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Vol. 25 No. 209 Established 1940 | 16 PAGES | ₹6.00

Cyclone wreaks havoc in Nellore

Heavy rains make water bodies overflow; villages lose connectivity; traffic on NH gets affected

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, NOV. 26

Cyclone Nivar has thrown life out of gear in Nellore and Chittoor districts, apart from other districts in Rayalaseema.

Under the influence of the Cyclone, heavy downpour associated with gale winds uprooted as many as 800 electric poles and 100 odd trees across Nellore district. As a result of this, scores of villages and some towns plunged into darkness, and traffic movement was affected due to the fallen trees.

Traffic on the crucial National Highway No 16 which connects Chennai and Kolkata was affected, and vehicles were stranded for over eight km in view of water overflowed from the Pambaleru stream between Gudur and Manubolu.

Although the movement of two-wheelers and autorickshaws was restricted to allow the traffic of cars and heavy vehicles, the vehicles moved at a snail pace. A diversion road constructed on the National Highway, where the road had breached during heavy rains witnessed in 2015, to build a new bridge led to water stagnation and overflow on the road.

Similarly, traffic came to a grinding halt between Rapur and Venkatagiri following the collapse of a bridge on NH 565 at Lingasamudram village.

Links between several villages in Venkatagiri, Nellore rural, Gudur, Naidupeta, Sullurpeta, Ozili and several coastal areas were cut-off due to the overflow of water from rivulets, canals and tanks on the roads in 16 places.

Heavy inflows of 80,000 cusecs (cubic foot per second) from the Penna upstream forced authorities to release one lakh cusecs of water from the Somasila reservoir.

A breach to the Kanupur Canal at South Mopur near Nellore led to the flooding of nearby habitations and farm lands. In Sydapuram Mandal, Kaivalya Vagu overflowed, causing problems to commuters on the Gudur road.

Around 20 passengers travelling in an RTC bus from Gudur to Rapur had a harrowing experience when the bus got stuck between two streams near Tikkavarappadu Cross Road on Thursday night. NDRF teams rushed to the spot with a boat and launched an operation to shift the passengers to safety.

In the Atmakur segment, links were cut-off between Padamatanaidupalli village and the national highway as Kethemanneru vagu was in spate. In Marripadu mandal, Boggeru Vagu was also on spate, disconnecting transport links between many villages. Connectivity between Chejarla and Mamuduru was severed due to overflowing floodwater from the Gollapalli tank.

In Sullurpet, Vatrapalem was inundated with floodwater and the local population spent sleepless nights. In Nellore city, many areas were inundated and remain without power.

In Chittoor district, the Tirupati urban police along with fire personnel rescued two young farmers — Venkatesh and Ramesh, both 21-year-old — using a speed boat when they were caught in the floodwaters of the Mallemadugu reservoir near Kummarapalli village of Yerpedu mandal.

Both the men were returning to their village after retrieving their motor pumps.

The police said efforts are on to save the third victim Prasad.

A bridge on National Highway 565 collapses at Lingasamudram, cutting off the road link between Rapur and Venkatagiri in Nellore district on Thursday. — DC

Water overflows from the Pambaleru stream on National Highway No 16 near Manubolu on Thursday, restricting the movement of vehicles on the National Highway. — DC

Depression induced rains may continue till Dec. 10

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, NOV. 26

Cyclone Nivar on Thursday crossed the Tamil Nadu coast and moved north-northwest, weakening into a deep depression. It currently lies over south Rayalaseema, about 50 km west southwest of Tirupati.

According to IMD reports, the cyclone was moving northwards and could further weaken into a depression during the next 12 hours. Under its influence, more rains were forecast for Kurnool, Tirupati, Prakasam and Chittoor districts on Friday.

As the southern region continues to soak in heavy rains after Cyclone Nivar, two more low pressures are likely to form over the Bay of Bengal, which could bring more rains to the three states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

> **IMD AP** director S. Stella said a depression is most likely to form in the southeast Bay of Bengal on November 29, but it was too early to say whether it will intensify into a cyclone or cross as the depression.

IMD AP director S. Stella said a depression is most likely to form in the southeast Bay of Bengal on November 29, but it was too early to say whether it will intensify into a cyclone or cross as the depression. "It will take some time to make precise predictions. It is too early," Stella said.

A private meteorologist, however, said the system will intensify into a deep depression on November 30 and cross the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu as a cyclonic storm on December 2.

The meteorologist predicted another low pressure to form over the southern Bay of Bengal on December 10. "This will not only bring more rains but also bring down the temperature in the southern peninsula," he added.

Crops damaged in 1.96 lakh hectares

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 26

Heavy rains caused by cyclone Nivar damaged crops spread over 1.96 lakh hectares in the state, causing a monetary loss of ₹1,000 crore in 10 districts in the state on Thursday.

Based on a preliminary assessment, agriculture crops like paddy, maize, jowar, black gram, green gram, bajra, Bengal gram, red gram, groundnut, korra, tobacco, cotton, sugarcane, horse gram, chillies among others have suffered damage in 1,93,870 hectares in 10 districts, namely Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam, Nellore, Chittoor and Kadapa.

In area wise, Paddy crop was the most damaged as it was affected in 1,74,809 hectares, followed by black gram in 12,932 hectares, cotton 3,966 hectares, groundnut 1,237, chillies 1,210, tobacco 1,112, green gram 425, Bengal gram 420, maize-115, jowar 79 and other crops in smaller areas.

The production loss was estimated to be 4,86,047 metric tonnes while the monetary loss was ₹965.88 crore. The quantum of input subsidy to be given to the affected farmers was ₹281.23 crore.

■ Page 2: CM reviews impact of cyclone Nivar

2 JAWANS KILLED IN SNEAK ATTACK BY TERRORISTS

YUSUF JAMEEL | DC
SRINAGAR, NOV. 26

Two Army jawans were killed in a sneak attack by three car-borne militants on Srinagar's outskirts on Thursday. The police and witnesses said the gunmen appeared at Aban Shah Chowk in Khoshipora area and opened fire on an Army quick reaction team, critically injuring two soldiers. Both succumbed to their injuries while being evacuated to a hospital at the nearby Shariefabad Army cantonment, officials said.

The slain soldiers were identified as Sepoy Rattan Lal of 163 Territorial Army and Sepoy Deshmukh of 101 Territorial Army. They were attached to 2nd Unit of Rashtriya Rifles, the Army's counter-insurgency unit. One report said the assailants also decamped with the service rifle of one of the slain jawans.

Soon after the attack, the Army's 2 RR and the J&K police's Special Operations Group launched a search operation in the area, as the Army pressed a helicopter into service to hunt the militants and the Maruti car used to carry out the attack.

The Army said in a statement: "Terrorists fired indiscriminately at Quick Reaction Team of Indian Army in Khushipora. Being a crowded area, troops exercised restraint to avoid any civilian casualties."

Mock drill

Firefighters take part in rescue operations during an offsite emergency mock drill on ammonia toxic gas release scenario at Mulagada village organised by Coromandel International Limited in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. — DC

After '1 nation, 1 poll', PM roots for one voters' list for all polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, NOV. 26

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday pitched for his oft-repeated concept of "One Nation, One Election", saying it wasn't just a matter of debate, but what the country needed. He also suggested that the Election Commission prepare a single voters' list for all elections — Lok Sabha, Assembly and panchayats, saying separate lists were a "waste of resources".

"One nation, one election isn't just a matter of debate, this is the need for India. Elections are held at different places every few months. The effect it has on development work is known to all," Mr Modi said in a virtual address at the 80th All-India Presiding Officers Conference.

He said a single voters' list was desirable. "Only one voters' list should be used for the Lok Sabha, Vidhan Sabha and other elections. Why are we wasting time and money on these lists?" he said.

Speaking on a day that marks the 71st anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution on November 26, 1949, Mr Modi said: "Our Constitution has many features, but one very special feature is the importance given to duties. Mahatma Gandhi was very keen on this. He saw a close link between rights and duties. He felt once we perform our duties, rights will automatically be safeguarded."

On the 12th anniversary of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, the PM paid homage to the victims, and said India was fighting terrorism with a new policy and a new process. On November 26, 2008, 10 Lashkar-e-Tayyaba terrorists from Pakistan killed 166 people, including 18 security personnel, in a 60-hour siege.

"Many people died in that terror attack, and people of many nationalities were the victims. I pay my homage to all. I bow down to the security personnel who lost their lives in the attack."

The PM also emphasised the need for coordination between the three wings.

AGRI | DISSENT — **Punjab farmers were protesting against Centre's controversial farm laws**

Farmers face water cannons on way to Delhi

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA and SANJAY KAW | DC
NEW DELHI, NOV. 26

The Haryana police on Thursday used water cannons and teargas in a bid to stop thousands of farmers from Punjab from proceeding towards the national capital for their "Delhi Chalo" march against the Centre's new farm laws.

The situation got tense at the Shambu inter-state border on the national highway as farmers thr-ew police barricades off the bridge into the Ghaggar river. It was after a two-hour clash on the bridge that farmers from Congress-run Punjab managed to cross into BJP-ruled Haryana, which used heavy force to try and block them for making their way towards Delhi in tractors and on foot on their two-day protest march against the new farm laws that they fear will reduce their earnings and give more power to large retailers.

Many roads in Haryana, especially those in Gurgaon, were clogged with heavy traffic as barricades had been put up at different places to prevent the protesters from entering Delhi. The roadblocks were especially intense in places like Kundli, near Sonipat, and on the Delhi-Gurgaon border at Sirhaul and Rajokri.

However, despite the tight security measures, about 70-odd protesters, including some trade union members, managed to gather near Jantar Mantar, in the heart of Delhi, but were detained after refusing to vacate the area.

Amid huge protests, agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar appealed to the farmers to suspend their agitation and invited them for talks on December 3. "The government is committed to the welfare of farmers and we are ready for talks. Whether it's about minimum support price or infrastructure, we are ready for a discussion," he said.

Police personnel use water canons on farmers to stop them from crossing the Punjab-Haryana border during Delhi Chalo protest march against the new farm laws, near Ambala on Thursday. — PTI

WEATHER

Max: 28.0°C
Min: 21.0°C
RH: 73%
Rainfall: Nil
Forecast: Overcast. Max/Min temp. 28/21 ºC

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+43,931)	(+489)
93,08,751	1,35,734

covid19india.org

STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS

(+862)	(+3)
TS: 2,66,904	1,444
(+1,031)	(+8)
AP: 8,65,705	6,970

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

6,11,16,312

DEATHS
14,33,777

COUNTRIES, AREAS WITH CASES 218

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari; Dakshinayana
Tithi: Kartika Shuddha Dwadasi till 7.46 am
Star: Ashwini till 12.21 am (Saturday)
Varjyam: 7.51 pm to 9.39 pm
Durmuhurtam: 8.44 am to 9.28 am; 12.25 pm to 1.09 pm
Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 noon

HIJRI CALENDAR
Rabbi-ul Akhir 11, 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 6.13 AM
SUNSET TODAY 5.27 PM
MOONRISE TODAY 2.59 PM
MOONSET TOMORROW 3.32 AM

COUNTER POINT

You should have bribed the survey agency for a positive rank!

