using detailed sedimentological data observed by the rover Curiosity," said study co-author Alberto G. Fairén

from Cornell University. According to the scientists, geological features including the work of water and wind have been frozen in time on Mars for about four billion years.

They said these features convey processes that shaped the surface of both the Earth and the Mars in the past. This case includes the occurrence of giant wave-shaped features in sedimentary layers of Gale crater, often called "megaripples" or "antidunes" that are about 30-feet

● **THE RESEARCHERS** said these features convey processes that shaped the surface of both the Earth and the Mars in the past.

high and spaced about 450 feet apart, lead author Ezat Heydari, a professor of physics at Jackson State University in the US, noted. The antidunes are indicative of flowing megafloods at the bottom of Mars' Gale Crater about

four billion years ago, which are identical to the features formed by melting ice on Earth about two million years ago, Heydari added. According to the study, the most likely cause of the Mars flooding was the melting of ice from heat generated by a large impact, which released carbon dioxide and methane from the planet's frozen reservoirs.

The water vapour and release of gases combined to produce a short period of warm and wet condi-

tions on Mars, the researchers said. They believe the condensation may have formed water vapour clouds, which in turn likely created torrential rain, possibly planetwide. This water may have entered Gale Crater, and combined with water coming down from Mount Sharp in Gale Crater to produce gigantic flash floods, they added.

The Curiosity rover science team had already established that Gale Crater once had persistent lakes and streams in the an-

cient past. The researchers believe these long-lived bodies of water are good indicators that the crater, as well as Mount Sharp within it, were capable of supporting microbial life.

"Early Mars was an extremely active planet from a geological point of view. The planet had the conditions needed to support the presence of liquid water on the surface — and on the Earth, where there's water, there's life," Fairén said. — PTI

DECCAN Chronicle

24 NOVEMBER 2020

Kerala's dropping law to punish dissent welcome

The decision by Kerala's Left Democratic Front government led by the CPM to put on hold its controversial ordinance amending the Kerala Police Act 2011 is extremely welcome. The ordinance was intended to insert a section in the law giving the police wide powers to proceed against those who defame people through various media, including the social media, and another to make it a cognisable offence.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who announced the decision, said the government was forced to bring in the ordinance in the background of complaints about widespread misuse of social media platforms to attack individuals, especially women and children. The government must now complete the legal process which leads to the nullification of the ordinance.

The new Section 118A in the law had made a communication which "caused injury to the mind" of not only the target but also of "any other person in whom they have interest" a cognisable offence, giving the police undefined powers to initiate criminal proceedings against unsuspecting people.

It evoked instant condemnation from civil rights activists and Left sympathisers as well as the Opposition, who said that it could be misused to stifle voices of dissent. The Communist Party of India, the second largest LDF constituent, had also publicly voiced its dissent. The protests forced the CPM central leadership to promise a relook at the law.

That a government led by the CPM, which has consistently opposed every single move against freedom of speech, had dared to bring in such a law could perplex an outsider. But a close look at the way the police has behaved in Kerala under the current government would show that the new law was a continuation of the pattern of its behaviour, which has nothing to do with the published policy of the party that leads the government. The police shot and killed two Maoists in the forests of Nilambur in an encounter just three months after the new government had taken over.

Though Left parties oppose encounter killings, the party offered no explanation while the Chief Minister said the government will do nothing that would affect the morale of the police. Encouraged perhaps by the words of the Chief Minister, who also holds the home portfolio, the police conducted more encounters in the following years, in which six more people were killed. Two youngsters were incarcerated last year for about 10 months under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967 for allegedly possessing Maoist literature though the CPM has been in the forefront of agitations against its misuse.

While it is true that the Vijayan government has finally given in to public pressure against a draconian law, the CPM leadership needs to do a serious rethink why the Kerala police, which functions directly under one of its most senior leaders, gets to do whatever it feels like, even breaking the party's own policies. It must also be a lesson for all governments in this country which find voices of dissent an unnecessary evil. They might do well to recognise that freedom of speech is a vital part of democracy, guaranteed by the Constitution, and that all attempts to smother it will face stiff resistance.

J&K: What kind of democracy?

Jammu and Kashmir has taken a long break from democracy. There has been no popular government there since 2018's summer, and in August 2019, without going through any laid-down procedure, the Centre scrapped the former state's autonomy, vivisectioned it, and converted it into a Union territory. Now, when polls are to be held for District Development Councils, which didn't exist in the past, non-BJP parties are vociferously complaining that they aren't allowed to campaign while BJP candidates face no hurdles.

Mostly these are the Gupkar Alliance parties, and they complain that their candidates, in the name of security, are practically facing internment. This is Kashmir's first real test at procedural democracy in 29 months and it was expected that the leaders of Kashmir's mainstream parties, who have sworn by India and paid the price, with thousands of them killed by terrorists over the years, would have every opportunity to have their say in the DDC polls.

In an eloquent letter to lieutenant-governor Manoj Sinha, stalwart National Conference leader and former chief minister Farooq Abdullah, president of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), the conglomerate of Kashmir's non-BJP parties working for restoration of Kashmir's autonomy, has said that the story of democracy in Kashmir is soaked in the blood of representatives of the same parties whose candidates are being physically restrained from campaigning. Other PAGD parties have also complained bitterly. The elections are imminent.

If this grievance is made up, it will be appropriate for the L-G to go on record to say so, and then to substantiate his stand before the public. Else, the impression is apt to go around that the ruling party is intent on winning the election by hook or by crook, for it will be a big blow to the BJP if it loses the election after the party pursued its ideological agenda to denude J&K of its historical autonomy. And why has the Election Commission gone to sleep in the face of such complaints?