SHORT TAKE

Navy gets 2 Sea Guardian drones

New Delhi: The Indian Navy has taken on lease two Sea Guardian drones from an American defence major to enhance surveillance over the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) but the unmanned aerial vehicles can be deployed in the Ladakh region if the need arises, sources said. Two drones have been leased for one year with an option of extending the period by another year, they said. The lease came in the midst of India's plans to procure up to 30 weaponised versions of the drones from the US to bolster the Navy's overall surveillance capabilities in the IOR.

No global flights till Dec. 31: DGCA

Mumbai: Aviation safety regulator DGCA on Thursday extended the suspension of scheduled international commercial passenger flights to December 31. The restrictions, however, will not apply on international all-cargo operations and flights specifically approved by the DGCA, a circular said. "The competent authority has further extended the validity of circular issued on the subject cited above regarding scheduled international commercial passenger services to/from India till 2359 hours (IST) of December 31, 2020," the DGCA said in the circular.

Nivar lashes Tirumala, landslip on Ghat Road

Boulder falls on edge of Bolero vehicle, devotees escape unhurt; huge trees also uprooted at a couple of spots

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, NOV. 26

Tirumala-bound devotees had a miraculous escape when a boulder fell on the edge of their vehicle near 14th km on the ghat road leading to Tirumala on Thursday due to the impact of very severe cyclonic storm Nivar.

The incident has brought back the fears of falling boulders and rocks to devotees and locals, who go all the way to Tirumala via the second ghat road (Tirumala-Tirupati). The incessant heavy rains since Wednesday resulted in landslips at a couple of places on the second ghat road during the late hours on that day. The TTD authorities immediately cleared the boulders and resumed the vehicular traffic on the ghat road.

Again on Thursday morning, a boulder fell on the edge of a Bolero vehicle - carrying devotees to Tirumala, at the 14th km. However, no casualties were reported in the incident and devotees escaped unhurt. On being informed, the TTD vigilance and engineering wing staff swung into action and cleared the boulder, before shifting the devotees to Tirumala.

On the other hand, huge trees were also uprooted at a couple of spots on the first ghat road leading to Tirupati.

The vehicular traffic was interrupted for a while; however, it was later resumed after the TTD staff cleared the debris. The TTD officials have cautioned the devotees taking the twin ghat roads to be alert and drive cautiously.

Meanwhile, the incessant rains poured nonstop and have caused inconvenience to the devotees. They were seen drenched even before reaching the queue complex for darshan as well as after coming out of the temple. The low-lying areas across the hill town and few parts surrounding the temple were flooded, while all the water bodies atop the hill were brimming with water.

Following heavy rains in the last two days, the TTD has decided to close down Srivari Mettu footpath route for two days. This temporary closure of the pedestrian route at Srinivasa Mangapuram is owing to felling of huge rocks.

Water gushes out from Kanupuru canal following a breach at South Mopuru village in Nellore rural mandal on Thursday. — DC

CM reviews impact of Nivar

From Page 1

About 21 varieties of horticulture crops suffered damage in about 2,834.52 hectares located in Prakasam, Nellore, Chittoor and Kadapa, affecting nearly 5,689 farmers.

The loss of horticultural crops was estimated to be ₹38.18 crore and the estimated input subsidy to be given to the affected farmers was estimated to be as per norms of State Disaster Response Fund to be ₹460.46 lakhs.

With IMD predicting further rainfall, the farmers are worried over the fate of their crop. Farmers who raised paddy late in the Kharif season and those who are raising various crops in the current rabi season have become victims of natural calamity. Teams of officials have started visiting areas where crops were damaged to assess the extent of loss.

The cyclone has also disrupted normal life in East and West Godavari districts, which received moderate to heavy rains. Cargo operations have stopped in Anchorage Port at Kakinada.

Earlier, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy reviewed the impact of Cyclone Nivar with concerned officials at his Camp Office. He directed them to take all necessary measures to provide relief to the affected people.

The CM ordered the officials to support the family members of a person, who died due to electric shock in Nellore district and called for enumeration of crop damages to provide relief to the affected farmers. The officials informed the CM that they were taking steps to rescue people trapped near the Mallemadugu reservoir in Renigunta.

SCR RESTORES CHARMINAR EXPRESS SERVICES

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, NOV. 26

The South Central Railway (SCR) has restored the services of Charminar Express, operating between Tambaram (Chennai) and Hyderabad, from Thursday and cancelled two other trains on November 28 in view of cyclonic weather conditions in South Coastal AP and Tamil Nadu. Train No. 06012 operating between Hazarat Nizamuddin and Kanyakumari has been cancelled on November 28 while Train No. 05119 running between Rameswaram and Manduadih was cancelled on November 26.

Normal life crippled in temple town

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, NOV. 26

Normal life was crippled in Tirupati as the unabated rains due to the very severe cyclonic storm Nivar has inundated several parts in the temple city on Thursday.

The incessant downpour in the Tirumala forest area as well as in the city since Wednesday led to inundation of many houses located on the banks of Kapilatheertham and Malavadigundam streams and few other low-lying colonies.

Municipal commissioner P.S. Girisha personally visited these areas and ordered for immediate evacuation of people in vulnerable locations. They have shifted nearly 468 persons from 154 families to relief centres, set-up at schools in Tiruchanoor and Mangalam.

Meanwhile, adding fuel to the distress caused by the rains, power remained disrupted in a few areas all day. People were forced to remain indoors and most of the shops remained closed. On the other hand, the ongoing works of elevated corridor - Garuda Varadhi, passing through the Tirumala bypass road has obstructed the flow of rain water, adding much inconvenience to commuters.

Adding fuel to the distress caused by the rains, power remained disrupted in a few areas all day. People were forced to remain indoors and most of the shops remained closed.

Drains were overflowing at many areas in the city and roads submerged with water resembled tiny canals at various arterial junctions.

The impact of cyclone was felt in the form of water-logging in many parts of the city including Subbareddy nagar, Korlagunta, Satyanarayanapuram, Akkarampalli, Reddy and Reddy colony, Bhavani nagar and Tirumala bypass road etc. In Tirupati rural, drainage overflowed at Vaikuntapuram, Padmavathi Nagar and Lakshmipuram junctions.

The railway underbridge near the railway station was submerged with water and the Karakambadi and Tiruchanoor roads were among the worst-hit areas in the city. This forced the urban police to suspend vehicular traffic along these roads, while the staff of municipal corporation of Tirupati tried to restore normality, by deploying earth movers and cranes.

Winds, heavy rains batter Godavari dists

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, NOV. 26:

Cyclone Nivar has disrupted everyday life in East and West Godavari districts, which received moderate to heavy rains throughout the day accompanied by very chilli winds.

Most people kept indoors, and traffic was also disrupted in many places. There was extensive waterlogging at many places, and roads and agriculture fields with harvested paddy crops were inundated in many areas. Farmers suffered heavy losses once again.

Amalapuram (88.4mm), Allavarm 77.4 mm, Uppalaguptam 77.6 mm, Katrenikona 65.8 mm, Rajahmundry 16.2 mm and Kakinada 24.22 mm rainfall was recorded in East Godavari and Polduru 38.2 mm, Mogalturu 36.7 mm Palakollu 35.22 rainfall was recorded in West Godavari district for the past 24 hours.

The sea was very rough and turbulent at Uppada shore, and the waves swept over the geo-tube wall onto the road. The traffic was disrupted on the beach road. Lord Rama Temple, which was partially damaged in last time rains, has now totally collapsed with these rains.

Some of the damaged houses near the shore in Uppada mandal washed away into the sea.

The tahasildar L. Sivakumar said that the U. Kothapalli mandal received continuous rains for the past 24 hours, but lowest rainfall was recorded. He said that the temple was partially damaged last time and now totally collapsed due to these rains. He said that nearly 2,000 fishermen families including 800 families residing at the seashore in U. Kothapalli mandal would be given house sites and also houses at Kenapa Peta and Machavaripalem villages to sort out the sea-erosion problem to them permanently on December 26 irrespective of rules. He said that all the families of the seashore would be shifted to these new houses.

Sea waves swept over geo-tube wall ii) A temple at Suradapet was destroyed due to sea waves

Meanwhile, the cargo operations have stopped in Anchorage Port for the past two days due to large waves and chilli winds. Due to the heavy gales, the steel barges are not in a position to a standstill at sea.

The Port Officer-in-charge Mr Raghava Rao said that the port had not suspended the operations, but due to bad weather conditions, the workers were bringing barges to the shore without making any operations.

He said that nearly 17 ships have been waiting for the handling of rice cargo in anchorage port.

The farmers in East and West Godavari districts incurred significant losses as their harvesting crops were inundated their respective fields due to heavy rains.

The farmers say that they lost the entire Kharif crop and they are not able to get even investment and even labourer expenses.

RAIN LASHES PRAKASAM DISTRICT

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, NOV. 26

Rain lashed Prakasam district under the influence of the cyclone Nivar on Thursday. The average rainfall between 6 am and 6 pm on Thursday was 87.4 mm (8.7 cm) with Kandukuru recording highest of 160.6 mm (16 cm) and Ardhaveedu mandal recording 29.0 mm (2.9 cm).

Ulavavapadu, Kandukuru, Singarayakonda, Gudlur, Lingasamudram, Zarugumalli, Ongole and Tanguturu mandals abutting SPSR Nellore district recorded heavy rainfall compared to other mandals.

District Collector Pola Bhaskar has activated the official machinery to be on alert to deal with any situation as rains are forecasted for next two days. He told the special officers posted to mandals to remain in the mandal headquarters. Meanwhile District SP Siddharth Kaushal visited the coastal villages of Kottapatnam, Etamukkala, Sanku Vani Kunta and Sura Reddy Palli to review the cyclone preparedness and safety procedures.

He inquired the Ongole DSP about the current situation.

Two farmers rescued in Chittoor

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, NOV. 26

Tirupati urban police wing, along with the fire personnel, have rescued two out of the three young farmers who were marooned in floodwaters of Mallemadugu reservoir near Kummarapalli village of Yerpedu mandal in Chittoor district on Thursday.

The two rescued farmers Venkatesh, 21, and Ramesh, 21, along with another farmer Prasad, 30, had gone to their farmlands at around 6 am to retrieve their agriculture motor starters. With the incessant rains caused by Cyclone Nivar since Wednesday, Mallemadugu reservoir was overflowing, inundating the entire stretch under the reservoir in the Yerpedu and Renigunta mandals.

The young farmers were caught in the floodwaters at around 6.30 am when they were returning to the village after retrieving their motor pumps. On being informed, Renigunta circle inspector Anju Yadav reached the spot immediately and spotted farmers holding on to the branches of trees to save themselves. She called upon the police and fire teams for a rescue operation.

The police, along with the fire brigade, rushed to the place and commenced rescue operations to save the farmers stranded in the floodwaters. As the canal was overflowing due to non-stop heavy rains, rescue operation was halted for a while.

On learning about this, Tirupati SP Avula Ramesh Reddy, MLAs Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy and B. Madhusudhan Reddy reached the spot and requested the state authorities for a chopper to rescue the farmers.