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUBHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:

Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad - 500 003, Ph: 040-27803930-4; Fax : 040-27805256

Vijayawada: No C-3 & 4 Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.), Ph: 0866-2553284/2553287; Telefax: 0866-2553234

Visakhapatnam: Survey No.1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017 (A.P.), Ph: 0891-2552333/2552334; Fax: 0891-2755285

Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph: 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208

Anantapur: Thapovan colony, Bangalore By-Pass Road, Anantapur - 515004, Ph: 08554-276903; Fax: 08554-276904

Karimnagar: Survey No.1341, Vavilalpalay Colony, Jagityala Road, Karimnagar - 505 001, Ph: 0878-2228908; Telefax: 0878-2220433

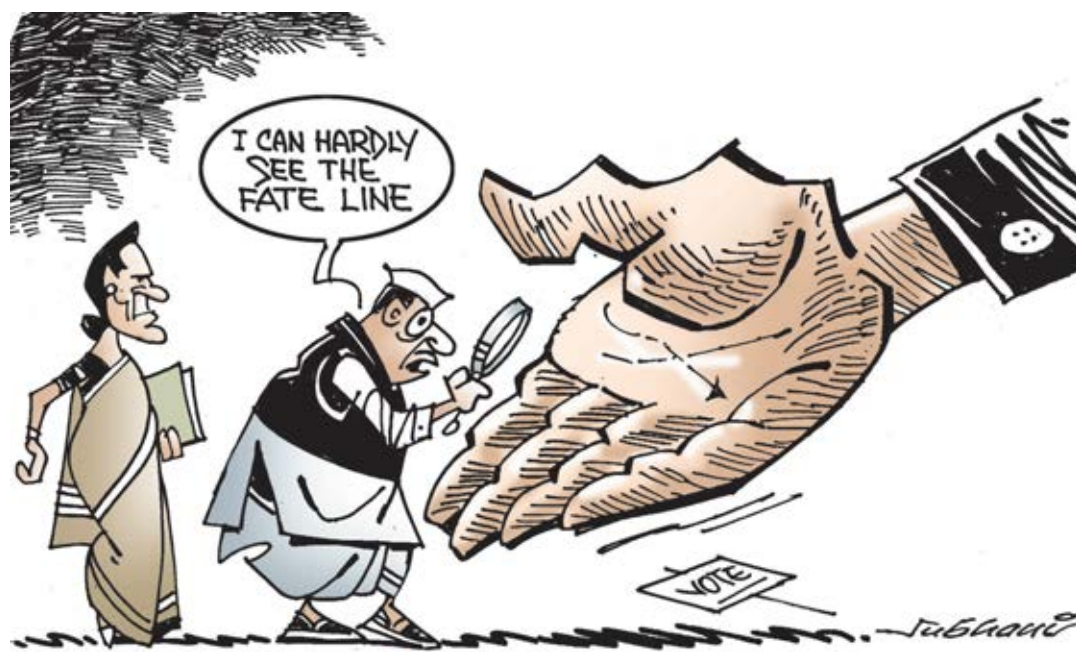
Nellore: Survey No.527/2, Burranpur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chennudugunta Panchayat, Nellore, Ph: 0861-2348581/82; Telefax: 0861-2348580

Chennai: SP-3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai - 600 032, Ph: 044-22254747/48/50/51; Advt Fax: 22254765/22254766/42305325

Coimbatore: 77, Vivekananda Road, Ramnagar, Coimbatore - 641 009, Ph: 0422 2231255

Gram: CHRONICLE Postal registration no: No. HSD-348/2006-08

Subhani



Beyond the RCEP: India matters in Indo-Pacific

Sreeram Chaulia

Since the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement by 15 nations on November 15, criticism of India for sitting out the mega free trade pact has arisen in some quarters. Myths have been propagated that deserve to be debunked.

The first line of attack is that India has hacked at its own feet because remaining outside the pan-regional integration process will hamper India's economic growth and transformation. This argument is not supported by empirical evidence from previous free trade agreements. Barring the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (Safta), which came into force in 2006, all the other FTAs have produced trade deficits for India.

By 2019, India had a deficit of \$22 billion with Asean, thanks to the India-Asean Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), which has been operational since 2010. Likewise, the India-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), in vogue from 2011, and the India-South Korea CEPA, in effect from 2010, have engendered progressively larger deficits for India. Signing these FTAs did increase overall trade volumes between India and its partner countries, but India's market became more open to imports without reciprocal benefits for Indian exporters.

Liberal proponents of consumer welfare contend that the deficits should not matter as Indian consumers gain from the influx of cheaper foreign-made goods. But the widening trade deficits have adverse implications for India's macro-economic stability and ability to strategically plan its economic future.

External affairs minis-

ter S. Jaishankar explained the crux of the matter by reminding us that past FTAs led to "de-industrialisation" of sectors of the Indian economy by pumping in cheap foreign goods and removing economic incentives to build our own indigenous manufacturing base.

The challenge, Mr Jaishankar rightly says, is "whether India will become a first-class industrial power or not". Multiple studies have shown that if India joined the RCEP on the bargaining terms we got after six years of negotiations, the already alarming surge of Chinese goods would have swamped India and rendered it permanently uncompetitive and crippled.

Already, even without an FTA, China had a worrisome trade surplus of \$48.6 billion with India in the 2019-2020 financial year. With China sitting as the 800-pound gorilla in RCEP, which doesn't prohibit China's notorious state subsidies to its exporters and doesn't block Chinese exports rerouted via other RCEP members, India would have committed strategic suicide by entering the club.

All the hopes pinned on Prime Minister Modi's "AtmaNirbhar Bharat" and "Make in India" drives would have been eviscerated had we been in RCEP. For example, the billions of dollars of incoming FDI flows to India to manufacture consumer electronics for sale in our domestic market and for export would evaporate if our gates were wide open for tariff-free Chinese mobiles, laptops or television sets.

Protectionism and import-substitution indeed failed in earlier eras and stunted India from developing world class export-oriented products. But the record FDI inflows and improvements in "Ease of Doing Business" in the Narendra Modi era

are rays of hope for a late industrialisation renaissance, which needs at least one more decade before judging its success. In this intervening decade, we ought to be cagey about FTAs involving predatory exporting giants.

The second myth about India not joining RCEP is that the other RCEP members — the Asean nations, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand — have been deeply disappointed and India has marginalised itself by abandoning these partners when they needed it the most to counter the Chinese behemoth from within. This too is a misrepresentation. India already has FTAs with 12 out of the 15 RCEP members. Only Australia and New Zealand lack FTAs with India, but its trade with them too has been growing. We have already been quite generous with all RCEP members and remain committed to elevating our strategic partnerships with many of them. Just because we are not in RCEP does not mean India has lost its appeal in the eyes of these countries.