Joint-collector-2 Veera Brahmam, RDO Kanakanarasa Reddy, DSP Ramachandra, fire official Adhinarayana Reddy joined the rescue teams to evacuate the farmers. "Firstly, we sought the help of authorities to send a chopper to rescue the farmers, but due to the heavy rain it wasn't possible at that time. However, we have requested the district authority for a speed boat, which reached the spot by afternoon and helped us in rescuing two farmers. Rescue operation is still underway for the third person," SP Ramesh Reddy said.

While the Chandragiri legislator Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy along with the rescue teams got down into the flood stream in the speedboat and rescued two farmers, Srikalahasti MLA Madhusudhan Reddy has rewarded the rescue personnel with ₹1 lakh cash.

Farmers, who got marooned in floodwaters of Mallemadugu reservoir near Kummarapalli village of Yerpedu mandal in Chittoor district on Thursday, hold on to the branches of trees to save themselves.

3,363 EVACUATED FROM LOW-LYING AREAS IN NELLORE

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, NOV. 26

District collector K.V.N. Chakradhar Babu said that as many as 20 kutcha houses were damaged fully and 56 damaged partially while 43 houses are either marooned or inundated because of heavy rains since Wednesday.

With respect to damage to agriculture, paddy nurseries and Blackgram crop was inundated in 420 hectares and 500 hectares respectively apart from transplanted paddy in 200 hectares.

Tada tank and Lingala tank were breached.

Mr Chakradhar Babu said they have evacuated 3,363 people belonging to 1,035 families from low-lying areas and shifted them to 92 relief camps.

He said road breaches took place between Venkatagiri – Kurjagunta, Koduru – Pattapupalem Road and Pidathapoluru – ST Colony Road.

He informed that rescue and relief works are in progress with the assistance of 44 NDRF Men and 45 SDRF men across the district.

IN BRIEF

Assembly, Council from Nov. 30

Vijayawada: Andhra Pradesh Assembly and Council sessions are scheduled to commence on November 30 at 9 am and 10 am respectively. Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan summoned the 15th Session of the Legislative Assembly and 37th Session of the Legislative Council to be held at their respective halls at Velagapudi in Amaravati. The sessions of both Assembly and Council are expected to continue for five days.

STATE CABINET MEET TO BE HELD TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 26

The AP Cabinet meeting, to be chaired by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, will be held at 11 am on Friday.

The Cabinet is expected to discuss on the extent of damage to the crops under the influence of cyclonic storm Nivar and relief to be provided to the affected farmers. It will also discuss about the issues related to State Election Commission's move to conduct local body polls in February and also arrangements to be made for distribution of Covid-19 vaccine once it becomes available for distribution from the Centre.

Moreover, the Cabinet will also discuss about several bills on various issues to be introduced in the legislature as the sessions for both Assembly and Council are scheduled to be held from November 30.

STAMP DUTY ON LOANS WAIVED OFF FOR PETTY TRADERS

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 26

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy directed the revenue authorities to waive off stamp duty for documentation to obtain bank loan by petty traders who are being covered under Jagananna Thodu scheme to get interest free loan of ₹10,000 each.

Village and ward secretariats and housing principal secretary Ajay Jain in a release here on Thursday said that based on a request from the beneficiaries to waive off the stamp duty as they had to spend ₹324 each for carrying out documentation for getting the bank loan, the Chief Minister directed the revenue officials to take measures to waive off stamp duty for loan documentation.

Accordingly, 10 lakh beneficiaries under the scheme would get the benefit of ₹32 crore once the stamp duty was waived off.

NIVAR STRIKES A BLOW TO CROPS IN NANDYAL DIVISION

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, NOV. 26

Heavy rains lash out several areas in Nandyal division as Nivar cyclone strikes. Mala Vagu and Vakkileru expected to swell by Thursday night hampering traffic on Rudravaram and Siliveru.

People were banned from entering Kundu and Tungabhadra rivers and cautioned not to go near tanks which are 80 per cent full. Holiday was declared for schools and Pushkar ghats have been strictly monitored by the SDRF personnel.

The Nivar cyclone damaged paddy in at least 20,000 hectares which was ready for harvest in Allagadda Assembly segment of Nandyal revenue division in Kurnool district on Thursday.

Heavy rains and chilly winds started blowing from morning hours and these rains have thrown the normal life out of gear at various parts of the district particularly Allagadda, Chagalamarri, Sirivella, Rudravaram Sanjamala, Uyyalawada and Mahanandi mandals.

The Nandyal division which has been worst affected by the Nivar cyclone received a total rainfall of 81.40 mm in the last 24 hours. A highest rainfall of 13.20 mm was recorded in Allagadda mandal, followed by Sanjamala 12.80 mm and Bandi Atmakur 8.60 mm. Flood water breached several causeways at various places in the said mandals.

Four control rooms including command control room at Kurnool collectorate - 08518 277305 and each one at three revenue divisions like Kurnool RDO office - 83339 89011, Nandyal sub collector office - 08514 221550 and 83339 89013 and Adoni RDO office 83339 89012 have been established.

REVIEW | MEETING

Officials told to prepare DPR on supply of drinking water from Polavaram project to Visakhapatnam

CM tells officials to expedite execution of three ports

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 26

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed the officials to complete execution of the three ports coming up at Ramayapatnam, Bhavanapadu and Machilipatnam in two-and-half-years.

The CM held a review meeting on development of ports and industrial corridors at his Camp Office here on Thursday.

The officials informed him that tenders for execution of Ramayapatnam port would be finalised by December 15 to ensure that the works begin in February 2021. They said that in the first phase, the port would come up with four berths with a capacity to handle 15 million tonnes of cargo.

On Bhavanapadu port, the officials said the tenders will be finalised by December 15 and start works in March, 2021. They said that in the first phase, four berths would be executed to handle 25 million tonnes of cargo.

With regard to Machilipatnam port, the officials said that tenders for its execution would be finalised by February 15 so that works could be commenced in April, 2021, and added that in the first phase, six berths would be developed to handle 26 million tonnes of cargo.

The CM also asked the officials to find out feasibility for developing a port at Rambilli area so that it could bring down pressure on Visakhapatnam port in terms of handling cargo and help reduce pollution.

The CM made it clear to the officials that works related to development of the three ports, eight fishing harbours, Kopparthi industrial cluster, development of Bhogapuram airport, Visakhapatnam metro rail and supply of drinking water from Polavaram project to Visakhapatnam through pipeline, to be given top priority for their expeditious execution.

With regard to development of Bhogapuram airport, the CM felt the need to develop a beach road also so that people after landing in Bhogapuram airport could reach Visakhapatnam early through beach road.

He directed the officials to prepare a Detailed Project Report on supply of drinking water from Polavaram project to Visakhapatnam. He laid stress for making efforts by the officials to lay foundation stones for the three projects including Bhogapuram airport, beach road and drinking water supply by Sankranti festival.

The officials informed the CM about the progress of works related to development of Visakhapatnam-Chennai industrial corridor with an emphasis on development of Atchutapuram and Nakkapalli clusters. The CM laid stress for enhancing air cargo facilities in Tirupati, Nellore and Kadapa airports.

The CM asked for usage of desalinated water for industries as it would cost just ₹4 per litre and directed the officials to ensure setting up of sewage treatment plants in industrial corridors and industrial estates and also asked for taking steps to avoid pollution of groundwater tables with untreated effluents from industries.

SHORT TAKES

WORKERS TAKE OUT RALLIES GODAVARI

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, NOV. 26

Several trade unions like INTUC, AITUC, CITUC and others took out processions in East and West Godavari districts on Thursday in protest against the anti-policies of the NDA government.

The leaders of the unions called upon the people to defeat the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-Amit Shah leadership from the country as they are implementing anti-labour, agriculture, employees and teacher policies and several systems were being destroyed.

The trade unions in Kakinada, Rajamahendravaram, Eluru and other cities took out huge processions by raising slogans against the NDA government policies.

The leaders said that the NDA government led by Mr Modi started handing over the prominent public sector companies and government bodies like Railways, BSNL, LIC, Defence, Banking and oil companies to the private sector and these decisions will spoil the society.

53 FEMALE LIFE CONVICTS TO BE RELEASED

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 26

Fifty-three life convicted female prisoners, who were to be released from the jails on special remission on the eve of Independence Day, 2020 in the state, will walk free after the administrative procedures.

The state government on Thursday issued GO Ms No. 142 here, granting special remission of sentence to the life convicted female prisoners who had been convicted for offences against the laws based on recommendation of the Standing Committee constituted for the purpose.

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan under Article 161 of Constitution of India, read with Section 432 of Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, remitted the unexpired residual sentence to 53 life convicts.

THEPPOTSAVAM AT TEMPLE CANCELLED

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, NOV. 26

Theppotsavam programme to famous Lord Sri Trimurthyatmaka Sri Satyanarayana Murthy in Annavaram in East Godavari to be performed at Pampa River to God and Goddess was cancelled on Thursday due to the heavy rains and chilli gales during Cyclone Nivar.

According to the temple officials, Annavaram Devasthanam is organising the programme in every Ksheerabhdhi Dwadasi festival.

Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy pays tributes to the portrait of Dr B.R. Ambedkar on the occasion of Constitutional Day at the camp office on Thursday. — DC

Andhraites in Hyd urged to vote for TD nominees

TD followers in AP make fervent appeal in 20 GHMC divisions

MD ILYAS | DC
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 26

In an innovative move, die-hard Telugu Desam fans, leaders, activists and sympathizers residing in Andhra Pradesh have started an oral campaign among Andhrites in Hyderabad urging them to ensure that TD candidates would win in the GHMC elections, slated for December 1.

They are contacting Hyderabad-based Andhra people over phones, messages and social media groups appealing to vote for TD as Andhra settlers are crucial in several wards of GHMC.

Various groups were formed under TD social media wing with CBN Army, TDP warriors, TDP Army, TDP Youth, TDP Mission 2022, TDP Yuvasena, Vote for TDP and others, which are actively working for the yellow party.

They started the campaign on Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Twitter and other social media platforms asking them to work for TD win.

- Telugu Desam supporters pointed out that Andhrites are largely settled in Kukatpally, LB Nagar, Rajendranagar, Uppal and other adjacent areas and they were a deciding factor in the elections in 20 municipal divisions.

They are reminding the electorate that it was TD, which developed Hyderabad and had established Hitec City.

They pointed out that Andhrites are largely settled in Kukatpally, LB Nagar, Rajendranagar, Uppal and other adjacent areas and they were a deciding factor in the elections in 20 municipal divisions.

TD supporters Kesani Suresh, Bobba Premnath and G. Jayaram Chowdary said that TRS leader K.T. Rama Rao was trying to woo Andhra settlers by giving statements in support of Amaravati but Andhrites know the truth. They said that there is a good response to TD in those 20 divisions.

They condemned the statement of MIM about removal of NTR statue in NTR Gardens and his memorial.

They said that as YSR Congress is not contesting GHMC elections, Andhrites would support TD.

STATE ENLARGES SCOPE OF SEB TO CURB GAMBLING, SMUGGLING

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 26

The state government has enlarged the scope of Special Enforcement Bureau to handle offences and some other illegal activities.