Admittedly, there is far greater economic cooperation potential to be unlocked by India with RCEP members other than China. But one must not downplay the defence and geopolitical dimensions of India's salience in the Indo-Pacific region. The recently strengthened "Quad" security dialogue mechanism has spurred enthusiasm in Japan and Australia, which are speeding up military interoperability for balance in the Indo-Pacific. Japan and Australia may have signed RCEP, but China is far from neutralising the "Quad" or softening opposition from Asean biggies like Vietnam and Indonesia to Chinese intimidation.

The present multilateral and multipolar international environment is complex, and countries

RCEP is not a talisman for India's economic or geopolitical rise. We should move past what was lost by missing the RCEP bus.

often hold overlapping memberships in a variety of groups. Owing to the interests of private corporations and big businesses, RCEP members see economic value in trading and investing with China. But there is also deep fear and anxiety among their national security establishments and ordinary citizens about China's territorial aggrandisement and economic blackmail. This is why, after the Covid pandemic hit, Australia, Japan and India formed the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) to avoid dependence on a single hegemonic power. India is bang in the middle of these new structures and not a sideshow.

The third myth about India and RCEP is that we are rudderless if we do not coalesce into the Asia-wide economic connectivity network because the US and Europe will provide scant solace. It is true that India has not had much joy getting market access to Western countries due to their protectionist politics. But trade experts believe India might secure better terms than what was offered in RCEP if it moves forward FTAs with the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). One must be unsentimental in the pursuit of national interests, which is what the Modi-Jaishankar duo is trying to do.

Another heartening shift is that the Europeans want to permanently deploy military assets in the Indo-Pacific alongside the US to restrain China. France, Germany and the Netherlands are advocating accelerated trade and political linkages with democratic nations like India and Indonesia to contribute to rebalancing in the Indo-Pacific.

RCEP is not a talisman for India's economic or geopolitical rise. We should move past what was lost by missing the RCEP bus. There are other conducive regional and global vehicles to propel India as a "leading power", and it is on its way.

The writer is professor and dean at the Jindal School of International Affairs

LETTERS

BJP, VHP ACTIVISTS

The pro-Hindutva elements in AP are desperately trying to provoke religious passions at every given opportunity. They seem to be insensitive to the pandemic because their goal is polarisation of Hindus against the religious minorities. Better sense should prevail among them because Covid is lurking all over and they should not spread the virus further by bathing in the river.

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

EXERCISE IN FUTILITY

Had Jayalalithaa been alive, she would not have entertained anyone from the Centre, be it PM or HM (*BJP's pointless exertions, DC, Nov. 23*). The AIADMK leadership is needlessly bending over backwards to Amit Shah, indicating their losing power to either Sasikala or Stalin next year. Tamil Nadu politics are peculiar and only the DMK or AIADMK can wrest power. All other parties can never dream to rule from Fort St. George and those who win need to be accommodated at Centre only.

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

AMERICAN SITUATION

The condition of the US is so pathetic (*US surpasses 12 million cases, 2.5 lakh deaths, DC, Nov. 23*). Compared to the US, India is in a better position in terms of Covid cases and deaths but surely not just because of government's best efforts. To avoid a situation like the US, all state governments and Central government should be very strict in taking precautions and people must feel responsible to stop the virus.

P. Govardhana Rao
Kankipadu, Krishna district

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

India fascinating: Haubold

HYDERABAD, November 23 A remarkable young man who had "discovered" India sufficiently by now was in town today. Mr Erhard Haubold, Chief of the Press Bureau of German Industry, Delhi has statistics about Germany's industrial progress at his finger tips. In the course of an hour-long interview, he spoke about the Indo-German relations and the various fields in which further closer, economic ties are possible.

Aakar Patel



From testing to travel, India's Covid handling process is faulty

Hong Kong banned Air India flights again last week, after Indians landing there tested positive for Covid-19 for the fifth time since August. Passengers are supposed to board the aircraft only after taking a test that confirms that they are negative, but the testing does not appear to be done at our end with any sort of rigour. The passengers who boarded the flight and landed in Hong Kong had certificates showing they were Covid negative, but this turned out to be untrue.

I was not surprised by this because there is no standard process that India is following for testing and for flying, and I can vouch for this from personal experience. For the last few months I have been going to Surat every month to attend to a case that has been filed against me. The first time I went was the first time I flew after the Covid-19 outbreak and had to find out what the process for flying was. I was told by the airline

that an app from the Surat Municipal Corporation would have to be downloaded, and a form that was self-attested which said that I was not bearing any symptoms would also be needed to be signed and submitted. I tried downloading the app, but it was a fairly crude piece of software and my phone refused to download it.

On landing in Surat, I was not asked to show either the app or the form but instead all passengers above 50 were told to take a rapid test, and their phone numbers and addresses were taken down. On leaving Surat, I was asked to show if I had downloaded the Aarogya Setu app, which I did not have and did not know I was supposed to have. On landing back in Bengaluru, nothing was asked for.

That was the first time I had travelled. The second time, the following month, on landing in Surat there was nobody at the airport to check anything and I walked about without the test or any form. The

One airline gave face shields but did not insist that passengers use them. Another airline forced all passengers to wear the shield over their mask. Each time there was a different process

third time, which was in October, there were people at Surat airport who were taking the temperatures of passengers who were getting off the plane but no testing or taking down of addresses or phone numbers. This time, on leaving, nobody checked for the Aarogya Setu either.

One airline gave out face shields but did not insist that all passengers use them. Another airline forced all passengers to wear the shield over their mask. Each time there was a different process and even that process wasn't followed with any kind of rigour. It is random and does not reflect the seriousness with which the rest of the

world has taken the virus. This could be one reason why China has 100 times fewer infections than India and why Hong Kong has had to repeatedly ban Air India.

The problem of testing is not limited to the airlines. A report from Bloomberg this week said that questionable testing in India could be the reason why our Covid-19 numbers were down. Half of all testing in India was done through rapid antigen tests. These tests were quick but were likely to result in false negatives (meaning reporting a negative wrongly) half the time. This could mean that one out of every four people getting tested negative could actually be infected with Covid-19.

In mid-August only 25 per cent of the total tests were done in this way but now it is almost 50 per cent. In states like Bihar, about 90 per cent of all tests are of the rapid variety. This could explain the sharp fall in the number of cases in India, the report said. Other nations which

had large numbers of positive cases like the United States and Britain were using the RT-PCR tests, which took longer time for results but were more reliable.

There is also uneven testing across the country and no specific standard. The day the Bloomberg report was published, Bihar, which had just voted in an election with large rallies, reported only 600 cases while the city of Delhi, the nation's capital, added about 7,000 cases in 24 hours.

The report quoted several experts who were sceptical about the numbers in India, and again, this doesn't surprise me. We have no standard processes in place to address the more serious public health hazard of our lifetime. It is obvious to those of us who have travelled in this period. The rest of the world, as the repeated bans on us from Hong Kong show, knows it too now.

The writer is a columnist and a senior journalist

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	44,077.15	0.44
Nifty 50	12,926.45	0.52
S&P 500*	3,581.04	0.66
Dollar (₹)	74.10	0.07
Pound Sterling (₹)	99.07	-0.63
Euro (₹)	88.04	0.14
Gold (₹)	49,767	0.11
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	45.63	1.49
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.900	0.391
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.855	3.136

* As of 9:30 PM IST

‘Asset quality of Indiabulls Hsg, IIFL vulnerable’

Asset quality at non-bank lenders IIFL Finance and Indiabulls Housing Finance is "vulnerable" due to the economic contraction, Moody's Investors Service said. It said Muthoot Finance, the third NBFC it rates, is better positioned because of its focus on the gold loans. Loan collections have shown an improvement for all the three NBFCs despite the six-month loan repayments moratorium ending in August.

Gland Pharma shares rise 40% in two sessions



After decent listing gains last week, Gland Pharma shares gained another 15 per cent on positive management commentary. The shares gained 19.99 per cent intra-day to hit a high of Rs 2,184.50 on the BSE and later closed at Rs 2,091.85, up 14.91 per cent. Gland Pharma has gained 39.43 per cent in just two trading sessions from its public issue price of Rs 1,500 per share of Re 1 face value.

UK biopharma platform buys into Celon Labs

A newly incorporated London-based biopharmaceutical platform has acquired a majority stake in Celon Laboratories Private Limited, a Hyderabad-based specialty generics company having presence in India and emerging markets. The Platform is backed by CDC Group, the UK's publicly owned impact investor, Development Partners International via its ADP III fund and the European Bank for Reconstruction & Development.

Fake Xiaomi products worth ₹33 lakh seized

Xiaomi said counterfeit products with the company's branding were seized from four suppliers in Chennai and three suppliers in Bengaluru. The fake products were worth Rs 33 lakh. As a part of its proactive anti-counterfeit programme, Xiaomi filed complaints with the local police stations, and raids were conducted in the market in October and November. Over 3,000 products were seized.



■ On-tap banking licence already available NBFCs may prefer to skip bank status

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, NOV. 23

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) internal working group's recommendation to allow large Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) to convert into front line banks may see few takers, going by the past experience. The on-tap Universal Banking Licence is anyhow available to most NBFCs and other players since 2016; however, none have opted for going down the banking route so far.

According to experts, fulfilling the statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) and cash reserve ratio (CRR) requirement for NBFCs will play an important role in decision making for most of these lenders. The impact of SLR/CRR will have a severe negative impact on NBFC's margin profile as well as on their current cashflow patterns.

After the IL&FS crisis, most NBFCs have improved their risk practices and currently are sitting on cash piles to avoid any undue defaults or liquidity freeze, pointed out experts.

The internal working group (IWG) headed by executive director P. K. Mohanty has recommended that well-run large NBFCs with an asset size of Rs 50,000 crore and above, including those owned by a corporate house, may be considered for conversion into banks subject to the completion of



10 years of operations, and tougher promoter stake dilution guidelines (49 per cent stake before applying, with a 10-year timeline to reach 26 per cent cap).

Umesh Revankar, MD & CEO at Shiram Transport Finance, said, "The regulator had opened doors for on-tap universal banking licence in 2016 and for small finance bank licence in 2018, so what we are seeing in terms of opening up the sector is not a first from RBI, but opening up candidature for large corporate/industrial houses and well-run large NBFCs for converting to a private sector bank is a progressive step indeed."

"Shriram Transport Finance, being a large NBFC predominantly in the vehicle finance space, we have built pan-India reach with strong last-mile connectivity, all the while delivering a focused product portfolio, backed by speed & quality, to mostly the underbanked and unbanked customers. In contrast, a bank has to provide a very wide range of

services, maintain statutory liquidity ratio and cash reserve requirement requirements and operate at a much higher cost structure compared to NBFCs. So a NBFC will have to weigh the pros and cons after final guidelines, and understand the impact for stakeholders (shareholders, employees, customers) before considering conversion to a bank".

Similarly, in its Q2 conference call, the management of Bajaj Finance had mentioned that consideration of a banking licence will be after the company becomes thrice its current size.

Jignesh Shial, research analyst at Emkay Global, says Bajaj Finance management "would not transform into a bank at the cost of growth, at least over the medium term. However, we believe the suggestions could benefit NBFCs such as L&T Finance Holdings (L&T had tried to obtain a banking licence earlier) and conglomerates such as Aditya Birla Capital due to their diversified loan book."

Rajan, Acharya blast proposal for big corporate entry into banking

New Delhi, Nov. 23: The RBI working group's proposal to allow corporate houses to set up banks is a "bombshell" and at this juncture, it is more important to stick to the tried and tested limits on involvement of business houses in the banking sector; according to an article jointly written by former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan and ex-deputy governor Viral Acharya.

They also said that the proposal is "best left on the shelf".

"The history of... connected lending is invariably disastrous how can the bank make good loans when it is owned by the borrower? Even an independent committed regulator, with all the information in the world, finds it difficult to be in every nook and corner of the financial system to stop poor lending," the article said.