The state government has issued GO Ms No. 120 here on Thursday, permitting the Special Enforcement Bureau department to handle the offences like gambling and gaming of all kinds, including online betting, matka and others, narcotics drugs and psychotropic substances like ganja, manufacturing and sale of banned products like gutka and others and smuggling of red sanders.

Earlier, the state government had issued GO Ms No. 41 dated 9-5-2020, creating a new department called Special Enforcement Bureau to curb all kinds of illegal activities relating to liquor and sand.

AP records 1,031 Covid cases

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, NOV. 26

AP registered 1,031 new Covid-19 cases raising the tally to 8,65,705 and eight deaths taking the toll to 6,970 in the last 24 hours.

The state health authorities released Covid-19 bulletin here on Thursday reporting that out of 67,269 samples tested, 1,031 persons were found infected with Covid-19. Out of a total number of 98,55,315 samples tested so far, 8,46,120 patients were recovered while 12,615 patients are still active with the virus.

Among the daily cases of Covid-19 infections, Guntur reported the highest of 172 followed by 162 in Krishna, 126 in West Godavari, 117 in East Godavari, 102 in Chittoor, 84 in Visakhapatnam, 56 in Anantapur, 55 in Kadapa, 43 in Prakasam, 41 in Nellore, 29 in Viziana-garam, 23 in Srikakulam and 21 in Kurnool.

East Godavari continues to top the state with 4,143 cumulative cases of Coronavirus active cases followed by 1,694 in Krishna, 1,481 in Guntur, 1,057 in West Godavari, 1,046 in Visakhapatnam, 830 in Nellore, 617 in Chittoor, 454 in Prakasam, 364 in Srikakulam, 309 in Anantapur, 253 in Kadapa, 191 in Kurnool and 176 in Vizianagaram.

The rate of recovery of Covid-19 patients has been steady in East Godavari with 1,17,308 followed by 90,472 in West Godavari, 82,003 in Chittoor, 70,437 in Guntur, 65,697 in Anantapur, 60,356 in Prakasam, 59,988 in Nellore, 59,488 in Kurnool, 56,373 in Visakhapatnam, 53,523 in Kadapa, 44,688 in Srikakulam, 42,728 in Krishna, 40,164 in Vizianagaram, 2,461 from other states and 434 from other countries.

Among the daily cases of Covid-19 deaths, Krishna reported two followed by one each in East Godavari, Guntur, Kadapa, Kurnool, Visakhapatnam and West Godavari.

Among cumulative cases of death of Covid-19 infected patients, Chittoor topped with 824 followed by 648 in Guntur, 636 in East Godavari, 630 in Krishna.

CONSTITUTION DAY OBSERVED IN EAST, WEST GODAVARI

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, NOV. 26

The Indian Constitution Day was observed on Thursday by the Government institutions in East and West Godavari Districts. The officials garlanded the photographs of Dr B.R. Ambedkar and appreciated the Constitution and its preamble.

East Godavari Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that the Constitution was observed by all government offices, autonomous institutions, local bodies and educational institutions by explaining and using the constitutional values and its ideals. In Nehru Yuva Kendra, the officials observed the constitution day headed by the Chief Executive Officer.

TD slams AP govt for poor arrangements for pushkar

DC CORRESPONDENT
NELLORE, NOV. 26

- TD MLC said the government had failed to create a spiritual ambience at the venue of the Pushkarams.
- He alleged small traders were worst hit due to negligence of the state government

District unit president of Telugu Desam and MLC Beeda Ravichandra rebuked the AP State Government for not paying any attention to hold the Tungabhadra Pushkarams with usual fanfare.

In a statement on Thursday, he expressed surprise over not releasing water into the river, except on the first day of Pushkarams, to enable devotees to take baths.

He alleged that the state government has pursued Karnataka to release water on the first day for inaugural function in the presence of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and ignored the subject later.

Stressing that pilgrims going for the sacred bath are returning homes with dissatisfaction, he said former chief minister Chandrababu Naidu had set a benchmark on how to organise Pushkarams and the entire country lauded him for holding Krishna Pushkarams in a grand manner.

He said the government had failed to create a spiritual ambience at the venue of the Pushkarams. He alleged that small traders banking on the event were worst hit because of the negligence of the government towards the holy event.

He demanded the government to rescue the affected small traders.

12 TEST POSITIVE FOR CORONA AT PUSHKAR GHATS

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, NOV. 26

Twelve people have been affected with Covid-19 at the Pushkar ghats in the district in the past six days, and scores of people have been found symptomatic, said DMHO Dr Rama Giddaiah.

The Pushkar ghats have been monitored closely, and 800 to 1,000 Rapid Antigen tests were conducted daily on the staff and visitors at the ghats, he said.

Of the 12 affected, two were Purohits and six others were police officers who came from Kadapa for Pushkar duties, he said.

Daily one reading period for students

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, NOV. 26

- Murali said that the students must go to libraries on the special period and read the newspapers and books compulsorily.

The Naadu-Nedu programme technical consultant A. Murali said that a special period would be allotted in every school in the state in every working day as reading period to inculcate reading habit and improve the general knowledge levels of the students.

He inspected the Naadu-Nedu works in several schools like MPP School in Seethepalli, MPUP School in Rampachodavaram and Pedageddada villages in the agency area of East Godavari on Thursday.

He said that the students must go to libraries on the special period and read the newspapers and books compulsorily. He said that it would improve their general knowledge and inculcate reading habits among the students and their bright career in future. He also said that the students have to wear uniforms from Monday onwards.

He said that infrastructure facilities would be provided in every school and the teachers should mould the students as brilliant.

Speaking about the Constitution Day, Mr Murali said that the MLAs, ministers and MPs should make the laws abiding by the Constitution, written by Dr B.R. Ambedkar and the Judges also give judgements according to laws.

He said that Dr B.R. Ambedkar wrote the Constitution to feel proud of every citizen. The District Education Officer S. Abraham, Tribal Welfare Department Executive Engineer Ramadevi and others were present. They unveiled the logo for the Naadu-Nedu programme.

AGITATION IN FAVOUR OF BOSE TO BE PICKED UP

DC CORRESPONDENT
KAKINADA, NOV. 26

The recent quarrel at the District Review meeting between Kakinada MLA Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy and Rajya Sabha member Pilli Subhash Chandra Bose has not subsided yet, even though the Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy called both leaders and made peace between the two.

However, at the ground level, there are still strong feelings against Mr Reddy for his aggressive and abusive behaviour at the DRC against Mr Bose. The Jana Sena party has condemned Mr Chandrasekhara Reddy's behaviour, and BC associations have given a call to storm the house of Mr Reddy on December 11, if he doesn't tender an apology by then. Jana Sena leader Pantham Venkateswara Rao condemned the comments.

Maoist leader killed in encounter

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, NOV. 26

A Maoist leader was killed and another injured in an exchange of fire between security personnel and the Maoists in Thotaguda forests Malkangiri on Thursday, a senior police officer said.

BSF jawans, acting on a tip-off, had launched a combing operation at Jantri forest in Swabhiman Anchal, a remote part of the district, earlier in the day, Malkangiri Superintendent of Police Rishikesh Khilari said.

Maoists fired at the security personnel, who then retaliated by killing one of the rebels on the spot. One Maoist suffered injuries, while the rest managed to flee the scene, Khilari said.

The deceased Maoist has been identified as Kishore, Area Commander of East Division, who was involved in a series of criminal activities, he said.

The police have intensified combing operations in the area to flush out leftwing extremists from Swabhiman Anchal.

Taking to Twitter, Odisha DGP Abhay said, "There was an exchange of fire between security forces and Maoists today in Swabhiman Anchal. The dead body of one Maoist with an AK 47 has been recovered and one injured Maoist is being evacuated. Security force personnel are safe. Well done security forces."

Mock drill held on toxic gas release

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, NOV. 26

Coromandel International Limited, Visakhapatnam on Thursday organised an off-site emergency mock drill on ammonia toxic gas release scenario in Mulagada village, near to its vicinity as per the instructions of the District Collector V. Vinay Chand.

For the last one-week, emergency preparedness awareness activities were carried out for the Mulagada and all nearby villagers through village leaders, the Sachivalayam staff and volunteers.

As part of the mock drill at 3.25 pm, ammonia release scenario has been postulated in the plant premises and which in turn lead to an off-site emergency in nearby Mulagada village. Ambulances and fire tender reached the incident spot from Coromandel.

As part of mutual aid ambulances and fire tender from Andhra Petrochemicals Limited, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited and also St Anns hospital aided in the rescue operations.

Mulagada villagers were evacuated by Coromandel rescue team to the nearest Assembly point. Personnel from district crisis group and officials from Police, Village Sachivalayam team and NGO's participated in the drill as part of an off-site emergency plan.

J. Siva Shankar Reddy, Joint Chief Inspector of Factories, lauded Coromandel for systematically conducting off-site mock drills and creating excellent awareness to the community members through their various awareness programmes.

B.V. Ramani, mandal revenue officer, Mulagada mandal and Sreeram Murthy praised the mock drill.

'Prepare plans for Rabi by March 31'

DC CORRESPONDENT
ELURU, NOV. 26

Deputy Chief Minister and the medical and health minister Alla Kalikrishna Srinivas (Nani) suggested the officials should prepare plans to complete the Rabi crop by March 31, creating awareness among the farmers about the Polavaram project works.

Speaking in the Irrigation Advisory Board meeting here on Thursday, Mr Nani said that 4.6 lakh acres out of 5, 29,962 acres of normal area is being cultivated in Rabi season through 11 main canals and its subsidiaries in 29 mandals in West Godavari District. He said that due to construction of Polavaram Project works from April, and the canals would be closed by March 31. He said that if the farmers go for short duration crops which will give yield within 120 to 135 days, there will be no problem for the second crop and there is no water scarcity to them. He said that the officials should make use of the Lift Irrigation Schemes and other water resources if necessary for saving the second crop.

He also suggested the RWS and Panchayat officials fill up the drinking water tanks in March. The housing minister Ch. Sri Natha Raju said that the officials should repair the canals and take steps for continuous water supply to the agriculture fields. The West Godavari District Collector Revu Muthayala Raju said that the officials of irrigation, agriculture and RWS are working with coordination and take steps for irrigation and drinking water.

Meanwhile, East Godavari District Collector D. Muralidhar Reddy said that special committees had been formed to cultivate short-duration varieties for the second crop. He along with Joint Collector G. Lakshmisha, Ch. Keerthi, and G. Rajakumari conducted a video conference with the officials and reviewed the Rabi action plan. He said that the officials should take steps for sowing paddy in the central delta from 5 to 10 December, Eastern Delta from 1 to 10 December. The minister said that village, mandal, constitution and district level committees have been formed and Rythu Bharosa Kendras would be involved in the task.

NMDC Limited
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CIN:L13100TG1958GOI001674.