Last week, an Internal Working Group (IWG) set up by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) made various recommendations, including that a large corporate may be permitted to promote banks.

Referring to the report, the article said, "its most important recommendation, couched amidst a

S&P sceptical

NUPUR ANAND MUMBAI, NOV. 23

S&P Global Ratings said on Monday a recommendation from the RBI committee to allow industrial conglomerates to set up banks is fraught with risk.

"The working group's concerns regarding conflict of interest, concentration of economic power, and financial stability in allowing corporates to own banks are potential risks," S&P Global Ratings said in a note. Corporate ownership of banks raises the risk of inter-group lending, diversion of funds and reputational exposure, it said. —Reuters

number of largely technical regulatory rationalisations, is a bombshell".

... it proposes to allow Indian corporate houses into banking. While the proposal is tempered with many caveats, it raises an important question: Why now?, asks the article, posted on Rajan's LinkedIn profile on Monday.

Reforms momentum to continue: Sitharaman

FC BUREAU NEW DELHI, NOV. 23

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday assured industry that the momentum of economic reforms will continue to make India a hotspot of global investment.

Noting that the government has used the pandemic to push ahead with long pending reforms, Sitharaman said, "...The momentum for reform shall continue. Several more active reform-related steps are being taken up."

The financial sector is being professionalised and the government will continue with disinvestment agenda, she added, addressing a CII event.

The minister also said the government will speed up the new privatisation policy for public sector units.

In order to bring in further ease for global players to set up shops here, she said an effective unified single window where access to regulators, policymakers and facilitators would be available at one point.

Referring to the Prime Minister's meeting with representatives from 20 of the world's largest pension and sovereign wealth funds earlier this month, she said the emphasis of the upcoming budget is going to be what the global investor community exactly looking from India in this changing environment.

Investment proposals from HK going into deep freezer

SHRUTI SRIVASTAVA NOV. 23

India is subjecting foreign investment proposals from Hong Kong at par with China as part of a new policy that makes approval mandatory for plans from countries that share a land border, a person with the knowledge of the matter said.

Nearly 140 investment proposals valued at over \$1.75 billion, mostly from China and Hong Kong—China's special administrative region—have been put on hold pending scrutiny, the person said asking not to be identified.

Amidst a border stand off with China, the Indian government tight-



ened rules for foreign direct investment from all nations sharing a land border, making scrutiny mandatory for such investments—a restriction that was earlier applicable only to Pakistan and Bangladesh. The delays may complicate deal-making and impact the flow of capital

from private equity firms and hedge funds, which often include investors domiciled in China or Hong Kong. This may starve Indian companies of investment in the midst of the pandemic-induced economic contraction.

The curbs also apply when the beneficial owner of the proposed investment is situated in any of India's neighbours. A government panel constituted to approve these proposals is yet to decide on the rules, including on beneficial ownership.

Tensions between the two giant Asian economies have been escalating since May. —Bloomberg

Diwali sales bounce for organised retailers

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, NOV. 23

Organised retail saw Diwali sales clocking about 88 per cent of last year. Some of the categories have even seen growth over last year.

The Covid-hit Diwali this year managed to garner 87 to 88 per cent sales of last year for the organised retailers. From 69 per cent sales in October, Diwali season saw a substantial recovery, finds the Retailers Association of India.

"While footfalls were still down, customers have been walking with a clear purpose of what to buy. This saw conversions going up and the bill sizes

were almost double that of last Diwali. While some categories did well, some lagged behind," said Kumar Rajagopalan, CEO, RAI.

Shopping malls too witnessed some activity during the festive days. "While the dwell time has decreased, the ticket size has increased drastically. During the Navratri, Diwali season, shopping malls across the country reported an increase in footfalls on a week-on-week basis and witnessed a continued growth during the weekends. We are hoping to reach 80 per cent of sales on an average," said Amitabh Taneja, chairman, Shopping Centres

Association of India.

Festive-induced shopping has added some impetus to the garments category. However, growth was seen only in the occasion wear and leisure-wear segments. Athletic-wear, including shoes, saw good growth of about 20 per cent as compared to last year's Diwali shopping period. Similarly, luxury brands and occasion-wear brands have also indicated double-digit growth.

Work-from-home category products continued to show faster recovery, especially electronics and consumer durables, with some segments registering double digit growth of about 15 to 18 per cent.

India net exporter of farm equipment, tractors lead

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, NOV. 23

India is a net exporter of agricultural machinery, with tractors contributing to a lion's share of the exports. Despite lock-down disruptions and container issues, tractor-makers could make significant exports in the first half of this year.

In 2019-20, agricultural machinery earned export revenues of \$1,024.58 million. By witnessing a positive trade balance of \$708.3 million, India is a net exporter of agricultural equipment. India exports these equipment to some of the advanced countries like the US, UK, Germany, and Italy apart from Africa, ASEAN and SAARC countries.

Tractors accounted for \$766 million, or 75 per cent, of the agricultural equipment exports. Even during the April-September period of this year, despite the

lock-down and container availability issues, tractor manufacturers clocked exports of \$905 million.

Mahindra and Mahindra is the market leader in the tractor segment, followed by TAFE. Together these companies account for more than 60 percent of the tractor market share in India.

The key customers of Indian tractors are in the US, Turkey, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Algeria, sub-Saharan Africa, Vietnam, Thailand and Ukraine. Indian manufacturers are capable of producing a wide range of advanced tractors with capacities ranging from 20 HP to 120 HP.

India also exports harvesting and threshing machinery, cleaning equipment as well as grading and sorting machinery.

"India is a world leader in exporting solar irrigation

pumps. India being largely an agrarian economy, mechanization has a significant potential," said Engineering Export Promotion Council India chairman Mahesh Desai.

India has a large global market to explore in agricultural machinery. The global agriculture equipment market is projected to reach \$279.5 billion by 2025, growing at a CAGR of 6.5 per cent from 2018 to 2025.

Currently, the global trade is valued \$90 billion and India has a meagre share of 1.4 per cent.

According to industry experts, some of the manufacturers have realised the importance of complying with international quality standards, especially when exporting to Europe and North America. Better compliance of these standards will help Indian products grab a larger share in the global trade.

New Suzuki V-Strom 650XT ABS launched at ₹8.84 L

MICHAEL GONSALVES PUNE, NOV 23

Suzuki Motorcycle on Monday launched a new BS6 variant of the V-Strom 650XT ABS, the ultimate adventure tourer bike

priced at Rs 8.84 lakh. With the new V-Strom 650XT, the Japanese automaker has introduced its first premium segment bike with a BS6 engine. The bike falls in the middleweight adventure category.



Is India letting cronyism get deeper into banking?

ANDY MUKHERJEE NOV. 23

Is India opening the door for big businesses to take over its banking industry?

A working group set up by the Reserve Bank has suggestions for what to do with ownership of private-sector banks. Large industrial houses may be permitted to own controlling stakes, it says, but only after strengthening regulation and supervision to deal with the problem of "connected lending" - basically diverting depositors' funds to their other businesses.

From the conditional nature of the recommen-

dation, it doesn't appear that the regulator will soon reverse its policy of keeping conglomerates away from banking. But the report could pave the way for backdoor entry. Large groups could acquire non-bank finance firms, which may be allowed to convert into banks. In India's post-Covid desperation for capital, the financial system might go from being state-dominated to tycoon-led.

The 1997-98 Asian financial crisis ought to be a cautionary tale. In Indonesia, unchecked commingling of financial and non-financial activities within a corporate

group pushed up the cost of bank rescue to 40 per cent of 1998 GDP. From telecommunications to transportation, India's business landscape is already starting to resemble a Monopoly board. An Indian reprise of J.P. Morgan, the US banker-businessman who used finance to control railroad pricing and stitch together a steel behemoth, would bring the country even closer to the American Gilded Age of the late 19th century.

Crony capitalism has built up slowly in India, emerging as a Frankenstein's monster a decade and a half after



politicians began to unchain the private sector in the early 1990s. That's when-in the name of public-private partnership and rapid economic growth-serious misallocation of credit got under way. In 2018, financier IL&FS Group, which wrote the playbook on

how to cynically exploit a poor country's desire for better infrastructure, went bankrupt. The ensuing funding crunch brought down several titans who were controlling hefty assets with slivers of equity.

The great churning since then has reduced competition and raised concentration. Today, the names of domestic balance sheets available to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for any serious heavy lifting can fit on the back of a postage stamp. But his need to find fresh risk-taking private capital is high, especially after the carnage from the pandem-

ic. Per capita gross domestic product in 2025 may be 12 per cent below pre-virus estimates, "implying the largest amount of scarring among major economies globally," says Oxford Economics' Priyanka Kishore.

That's the backdrop to the RBI internal group's review of bank ownership.

The report came just as the regulator solemnised the sale to Singapore's DBS Group Holdings Ltd of one such lender, the third failure of a major deposit-taking institution in 15 months. Before that shotgun marriage, the country had 22 universal

banks (and 10 so-called small finance banks) in the private sector, with a 30 per cent share of deposits, up from 13 per cent two decades ago. Foreign banks' low 5 per cent share has remained unchanged. Dominant public-sector banks' market share is down to 65 per cent, from 82 per cent in 2000.

This process will only accelerate as state-run institutions consolidate to four from 12. More private banking capital will no doubt be needed. Still, should the country really look to big business to provide it?

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Prajnesh goes down in final

Orlando: Indian tennis player Prajnesh Gunneswaran ended runner-up at the Orlando Open, losing the summit clash of the ATP Challenger event to American Brandon Nakashima, here.

Prajnesh did not have the required power in his strokes to hurt the American, losing 3-6 4-6 in the \$52,080 hard court tournament on Sunday. He could convert none of the eight break chances that came his way in an hour and 28 minute contest. It is Prajnesh's second straight runner-up finish. He had reached the final at the Cary Challenger last week. The result helped Prajnesh to move to 128 from 137. He has already locked the India number one rank with his Orlando show. Serving at 2-3, 30-all, Prajnesh buried a forehand to the net to be down a break point but saved it with an ace. Another forehand error by Prajnesh gave Nakashima another chance but the Indian saved that too with a well set-up winner. — PTI

BCCI condoles Bhaskaran's death

New Delhi: The BCCI on Monday condoled the death of former Kerala first-class cricketer CK Bhaskaran Nair, who had also played an unofficial first-class game against then Ceylon. Bhaskaran breathed his last in Houston, USA, where he practised medicine. He was 79. "The BCCI mourns the death of Dr. CK Bhaskaran Nair. He away on 21st November 2020 at Houston in the United States of America (USA)," the Board stated in a condolence message. Nair was born in 1941 in Thalassery in Kerala. He picked 106 wickets in 42 first-class matches in a 12-year career spanning from 1957 to 1969. He had five five-wicket hauls and scored 580 runs, with the highest being 76 not out. — PTI

Afridi misses SL flight ahead of LPL

Lahore: Pakistan all-rounder Shahid Afridi on Monday missed his flight to Sri Lanka and will be unavailable for at least the first two matches of his franchise Galle Gladiators in the inaugural Lanka Premier League. Afridi tweeted about the same, adding to the agony of the tournament organisers after a spate of heavyweight pullouts. "Missed my flight to Colombo today morning. Nothing to worry, I'll be reaching soon to take part in the LPL for Galle Gladiators. Look forward to joining my teammates," Afridi wrote on his Twitter handle. Galle Gladiators will play their first match on November 27 against Jaffna Stallions, a day after the inaugural season opener between Kandy Tuskers and Colombo Kings. — PTI

Paddler Neha on sporting lessons

Hyderabad: Neha Aggarwal Sharma inaugurated a new table tennis facility at Mansarovar Heights Phase I in Manovikas Nagar, Secunderabad on Sunday. Present on the occasion were her husband and 2007 Youth Commonwealth Games silver medallist Shubham Sharma and Rachana Anandaraman, a Khelo India Games quarterfinalist. The 2008 Beijing Olympics paddler said, "The biggest lesson sports teaches you is how to lose. It teaches you life lessons, which the four walls of a classroom cannot. To manage success, which came early in my career is another, even while taking the ups and downs. To come back from defeat and conquer the TT world gave me strength which I don't think any school or college can."