CONTRACTS DEPARTMENT

Tender Enquiry No: HO(Contracts)/NISP/O&M/RMHS/A2 Dated: 27/11/2020

NMDC Limited, A "NAVARATNA" Public Sector Company under Ministry of Steel, Govt. of India, invites **online bids** from experienced domestic bidders for **"Operation & Maintenance of Ore, Flux, Sinter and Slag area (A2) at Raw Material Handling System (RMHS) of 3 MTPA ISP at Nagarnar".**

The detailed NIT and Bid documents can be viewed and /or downloaded from **NMDC website http://www.nmdc.co.in, Central Public Procurement portal http://www.eprocure.gov.in/epublish/app** and MSTC portal **www.mstcecommerce.co.in** from **27/11/2020 to 18/12/2020.**

For Accessing the Bid document from NMDC website, the bidder has to register as ***'New User'*** in Bid section at NMDC's website link **http://www.nmdc.co.in/nmdctender/default.aspx**

For Accessing the Bid document from Central Procurement Portal **www.eprocure.gov.in,** the Tenderer has to click on "Latest active Tenders".

For Accessing the Bid document from MSTC, bidders to visit website link **http://www.mstcecommerce.co.in/eprochome/nmdc/buyer_login.jsp** and search **Tender No. NMDC/HO/2/20-21/ET/2.** Bidders are requested to register as 'New Vendor' for downloading the tender document. For further help refer to 'vendor guide' given in MSTC website.

The bidders are requested to submit their bids through online mode and details of submission of bid through online are given in NIT.

The Bidders on regular basis are required to visit the NMDC's website/CPP Portal/ MSTC website for corrigendum, if any, at a future date.

For further clarification, CGM (Contracts), NMDC Limited Hyderabad can be contacted through Fax no. **+91-040-23534746**, Tel No. **+91-040-23532800, email: steelcontracts@nmdc.co.in**

Chief General Manager (Contracts)

हर एक काम देश के नाम इस्पाती इरादा

SHORT TAKES

COVID-19 PATIENT JUMPS OFF HOSP BUILDING, DIES

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY | DC
BHOPAL, NOV. 26

A Covid-19 patient in Chhattisgarh on Thursday jumped off the building of All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), Raipur.

The deceased, identified as Muralidhar Sahu (49) of Janjgir-Champa, was admitted in AIIMS, Raipur on November 22 after being tested positive for Covid-19.

He was put on a ventilator a couple of days ago when his condition worsened.

However, the ventilator was removed on Thursday morning when his condition started improving.

According to the Raipur police, Sahul had gone to washroom at around 1.30 in the afternoon and then jumped off the second storey of the AIIMS building. He was later admitted in the intensive care unit. He died during treatment. The reason for his extreme step was yet to be ascertained, police said.

As on Thursday, Chhattisgarh has reported 2,29,203 Covid-19 positive cases and 2,783 deaths.

GROOM ARRESTED FOR LINK IN IIFL LOOT CASE

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO | DC
BHUBANESWAR, NOV. 26

A 30-year-old youth serving as manager in a private gold loan firm was on Thursday arrested in the middle of his marriage rituals by the Crime Branch in connection with dacoity at the IIFL Finance Ltd branch office in Cuttack city.

The arrested youth was identified as Pitambar Sahoo of Nischintakoili, Cuttack.

Following Pitambar's arrest, the police seized a large quantity of stolen gold and investigation is underway to ferret out more information on the IIFL Finance loot case, said Prateek Singh, deputy commissioner of police, Cuttack.

Following the manager's arrest, the bride and her family who were waiting at a hotel had to pack up and cancel the event.

According to reports, the police had obtained the custodial remand of five accused persons in the loot case. Their preliminary questioning revealed that more than 10 employees of IIFL Company had direct links with the crime that took place on November 19. According to sources, the interrogation of other suspects was on and many more are likely to be arrested.

On the other hand, people who had deposited gold in IIFL Company Ltd with the hope to get more returns have become skeptical whether they would get their deposits back in view of scam and police action.

'NO AUCTION OF NIRAV PENTHOUSE BEFORE DEC. 14'

DC CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, NOV. 26

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday made it clear before the Bombay High Court that it will not auction a luxurious penthouse — Samudra Mahal belonging to Nirav Modi — before December 14.

The HC was hearing a petition filed by Modi's son Rohin challenging ED' s move to confiscate Samudra Mahal property. In his petition, Rohin informed the court that his father is nowhere concerned with the said property and it belonged to a trust set up by him.

Few months back, the ED had filed an application before the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court. The agency had brought to the notice of the court that as per provision under Fugitive Economic Offenders (FEO) Act 2018, it can confiscate immovable and movable properties belonging to Nirav Modi. According to the ED, Modi has properties worth ₹1,396 crore in India, England and UAE.

Subsequently, in June 2020 PMLA court had passed order to confiscate Modi's properties. Petitioner Rohin's counsel Amit Sibal argued that property belongs to Rohin Trust and not any individual. He also argued that as per FEO Act, a notice must have been issued to Rohin if ED wants to auction the property and he must be heard before the auction, but no notice was issue to Rohin.

Farmers are up in arms

Members of various farmers organisations try to cross Shambu Border in Patiala district on Thursday during the 'Delhi Chalo' protest march by farmers against the new farm laws. Farmers faced water cannons and broke police barriers at the state's border with Haryana and by late evening, a large group of them had reached the road toll plaza at Panipat, about 100 km from Delhi. — PTI

DIDI EXTENDS SUPPORT TO ONGOING FARMERS STIR

RAJIB CHOWDHURI & PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI | DC
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE, NOV. 26

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday extended her support to the ongoing farmers' protest rally to New Delhi over the Centre's three bills which has deregulated the essential commodities.

Calling the use of tear gas and water canons on the farmers' rally in Haryana "unfortunate", the Trinamul Congress supremo also offered to join their agitation, if invited, with an eye on the Assembly Election in the state.

She said, "This is unfortunate. I am sorry to say this is the first time the central government wants to capture all the fundamental rights of all sections of people. It can not curb the farmers' democratic rights. The bills are illegal as they are aimed to help the hoarders for black-marketing, not the farmers. Why did the central government snatch their rights? To allow the people of the country to die? Only one man, one party, one election, one nation?! We were, are and will be with the farmers. If we are invited, we will participate in their rally to Delhi."

Banerjee, however, supported the cause behind the nationwide strike of the Congress and Left trade unions against the Centre's economic policies.

"Today a workers' movement happened. We support the cause, not the bandh as it is against our policy," she added. This prompted the BJP to foresee another "Mahagatbandhan" (grand-alliance), in line of what happened in Bihar recently, against it in Bengal.

Phase III trial of India-made 'Covaxin' begins at AIIMS

Around 15,000 volunteers will receive the shot over the next few days

DC CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, NOV. 26

With 44,489 new confirmed cases in the last 24 hours, India's Covid-19 caseload crossed 92 lakh, while the number of recoveries surged to 86.42 lakh.

The number of total Coronavirus cases rose to 92,22,216, while the death toll due to the disease climbed to 1,34,699 with 481 new fatalities.

Phase three trial of India-made Coronavirus vaccine Covaxin, meanwhile, began at AIIMS in New Delhi on Thursday with Dr M.V. Padma Srivastava, the chief of Neurosciences Centre at the premier institute, and three other volunteers receiving the first dose.

Dr Srivastava was the first one to receive the shot, which would be given to around 15,000 volunteers at the medical institute over the next few days.

The first dose of 0.5 ml Covaxin intramuscular injection was given to four volunteers. They were under observation for two hours and will be monitored for the next few days.

Dr Srivastava said, "Covaxin is the first indigenously-developed anti-coronavirus vaccine and on top of that, my institute is participating in the trial. I am honoured to be the first volunteer to receive the shot. I am happy to be a part of such a great cause. I am perfectly fine and I'm working."

As part of the trial application, a dose of 0.5 ml would be given on day 0 and on day 28.

The phase three randomised double-blind placebo-controlled multicentre trial would cover around 28,500 subjects aged 18 years and above.

It would be conducted in around 25 sites across 10 states. The trial has already started at a few sites.

Bharat Biotech has been given the permission for conducting phase 3 human clinical trials of the Covaxin from the Drugs Controller General of India.

According to the Union health ministry, the active caseload shot up to 4,44,746, an increase of 6,079 cases from Tuesday, even though it remained below five lakh for the 15th consecutive day, accounting for 4.82 per cent of the total cases.

The number of people who have recovered from the disease surged to 86,42,771, pushing the national recovery rate to 93.72 per cent, while the Covid-19 case fatality rate stands at 1.46 per cent.

Of the 1,34,699 deaths reported in the country so far due to the disease, Maharashtra accounts for 46,683, followed by Karnataka (11,695), Tamil Nadu (11,639), Delhi (8,621), West Bengal (8,121), Uttar Pradesh (7,615), Andhra Pradesh (6,956), Punjab (4,653) and Gujarat (3,892).

The Union health ministry on Thursday said 60.72 per cent of the 44,489 fresh cases registered in a span of 24 hours have been contributed by six states and UTs, with Kerala leading the tally followed by Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

It said 60.50 per cent of the 524 latest fatalities are concentrated in six states and Union territories — Delhi, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.

Kerala leads the tally with 6,491 new Covid-19 cases registered in a span of 24 hours, while Maharashtra has reported 6,159 new cases followed by Delhi with 5,246 new cases.

Delhi with 99 deaths reported the maximum new fatalities. Maharashtra saw a fatality count of 65 followed by West Bengal with 51 deaths, the ministry said.

According to the ministry, 65 per cent of the active cases are in eight states and UTs which have contributed to the maximum daily new cases and deaths.

It said 61 per cent of the total deaths are concentrated in these eight states/UTs.

The case fatality rates of Punjab (3.16 per cent), Maharashtra (2.60 per cent), West Bengal (1.75 per cent) and Delhi (1.60 per cent) are higher than the national average of 1.46 per cent, the ministry said.

Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and Kerala have a case fatality rate of 1.43 per cent, 1.02 per cent, 0.87 per cent and 0.37 per cent, respectively.

Delhi has 29,169 Covid-19 cases per million followed by Kerala with 16,201 cases, Maharashtra with 14,584 and Haryana with 7,959 cases per million population.

Trinamul leader wants Governor removed

RAJIB CHOWDHURI | DC
KOLKATA, NOV. 26

Ahead of the Assembly election in West Bengal, the Trinamul Congress has demanded governor Jagdeep Dhankhar's removal from his post by President Ram Nath Kovind after accusing him of having "connections with criminals of the BJP."

The ruling party also sought Dhankhar's prosecution by the Kolkata police on criminal charges over his alleged support on Twitter to two accused, Govind Agarwal, a dubious chartered accountant, and Sudipta Roy Chowdhury, a businessman, after their arrests in two separate cases of financial offences into several crores.

On Thursday, Sreerampore TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee claimed at Trinamul Bhavan, "the Governor, as a public servant, is creating obstruction in the ongoing investigation against the two accused. He is trying to indulge criminals of the BJP with whom he has connections. The way Dhankhar is giving threats to the Kolkata police and Bidhannagar police through his tweets, he is liable for prosecution under section 186 and 189 of the Indian Penal Code. The police must initiate a criminal case against him. No sanction is required for this."

He said, "the President must intervene in the matter to see if the two IPC sections were violated by the Governor or not. If so, Dhankhar should be removed by the President as the Governor with immediate effect. He is not entitled to remain as the Governor anymore. According to my reading of the statute, since the Governor has violated two IPC sections, the President should not allow him to continue in his chair further after considering all aspects." Asked of the TMC's plan of any memorandum to Kovind for Dhankhar's removal from the Governor's post, Banerjee added, "It will be decided later."

Countering the TMC's demand Dhankhar, now in North Bengal, stated, "my attention has been drawn to press release and conference by a ruling party leader. To the extent Governor role or actions are concerned, the reflections are wide off the mark, betraying ignorance of elementary constitutional and legal aspects and factually untenable. A classic case of "memory lapse of law and constitution".

"This is unfolding of a strategy to take diversionary route so that burning issues can be put on back burner. This shall not happen. It deserves no serious note except for being ill informed on law, fact and constitution. In summation it is part of ongoing vituperative campaign to cover up monumental lapses and constitutional indiscretions. These cannot be impactful. I cannot help if some can not even read and understand the tweets. I dismiss any assertion made that indicates otherwise than my commitment for accountability and transparency."

TI | FINDINGS

The survey was conducted between June 17 and July 17 in India

India has highest bribery rate in Asia: Report

New Delhi, Nov. 26: India has the highest bribery rate in Asia and the most number of people who use personal connections to access public services, according to a new report by corruption watchdog Transparency International.

The Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) Asia, found that nearly 50 per cent of those who paid bribes were asked to, while 32 per cent of those who used personal connections said they would not receive the service otherwise.

The report is based upon the survey which was conducted between June 17 and July 17 in India with a sample size of 2,000.

"With the highest bribery rate (39 per cent) in the region, India also has the highest rate of people using personal connections to access public services (46 per cent)," the report said.

Bribery in public services continues to plague India. Slow and complicated bureaucratic process, unnecessary red tape and unclear regulatory frameworks force citizens to seek out alternate solutions to access basic services through networks of familiarity and petty corruption, the report said.

"Both national and state governments need to streamline administrative processes for public services, implement preventative measures to combat bribery and nepotism, and invest in user-friendly online platforms to deliver essential public services quickly and effectively," the report said.

Although reporting cases of corruption is critical to curbing the spread, a majority of citizens in India (63 per cent) think that if they report corruption, they will suffer retaliation, it said.

In several countries including India, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, sexual extortion rates are also high and more must be done to prevent sextortion and address specific gendered forms of corruption, the report said.

Sextortion is extorting money or sexual favours from someone by threatening to reveal evidence of their sexual activity through means like morphed images.

In India, 89 per cent think government corruption is a big problem, 18 per cent offered bribes in exchange for votes and 11 per cent experienced sextortion or know someone who has.

About 63 per cent of surveyed people think the government is doing well in tackling corruption while 73 per cent said their anti-corruption agency is doing well in the fight against corruption, it said.

Based on fieldwork conducted in 17 countries, the GCB surveyed nearly 20,000 citizens in total.

The report said the results showed that nearly three out of four people think corruption is a big problem in their country and the survey also found that nearly one in five people who accessed public services, such as health care and education, paid a bribe in the preceding year.

— PTI

BJP FILES COMPLAINT AGAINST LALU YADAV

DC CORRESPONDENT
PATNA, NOV. 26

A complaint case has been registered against RJD Chief Lalu Yadav at the vigilance police station in Patna.

BJP MLA Lalan Paswan who had accused Lalu Yadav of making strategies to topple the newly elected NDA government in Bihar filed the complaint on Thursday under the prevention of corruption act.

On Wednesday, BJP leader and former deputy CM Sushil Kumar Modi had released an audio clip in which Lalu Yadav was heard talking to Lalan Paswan and asking him to abstain from the voting during the speaker's election.

Sources said that the Jharkhand administration has also asked the officials to ascertain the veracity of the audio clip which was released by the BJP on Wednesday.

Amid the political turmoil in Bihar and Jharkhand over the issue, Lalu Yadav who is serving his jail term after being sentenced in several fodder scam cases has been sent back to the paying ward of Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences, Ranchi.

He was shifted to the director's bungalow last month due to Coronavirus.

"This is an attempt to stop the opposition RJD from raising questions against the NDA. The allegation against Lalu Yadav is baseless and the NDA leaders cannot prove anything. The opposition parties in Bihar would continue to expose the failures of the NDA government in Bihar", RJD spokesperson Chitranjan Gagan told this newspaper.

Sources, however, said that the RJD is concerned as Lalu Yadav's bail hearing in the fodder scam case is also scheduled on Friday.

INDIA, NEPAL TO ADVANCE MUTUAL COOPERATION

Kathmandu, Nov. 26: India and Nepal on Thursday agreed to step up efforts to advance mutual cooperation during a "productive" meeting between Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla and his Nepalese counterpart Bharat Raj Paudyal.

Shringla began his two-day official visit to Nepal on Thursday.

He was accorded a warm welcome on his maiden visit to Nepal which is happening at the invitation of Nepal Foreign Secretary Paudyal, amid a strain in bilateral ties following a bitter border row between the two countries.

"FS @harshvshringla had a productive meeting with @PaudyalBR during which they took stock of bilateral cooperation and discussed issues of mutual interest," the Indian embassy in Kathmandu said in a tweet.

"Both sides appreciated the progress made on the numerous bilateral initiatives and projects. It was agreed to take further steps to advance mutual cooperation," it said in another tweet.

Shringla arrived at Tribhuvan Inter-national in Kathmandu on Thursday morning.

While interacting with local journalists, he said, "I have wanted to come here earlier also, but because of Covid-19, I couldn't do so. I am very happy to be here. I was here in Kathmandu earlier too, though this is my first visit to Nepal as a Foreign Secretary. We have very strong relationship. Our endeavour will be to see how we can take that relationship forward".

Shringla's visit will be a continuation of the regular exchange of high-level visits between the two friendly neighbour.

IN BRIEF

40 miners stuck at Zimbabwe mishap

Harare: At least 40 informal miners in Zimbabwe have been trapped underground after a shaft in a disused gold mine collapsed, the country's miners' federation said on Thursday. The incident occurred late Wednesday in the town of Bindura, around 70 kilometres (43 miles) north of the capital Harare, said Wellington Takavarasha, head of the Zimbabwe Miners Federation. Takavarasha said the miners were working inside the disused Ran Gold Mine when a shaft caved in. Six miners have since been pulled from the rubble and taken to hospital.

Flydubai lands 1st scheduled flight

Tel Aviv: A flight operated by budget airline flydubai landed in Tel Aviv on Thursday, the first scheduled commercial service between the two cities following the normalisation of ties between the UAE and Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, on hand for the arrival of the inaugural flight after its nearly four-hour trip, called it "a moment of history.""As-salaam alaikum (Peace be upon you)," he said to arriving passengers. "Come again and again and again." The United Arab Emirates in September signed a landmark US-brokered deal to formalise relations with Israel, the first such agreement by an Arab state in the Gulf.

Greek oil tanker hit by blast at Saudi

Riyadh: An explosion rocked a Greek-operated oil tanker docked at Saudi Arabia's port of Shuqaiq on Wednesday, Greek officials said, in an attack that a Riyadh-led military coalition blamed on Yemeni rebels. The blast on the Maltese-flagged Agrari tanker follows a string of attacks by the Iran-linked rebels on Saudi oil infrastructure, highlighting the growing perils of a five-year military campaign led by the kingdom in Yemen. The tanker was "attacked by an unknown source" while it was preparing to depart from the Red Sea port of Shuqaiq, its Greece-based operator TMS Tankers said, adding that no injuries were reported. "The Agrari was struck about one meter above the waterline and has suffered a breach," TMS Tankers said in a statement. "It has been confirmed that the crew are safe and there have been no injuries. No pollution has been reported."An investigation was underway after Saudi authorities, including the coast guard, boarded the stricken vessel, it added.

PALESTINIAN WHO WAGED 103-DAY FAST FREED

Nablus, Palestinian Territories, Nov. 26: Israel on Thursday released a Palestinian who waged a 103-day hunger strike to protest Israeli rules allowing his detention without charge, the Palestinian Prisoner's Club said.

Maher al-Akhras, arrested over alleged membership of a militia group, was transferred from a Tel Aviv hospital to Nablus's Al-Najah University Hospital in the occupied West Bank, the prisoners' rights group said in a statement. A decision on releasing him to return home will follow "a medical assessment of his condition", Al-Najah hospital medical director Abdul-Karim Al-Barqawi said.

Akhras, 49, was arrested near Nablus in July and put in administrative detention, a policy that Israel uses to hold suspected militants without charge. He is suspected of links to the armed Palestinian group Islamic Jihad, labelled a terrorist group by Israel, the United States and the European Union. The father of six launched his fast to protest a four-month detention order, which had been due to end on November 26.

Akhras, who been arrested by Israel several times previously, ended his hunger strike after Israeli authorities committed to not extending his detention beyond that date. Israel's administrative detention policy, inherited from the British mandate of Palestine, allows the internment of prisoners without charge for renewable periods of up to six months each time. Israel says the procedure allows authorities to hold suspects and prevent attacks while continuing to gather evidence, but critics and rights groups say the system is abused.

Trump reiterates voter fraud allegations amid transition

Calls into Pennsylvania Republican event to probe charges

Washington, Nov. 26: US President Donald Trump has baselessly claimed anew that he had won the election and uttered repeated falsehoods as he called into an event held by Pennsylvania Republicans to investigate unproven allegations of voter fraud. "This was an election that we won easily. We won it by a lot," Trump declared to the group gathered at a hotel in Gettysburg on Wednesday.

Trump, in fact, lost to President-elect Joe Biden by about 1,50,000 votes in the state, and Pennsylvania certified Biden as the winner on Tuesday. The Pennsylvania event was the latest attempt by Trump and his lawyer Rudy Giuliani, a former New York City mayor, to try to cast doubt on the results of the democratic election, even as the formal transition process has begun and a growing number of Republicans are recognising Biden as president-elect.

Similar events have been scheduled in Arizona and Michigan. State election officials across the country and international observers have said there is no evidence of widespread voter fraud, and Trump's legal team has lost repeatedly in court, in addition to making numerous elementary errors.

Wednesday's event, organised by local Republicans, including Pennsylvania state Sen. Doug Mastriano, an outspoken Trump supporter, came with trappings of an official hearing — flags, a gavel, and "witnesses"who "testified" in person and by phone. Among them was a special guest — the president — who at one point had been expected to attend in person, but did not after another member of his legal team announced that he had tested positive for the Coronavirus on Wednesday morning. — *AP*

Two women pray on their knees as they gather with other supporters of President Donald Trump, most without masks, outside of the Wyndham Gettysburg hotel prior to a Pennsylvania Senate Majority Policy Committee public hearing to discuss 2020 election issues and irregularities with President Trumps lawyer Rudy Giuliani in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. — *AFP*

FACEBOOK FIGHTS WITH ELECTION DISINFORMATION

San Francisco, Nov. 26: The US presidential election is finished: votes cast, the transition — though delayed — begun.

But on Facebook, the fight against election misinformation continues, thanks to "super spreaders" — accounts that disseminate rumours and fabrications, falsely spreading the idea that the 2020 election was beset by organised, extensive fraud by the Democratic Party.