Live on TV

FOOTBALL

Indian Super League: Jamshedpur vs Chennaiyin from 7.20 pm on Star Sports 2, 3

Champions League: Rennes vs Chelsea from 11.25 pm on Sony Ten 2; Krasnodar vs Sevilla from 11.25 pm on Sony Six; Manchester United vs Istanbul Basaksehir from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Six; Dynamo Kyiv vs Barcelona from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 1; Paris St Germain vs Leipzig from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 3; Juventus vs Farensevaros from 1.30 am (Wednesday) on Sony Ten 2

Regd. No. H/SD/509/2018-20

Printed and Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at Deccan Chronicle Press situated at Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhawaleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry, Ph. 0883-2417618/2417208; Telefax: 0883-2417208. RNI Registration No. 3081/1957. Editor: Kaushik Mitter

High-flying Reds

Jota, Firmino score as Liverpool bulldoze Leicester

London, Nov. 23: Liverpool shrugged off an injury crisis to move level on points with Tottenham at the top of the Premier League with a 3-0 win over Leicester, while 10-man Arsenal were left to cling on for a 0-0 draw at Leeds by Nicolas Pepe's red card on Sunday.

The champions were without the injured Virgil van Dijk, Joe Gomez, Trent Alexander-Arnold, Jordan Henderson, Thiago Alcantara, Xherdan Shaqiri and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, while top scorer Mohamed Salah was absent due to a positive Coronavirus test.

Yet, Jurgen Klopp's men were still imperious in easing past a Leicester side that had started the weekend on top of the table.

The Foxes did not do themselves any favours when Jonny Evans turned James Milner's corner into his own net to reward Liverpool's bright start.

Diogo Jota then became the first ever Liverpool player to score in his first four home league games with a downward header from Andy Robertson's cross. Only a combination of goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel and the woodwork kept Liverpool from a repeat of the 4-0 thrashing they dished out to Leicester when the sides last met in December.

But Robert Firmino then rounded off a fine night for the champions with a towering header from another Milner corner six minutes from time.

Liverpool have now set a new club record of 64 unbeaten league games at Anfield.

PEPE LETS ARSENAL DOWN

Leicester's defeat means Arsenal are just five points off the top four, but Mikel Arteta was furious at Pepe's lack of discipline as the Gunners were lucky to escape with a point at Elland Road where they played 0-0 stalemate with Leeds.

Leeds are 14th after their third consecutive match without a win, but Marcelo Bielsa's men were left cursing their luck as Rodrigo, Patrick Bamford and Raphinha all hit the woodwork in the closing stages.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang had been given a rare chance in the central striker's role, but he was starved of service even before Pepe's dismissal.

Aubameyang's penalty in a 1-0 win at Manchester United last month is the only league goal Arsenal have now scored for nearly 500 minutes.

Meanwhile, Everton recovered from three straight defeats to beat Fulham 3-2 thanks to a double from Dominic Calvert-Lewin. — AFP

RAINA PLEDGES TO LOOK AFTER 34 SCHOOLS

New Delhi, Nov. 23: Former India cricketer Suresh Raina has pledged to build sanitation and drinking water facilities at 34 government schools across Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and NCR.

Raina has decided to ring in his 34th birthday on November 27 with a series of philanthropic activities in association with his NGO, the Gracia Raina Foundation (GRF), named after his daughter.

The initiative will ensure health and hygiene to over 10,000 children studying in these schools.

Raina, along with his wife Priyanka, a co-founder of the foundation kicked off his birthday week by inaugurating the upgraded drinking water facility, separate toilets for boys and girls, hand washing, dish washing area and smart classrooms at Govt Composite Middle School, Noor Nagar Sihani, Ghaziabad as part of the joint project of Gracia Raina Foundation and Yuva Unstoppable. — PTI



Kasper Schmeichel (left) of Leicester City fights for the ball with Liverpool's Roberto Firmino during their English Premier League football match at Anfield in Liverpool, North West England, on Sunday. Liverpool won 3-0. — AFP

Zlatan's brace blanks Napoli

Milan, Nov. 23: Zlatan Ibrahimovic scored twice to bring his tally to 10 league goals this season before limping off with a muscle strain as AC Milan stayed top in Serie 'A' on Sunday with a 3-1 win at 10-man Napoli.

Milan move back two points ahead of Sassuolo — 2-0 winners earlier at Hellas Verona — with Roma third after Henrikh Mkhitaryan netted a brace in a dominant 3-0 win over Parma.

Ibrahimovic continued his fine form, heading in a Theo Hernandez cross after 20 minutes, sending in the second with his knee nine minutes after the break.

But the 39-year-old pulled up clutching his left hamstring and was substituted after 79 minutes.

The Swede has scored in all six games he has played this season, having missed two after contracting Coronavirus.

Napoli played the final half an hour a man down after Tiemoue Bakayoko was sent off for two yellow cards, just after Dries Mertens had pulled a goal back for the hosts.

Norwegian Jens Petter Hauge completed the scoring five minutes into injury time, the 21-year-old getting his first Serie A goal. — AFP



Zlatan Ibrahimovic of AC Milan in action against Napoli during their Italian League match at the San Paolo stadium in Naples on Sunday. — AFP

YUSUF STRIKES TWICE IN LILLE'S 4-0 VICTORY

Paris, Nov. 23: Turkey international Yusuf Yazici struck twice as Lille ended a three-game winless run in French League with a 4-0 victory over Lorient that cut Paris Saint-Germain's lead at the top to two points.

Yazici slotted home from a Jonathan Bamba pass to put Lille ahead on 28 minutes before flicking in a Jonathan David cross to double the advantage early in the second half.

The midfielder then turned provider for Luiz Araujo to add a third for Lille on the hour, with Jonathan David notching his long-awaited first goal for the club in the closing stages.

Meanwhile, Christophe Galtier's side reclaimed second place from Lyon, who beat Angers 1-0 earlier in the day courtesy of a late winner from Zimbabwe striker Tino Kadewere. — AFP

ISAK SHINES AS SOCIEDAD EDGE PAST CADIZ 1-0

Madrid, Nov. 23: Real Sociedad moved three points clear at the top of La Liga on Sunday after Alexander Isak's goal proved the difference in a 1-0 win over Cadiz.