The US non-profit Avaaz has identified 25 pages in particular, including those of Donald Trump Jr and Eric Trump — the president's sons — White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany and combative conservative commentators Dan Bongino, Lou Dobbs and Rush Limbaugh, along with pro-Trump organizations such as Turning Point USA.

These are sowing doubt about the President-elect Joe Biden's White House win earlier this month — taking their lead from the building's current resident, who has also taken to social media to tweet that he will not "concede" and to outline his so-far unfounded claims that the election was "stolen." Unproven allegations of fraud from these accounts have been "liked," commented on and shared more than 77 million times since November 3, according to a study from Avaaz.

And that doesn't take into account the Facebook accounts of the "super-spreader" in chief, Donald Trump himself, nor that of his former adviser Steve Bannon, which was recently removed by the network. — *AFP*

Trump pardons Flynn, his ex-NSA who lied to FBI

Washington, Nov. 26: US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order granting pardon to his former national security adviser Michael Flynn, who had been charged with making false statements to the FBI over possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia during the 2016 presidential polls. Trump signed the executive order on Wednesday.

"It is my Great Honor to announce that General Michael T. Flynn has been granted a Full Pardon. Congratulations to Gen Flynn and his wonderful family, I know you will now have a truly fantastic Thanksgiving!" Trump said in a tweet.

White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany said, "The President has pardoned General Flynn because he should never have been prosecuted. An independent review of General Flynn's case by the Department of Justice — conducted by respected career professionals — supports this conclusion."

Michael Flynn

In fact, the Department of Justice has firmly concluded that the charges against Flynn should be dropped, she said. "This Full Pardon achieves that objective, finally bringing to an end the relentless, partisan pursuit of an innocent man," she said.

"General Flynn should not require a pardon. He is an innocent man. Even the FBI agents who interviewed General Flynn did not think he was lying. "Multiple investigations have produced evidence establishing that General Flynn was the victim of partisan government officials engaged in a coordinated attempt to subvert the election of 2016," McEnany said. These individuals sought to prevent Trump from being elected, to block him from assuming that office on his election, remove him from office after his inauguration, and undermine his administration at every turn, she said. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in a statement said Trump's pardon of Michael Flynn, who twice pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about his dealings with a foreign adversary, is an act of grave corruption and abuse of power. — *PTI*

'Infodemic' risks jeopardising Covid vaccines

Paris, Nov. 26: As early as February, with the global pandemic spreading fast, the World Health Organisation issued a warning about an "infodemic", a wave of fake news and misinformation about the deadly new disease on social media.

Now with hopes hanging on Covid-19 vaccines, the WHO and experts are warning those same phenomena may jeopardise rollout of immunisation programmes meant to bring an end to the suffering. "The Coronavirus disease is the first pandemic in history in which technology and social media are being used on a massive scale to keep people safe, informed, productive and connected," the WHO said.

"At the same time, the technology we rely on to keep connected and informed is enabling and amplifying an infodemic that continues to undermine the global response and jeopardises measures to control the pandemic." More than 1.4 million people have died since the pandemic emerged in China late last year, but three developers are already applying for approval for their vaccines to be used as early as December.

Beyond logistics, though, governments must also contend with scepticism over vaccines developed with record speed at a time when social media has been both a tool for information and falsehood about the virus. The WHO defined an infodemic as an overabundance of information, both online and offline, including "deliberate attempts to disseminate wrong information". Last month, a study from Cornell University in the United States found that US President Donald Trump has been the world's biggest driver of Covid-19 misinformation during the pandemic.

In April, Trump mused on the possibility of using disinfectants inside the body to cure the virus and also promoted unproven treatments. Since January, *AFP* has published more than 2,000 fact-checking articles dismantling false claims about the Coronavirus.

"Without the appropriate trust and correct information, diagnostic tests go unused, immunisation campaigns (or campaigns to promote effective vaccines) will not meet their targets, and the virus will continue to thrive," the WHO said. — *AFP*

PANDEMIC OR NOT, PEOPLE MUST STAY ACTIVE, SAYS WHO

Geneva, Nov. 25: The Coronavirus pandemic is no excuse for not getting enough exercise, the World Health Organisation said on Wednesday, warning that even before the crisis many were getting too little physical activity.

In an update of its physical activity guidelines, the UN health agency stressed that exercise was vital to physical and mental health, while sedentary behaviour can have serious repercussions.

"WHO urges everyone to continue to stay active through the Covid-19 pandemic," the agency's head of health promotion Ruediger Krech told reporters. "If we do not remain active, we run the risk of creating another pandemic of ill-health as a result of sedentary behaviour."There are still no clear statistics on what impact the pandemic has had on physical activity, but lockdowns, movement restrictions, gym closures and other measures have clearly forced many people to stay home and have disrupted regular activities and exercise routines.' — *AFP*

Rishi Sunak

BRITAIN FUNDS ANTI-TERROR ESTABLISMENT

London, Nov. 26: UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced to set aside millions of pounds to establish a "world-leading" Counter Terrorism Operations Centre (CTOC) based in London.

As part of a Spending Review for the next year's budgetary plans tabled in Parliament on Wednesday, the finance minister said he would allocate an additional 400 million pound to help recruit 20,000 more police officers by 2023, with 6,000 new officers in 2021-22; 63 million pound to tackle economic crime; and 337 million pound extra funding for the criminal justice system, which will include the new CTOC — expected to be fully operational within five years.

"Our police and intelligence agencies do an extraordinary job every day to protect us all from terrorist activity," Sunak said. "Bringing these partners together to form a world-leading operations centre will enable them to work more collaboratively to disrupt threats — allowing the government to deliver on its first and foremost duty to keep the public safe," he said.

"We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our police, intelligence agencies and criminal justice system who work tirelessly every single day to keep us safe from terrorism. This world-leading new centre will fully integrate their wealth of knowledge and expertise to ensure that we are responding to the range of threats this nation faces as quickly and effectively as possible," added UK Home Secretary Priti Patel. — *PTI*

Russia oil giant declares Arctic project open

Moscow, Nov. 26: Russian oil giant Rosneft on Wednesday announced the start of operations for its giant Vostok oil project in the Arctic, part of the country's strategic energy plan which has been criticised by environmentalists.

"It is with great pleasure that I inform you of the start of the practical implementation of the project," Rosneft chief executive Igor Sechin told President Vladimir Putin at a meeting in Moscow.

He thanked Putin, with whom he has close relations, for the adoption of a law facilitating Russian investments in the Arctic.

"The prospecting and exploration work are now underway, in accordance with our timetable," Sechin said, adding that the design work for a 770-kilometrer (480-mile) oil pipeline and a port had been completed. The strategic plan for Russia's mineral resources stretches to 2035 and is banking on growing global demand, though it does predict that natural gas will partially replace oil and coal.

"Mineral resources will remain a competitive advantage of Russia's economy, and will determine the place and role of the country in the world," it says.

Environmentalists urged the Russian government last year to stop granting licenses to exploit several Arctic deposits. The Vostok project, the cornerstone of Russia's Arctic ambitions, brings together several Rosneft activities in the Russian Far North, near the northern sea route that the company intends to exploit to deliver to Europe and Asia. — *AFP*

Iran swaps Australian for 3 Iranians

Tehran, Nov. 26: Iran has freed a British-Australian academic who had been detained in the country for over two years in exchange for three Iranians held abroad, state TV announced.

The television report on Wednesday was scant on detail, saying only that the three Iranians freed in the swap had been imprisoned for trying to bypass sanctions on Iran. Kylie Moore-Gilbert, 33, was a Melbourne University lecturer on Middle Eastern studies when she was picked up at the Tehran airport as she tried to leave the country after attending an academic conference in 2018.

She was sent to Tehran's Evin prison, convicted of spying and sentenced to 10 years behind bars. Moore-Gilbert had vehemently denied the charges and maintained her innocence. Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne confirmed the release on Thursday, saying Moore-Gilbert would soon be reunited with her family.

"Dr. Moore-Gilbert's release has been an absolute priority for the government since her detention," Payne said in a statement. "The Australian government has consistently rejected the grounds on which the Iranian government arrested, detained and convicted Dr. Moore-Gilbert. We continue to do so."

Payne said the release was achieved through "diplomatic engagement" with the Iranian government and was done in consultation with Moore-Gilbert's family. Moore-Gilbert was one of several Westerners held in Iran on widely criticised espionage charges that activists and UN investigators believe is a systematic effort to leverage their imprisonments for money or influence in negotiations with the West, which Tehran denies. — *AP*

Turkish coup accused get life terms

Ankara, Nov. 26: A Turkish court jailed more than 300 former pilots and other suspects for life in a mass trial stemming from a bloody 2016 coup attempt against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Fethullah Gulen, a US-based Muslim preacher who was once an Erdogan ally, is accused of ordering the failed putsch. His movement has been proscribed as a terrorist group by Ankara, but the 79-year-old denies all charges.

THE CHAOTIC attempt was swiftly followed by a fierce government crackdown spanning years and resulting in tens of thousands of arrests.

A total of 251 people died and more than 2,000 were injured in what has turned into the defining moment of Erdogan's rule and contemporary Turkish politics.

The chaotic attempt was swiftly followed by a fierce government crackdown spanning years and resulting in tens of thousands of arrests.

Turkey's largest courtroom was packed with dozens of security personnel and the presiding judge ordered one protesting defendant to "Sit down!" several times before reading the verdict.

He issued multiple life sentences to 27 disgruntled air force pilots who bombed the capital Ankara and civilians who orchestrated the coup attempt from inside the Akinci military base near the capital.

Court documents subsequently obtained by *AFP* showed 337 defendants handed life sentences for murder, violating the constitutional order and attempting to assassinate Erdogan.

Sixty suspects were given jail sentences of various lengths while 75 were acquitted. — *AFP*

PUBLISHING | GIANT **Bertelsmann's rival News Corp., which owns HarperCollins, slammed the deal**

Penguin to buy Simon & Schuster for $2bn

Berlin, Nov. 26: German media giant Bertelsmann said on Wednesday that its Penguin Random House division is buying rival Simon & Schuster in a megadeal that would reshape the US publishing industry.

Penguin Random House, already the largest American publisher, will buy the New York-based Simon & Schuster, whose authors include Stephen King, Hillary Clinton and John Irving, from TV and film company ViacomCBS for $2.17 billion in cash.

"Simon & Schuster strengthens Bertelsmann's footprint globally, and (particularly) in the US, its second-largest market," the Guetersloh, Germany-based company said in a statement.

The purchase of Simon & Schuster would reduce the so-called Big Five of American publishing — which also includes HarperCollins, Hachette Book Group and Macmillan — to four.

The companies said the deal is expected to close in 2021, subject to regulatory approval.

No US publisher in modern times would approach the power of the new company. ViacomCBS said Bertelsmann will pay a termination fee if the deal fails due to regulatory reasons.

PENGUIN RANDOM House Chief Executive Markus Dohle said on Wednesday that Simon & Schuster would retain its editorial independence and that individual imprints within Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster could continue to compete with each other for book deals.

Agents and authors often worry that a concentration of power in publishing could mean less competition for book deals, and lower advances.

The Authors Guild, a writers' organisation, said Wednesday that it opposed the sale because it would hurt competition, making it more difficult for authors and agents to negotiate with publishers. It said the U.S. Department of Justice should challenge it.