Isak headed in Adnan Januzaj's cross shortly after the hour mark at the Ramon Carranza to secure a sixth consecutive league victory for La Real.

An excellent start to the season shows no sign of abating, with Imanol Alguacil's side now three points clear of second-placed Atletico Madrid, albeit having played two games more.

They have scored an impressive 21 goals from their opening 10 matches, the highest tally in the league, and conceded only four. After travelling to AZ Alkmaar in the Europa League on Thursday, Real Sociedad play at home to Villarreal, who sit third and are the league's other surprise high-fliers.

Defeat means Cadiz sit sixth, just above Sevilla. Getafe were earlier held to a goalless draw by Eibar. — AFP

VIRAT'S WORDS HELPED ME STAY STRONG: SIRAJ

Sydney, Nov. 23: Away from family while grieving the recent loss of his father, Indian pacer Mohammed Siraj says skipper Virat Kohli's advice to "be strong" has helped him stay afloat as he gears up for a gruelling series against Australia.

Siraj's father Mohammed Ghouse, 53, died due to a lung ailment in Hyderabad last week and despite BCCI offering him the option to return home, the fast bowler decided to stay put on national duty.

"Virat bhai said 'Miyaan tension maat le (don't be tense) and be strong. Your dad wanted you to play for India. So, do that and don't stress,' the Siraj told *bcci.tv* on the sidelines of India's training session.

"The skipper told me, 'If you can be strong in this situation, it will only help you'. So those were positive words from the Indian captain and it felt nice," the Hyderabad based pacer further added. — PTI

Aridane stars as Hyderabad win

Goa, Nov. 23: Hyderabad FC began their Indian Super League Season 7 campaign with a solitary goal win over Odisha FC, at the GMC Stadium in Goa on Monday. Debutant Aridane Santana (35') netted a penalty that proved to be the difference between the two sides, as Hyderabad kept their first-ever clean sheet in the league.

Hyderabad were all over Odisha's territory in the opening minutes of the game, forcing their opponents to play deep. They won a series of corners in the first 10 minutes.

The Nizams' first real chance arrived in the 6th minute when Luis Sastre whipped a perfect delivery into the box but Santana failed to direct his header towards goal. That the visitors had worked on their set-pieces was evident. A smartly-executed corner in the 10th minute saw Akash Mishra force Odisha goalkeeper Arshdeep Singh into a save.

After constant probing, Hyderabad got their reward in the form of a penalty. Aridane Santana played Halicharan Narzary clear on goal, and his effort was handled by Odisha skipper Steven Taylor.

Santana kept his composure and slotted home in the 35th minute.

Hyderabad keeper Subrata Paul had to wait until the 40th minute to make his first save, thwarting Odisha striker Manuel Onwu. The Nizams had chances to extend their lead but the outstanding Singh made a couple of good saves just before the breather.

Minutes after the restart, Odisha had their best opportunity to restore parity. But Nandhakumar Sekar's poor first touch allowed Mishra to make a crucial goal-saving tackle. At the hour mark, Odisha had yet another chance. Diego Mauricio ghosted past his marker and squared a pass into the area to Onwu, whose low shot was kept out by Paul.

Hyderabad almost doubled the lead from a set-piece but Joao Victor's goal was rightly ruled offside. Liston Colaco almost produced a moment of magic in the 67th minute, when he dribbled from the half-way mark into the box but was unable to find the finish. In the end, though, the misses did not matter, as Hyderabad held on for the win. — Agencies

CHENNAIYIN LOCK HORNS WITH JAMSHEDPUR FC

Vasco, Nov. 23: Chennaiyin FC will have their task cut out as they go up against two individuals who charted their stunning comeback last season but will turn out for Jamshedpur FC in their Indian Super League game here on Tuesday.

Chennaiyin fans will find not one, but three of their former heroes in the opposing dug-out when their team takes on Jamshedpur FC at the Tilak Maidan Stadium.

Coach Owen Coyle was the mastermind behind last season's stunning recovery that saw Chennaiyin go from rock bottom to within a game of the ISL title.

Jamshedpur conceded 35 goals last season with only Hyderabad FC having a more porous defence. It remains to be seen whether the presence of former Sunderland defender Peter Hartley and Nigerian centre-back Stephen Eze will improve things in this regard.

For Chennaiyin, the biggest task will be to fill the gaps left behind by departing players. Of the foreign contingent from last season, only new captain Rafael Crivellaro and defender Eli Sabia remain. — PTI



Daniil Medvedev of Russia holds up the winner's trophy after defeating Dominic Thiem of Austria 4-6, 7-6 (2), 6-4 in the final of the ATP World Finals at the O2 arena in London on Sunday. — Agencies

Medvedev stuns Thiem to win title

London, Nov. 23: Daniil Medvedev came from behind to beat US Open champion Dominic Thiem in a gripping encounter and win the biggest title of his career at the ATP Finals in London on Sunday.

The Russian fourth seed was second best for large periods at the empty O2 Arena but found a way back into the contest and prevailed 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4.

Medvedev, who beat five-time champion Novak Djokovic and world number two Rafael Nadal earlier in the week, is the first man to beat all three of the world's top-ranked players at the season finale.

The giant Russian, 24, has now won 10 consecutive matches following his title earlier this month at the Paris Masters and his victory will taste sweet a year after a winless debut in London. But it is a painful defeat

for Thiem, who also lost in the final of the elite eight-man event last year, to Stefanos Tsitsipas.

"What a match. One of my best victories, two hours and 42 minutes, three sets against an amazing player," said Medvedev. Thiem weathered early pressure from Medvedev and secured the first break of the match in the fifth game, when the Russian served a double fault.

He sealed the set in fortunate fashion when his forehand clipped the net and looped over Medvedev's racket.

Meanwhile, Wesley Koolhof and Nikola Pietrangeli beat Jurgen Melzer and Edouard Roger-Vasselin 6-2, 3-6, 10-5 to claim the ATP Finals doubles trophy. It was a case of third time lucky for the fifth seeds, who lost their first two finals, in Marseille and at the US Open, earlier in the year. — AFP