The department did not immediately return a request for comment.

"As an organisation of writers it's important to us that the publishing industry (thrives), and that there be multiple, robust outlets to bring the widest variety of books to audiences," said Suzanne Nossel, the CEO of PEN America. "To the extent that efficiencies are garnered through consolidation, it is our hope that they are a catalyst to enable greater investment in authors, books, and outreach to readers."

Bertelsmann's rival News Corp., which owns HarperCollins, also slammed the deal. "Bertelsmann is not just buying a book publisher, but buying market dominance as a book behemoth," said News Corp Chief Executive Robert Thomson said in a statement. "This literary leviathan would have 70% of the U.S. literary and general fiction market."

Penguin Random House Chief Executive Markus Dohle said on Wednesday that Simon & Schuster would retain its editorial independence and that individual imprints within Penguin Random House and Simon & Schuster could continue to compete with each other for book deals.

Simon & Schuster's current president and chief executive, Jonathan Karp, will continue to lead the publishing house, Bertelsmann said. — *AP*

DECCAN Chronicle

27 NOVEMBER 2020

Ahmed's passing leaves crisis-hit Cong in trouble

Although he had been down with Covid, the unexpected and premature death of Ahmed Patel on Wednesday leaves the Congress Party ill-prepared to take on the key challenge that upcoming Assembly polls in five states are likely to pose. Before that the party faces a major internal challenge — the holding of an election for the Congress president, for which the party's interim chief Sonia Gandhi has already set up a central election authority after 23 prominent Congress figures wrote to Mrs Gandhi in early August asking for proper party elections, and in particular, the election of a new president to direct functioning on a structured basis since Rahul Gandhi had resigned as chief after the Lok Sabha election defeat in May 2019.

These events may be expected to pose a particular challenge principally on account of the fact that the Congress had become more or less wholly reliant on the organisational resources and skills that the late Mr Patel brought to the table. The rest of the party structure does exist in a nominal sense, but it is based on nominations and lacks substance. Ahmed Patel, too, was a nominated member of the Congress Working Committee but he used to win CWC elections until these stopped being held. Besides, he had vast experience.

Without exception, the late Mr Patel was the only Congress stalwart who could phone any senior non-Congress leader in any state to discuss poll alliances and adjustments or any political matter

He knew his own party inside out and had viable contacts across parties, especially in the non-BJP universe. He had entered Lok Sabha as far back as 1977 and served as parliamentary secretary to late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Later, he was made political aide to Sonia Gandhi when she became party chief more than two decades ago and served in that capacity even after Rahul Gandhi formally took over as Congress president in late 2017. Mr Patel was also made the party's treasurer in 2018, a position he had held earlier.

Without exception, the late Mr Patel was the only Congress stalwart who could phone any senior non-Congress leader in any state to discuss poll alliances and adjustments or any political matter. He derived this special authority by virtue of holding — on account of his abilities and conciliator personality — the trust of Mrs Gandhi who herself commands great personal regard and political respect across parties since it was under her leadership that the Congress was able to constitute and head two consecutive coalition governments at the Centre.

Mrs Gandhi is in frail health and there is no Ahmed Patel now. It will be interesting to see how much real weight the central election authority can bring to bear on the internal party poll, which ought to be completed by February. Rahul Gandhi may be well-advised to steer clear of the process guiding the party's internal elections — lest that be misunderstood — even if he is not going to be a candidate. In the absence of Mrs Gandhi playing an effective role day-to-day, and with Mr Patel gone, only a duly elected Congress president can carry weight with other parties when it comes to holding viable political and electoral consultations in the context of Assembly polls in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Kerala in the coming months. This is more the reason why the upcoming election of the Congress chief must be a clean and fair process in which the whole party is invested.

Farewell, Diego

Diego Armando Maradona was the "Golden Kid" who never really grew up. From the streets of Latin America to soccer riches is not too unusual a story except that Maradona was arguably one of the greatest players of all time with a talent so natural as to be defined as a divine gift. It was, however, coincidental that he became associated with the "Hand of God" for the controversial goal he scored with the "head of Diego and the hand of God" as he impishly put it. However, it would be unfair to define him only by that accidental goal. Such is the duality of Maradona that only minutes later he produced one of the finest field goals ever seen at a World Cup.

The brilliance of Maradona which came through in that coruscating run of 1986 from the Argentine half, twice feinting past pairs of defenders and beating one more before curling the football in past the England goal-keeper will remain etched in memory forever as the most aesthetic exhibition of the art of football. Even the memory of his virtually single-handed triumph for Argentina in that World Cup final (against West Germany) might fade when compared to the pristine beauty of the movement of the 5 foot 5 inch, low centre of gravity genius, the magical ball at his magnetic feet.

To say he was the most human of sport's immortals would be an understatement. His flawed genius illustrated how the loss of moral compass can affect man. Success went on to ravage him, his addictions to cocaine and liquor and women — he sired five children from four women — proving a pervasive cocktail. Judging others might seem incongruous as there is no such thing as a perfect human being. But, as a sporting icon whose millions of fans worshipped the very ground he walked on, Maradona had a responsibility to fulfil, which his bacchanalian lifestyle and attitude precluded. Comparisons can be odious but one must be done with Pele to illustrate what Maradona would have been if only… But then, as he said in a famous speech — "The ball does not show dirt."

DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Subhani

'Contempt of court': A relook may be needed

Karan Thapar

As I See It

Once again contempt of court is in the news. In September, the human rights lawyer Prashant Bhushan was tried and found guilty on this count. Now the stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra faces a similar charge, this time endorsed by the attorney general. While the Supreme Court will no doubt focus on what's been said about its judges, many others will ask whether judges need to accept satire and criticism with good grace rather than seek the protection of the law of contempt and use it to punish their attackers.

Let's start with the case against Kumal Kamra. The attorney general has found his tweets and two-finger gesture contemptuous. "This is a gross insinuation against the entirety of the Supreme Court of India that … (it) is not an independent and impartial institution … (but) is a court of the ruling party, the BJP, existing only for the BJP's benefit. All this in my opinion constitutes criminal contempt of court", Mr Venugopal declared.

If true, the attorney general's finding is indeed grave. But do the two Kamra tweets that Mr Venugopal cites amount to this? The first says: "Honour has left the building (i.e. the Supreme Court) long back". The second says: "The Supreme Court of this country is the most supreme joke of this country". Frankly, the attorney general has invested more meaning in these tweets than exists in them.

The tweets are an attempt at satirical humour and, admittedly, not a particularly witty one. They are not meant to be kind or polite. The intention is to lampoon or, even, lacerate. But is this "gross insinuation"? Do they suggest that the Supreme Court "is a court of the ruling party, the BJP, existing only for the BJP's benefit"? Actually, to ask the question is to answer it. And it's "NO".

The two-finger gesture is more tricky. It's both more clever and questionable. At one level, the raised index and middle finger of Kamra's left hand is a V signal. However, the accompanying message — "one of these two fingers is for CJI Arvind Bobde … ok let me not confuse you it's the middle one" — could convert this into a rude gesture. Actually, crude might be a better word. It's telling the Supreme Court where to get off. But is that contempt? Even if it is, it's too immature to take seriously. Judges —and not just because of their age — should rise above it.

This brings me to a more important and wider question about the law of contempt. Has it outlived its utility? And how should we handle cases that could amount to contempt today? Let's go back to its origin to understand its purpose.

The concept of contempt is centuries-old British law which was abolished by Britain in 2013. At the time the country's Law Commission said the purpose was not just "preventing the public from getting the wrong idea of judges … but where there are shortcomings it's equally important to prevent the pubic from getting the right idea". In other words, one intention was to hide judicial corruption. The concept, therefore, ab initio, clashed with the need for transparency and, of course, freedom of speech.

So no wonder enlightened British judges have ignored it. As far back as 1968, Lord Denning, Britain's former Master of the Rolls, had this to say of the law of contempt: "Let me say at once that we will never use this jurisdiction as a means to uphold our own dignity … nor will we use it to suppress those who speak against us. We do not fear criticism, nor do we resent it. For there is something far more important at stake. It is no less than freedom of speech itself. It's the right of every man, in Parliament or out of it, in the press or over the broadcast, to make fair comment, even outspoken comment, on matters of public interest … we must rely on our own conduct itself to be its own vindication."

In 1987, after the *Spycatcher* judgment, when the *Daily Mirror* called Britain's Law Lords "You Old Fools" or, in 2016, after the Brexit ruling, when the *Daily Mail* called three judges "Enemies of the People", the British judiciary consciously and sensibly ignored the headlines and did not consider contempt prosecution. In fact, Lord Templeton's comment on the *Spycatcher* headline is worth recalling: "I cannot deny that I am old; it's the truth. Whether I am a fool or not is a matter of perception of someone else … there is no need to invoke the powers of contempt."

In 1987, after the *Spycatcher* judgment, when the *Daily Mirror* called Britain's Law Lords 'You Old Fools' or, in 2016, after the Brexit ruling, when the *Daily Mail* called three judges 'Enemies of the People', the British judiciary ignored the headlines

Some of our own judges have shown similar wisdom. In a 2008 lecture, Justice Markandey Katju had this to say: "If a person calls me a fool, whether inside court or outside it, I for one would not take action as it does not prevent me from functioning, and I would simply ignore the comment or else say that everyone is entitled to his opinion. After all, words break no bones".

More important, Justice Katju was crystal clear about when contempt could apply and when it would not. "The test to determine whether an act amounts to contempt of court or not is this: does it make the functioning of judges impossible or extremely difficult? If it does not, then it does not amount to contempt of court even if it's harsh criticism … the only situation where I would have to take some action was if my functioning as a judge was made impossible … after all, I have to function if I wish to justify my salary."

I think that answers the questions I began with. While justice is important, judges must not take themselves too seriously. Even if their amour propre is offended it does not mean the institution has been questioned or justice brought into disrepute. Judges deliver justice, they do not embody it. They should never forget that their court is supreme because it's final, not because it's infallible. When they lapse, they can be criticised or satirised. And it does not have to be polite or, even, fair.

I hope the Supreme Court will bear this in mind when it pronounces on Mr Kamra's case.

The writer is a television commentator and anchor

LETTERS

INTER-FAITH WEDDING

The UP government's ordinance on inter-faith marriages is unconstitutional. It encroaches on the basic rights of individuals to choose their life partners. The government should listen to the views of Allahabad High Court in one relevant case where it said that the right of an adult individual in selecting their companion couldn't be taken away in the name of religion or other pretext.

Dr D.V.G. Sankararao
Vizianagaram

HC GAG ORDER

By setting aside APHC's gag order on Amaravati land deals, the SC restored the democratic rights of people and the media. But by postponing a decision on investigation, into the case pending since September 2020 against former advocate general of AP and 12 other accused, the SC further delayed the inevitable..

Govardhana Myneedu
Vijayawada

CURB HOARDING

Unless the government curbs hoarding and spiralling prices of commodities, Janata Bazaars may only lead to stockouts. If the rates are lesser than what it is outside, sea foods will attract the rich and the upper middle class as they are not available in the open markets.

Prof. K. V. Satya Prakash
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN DECCAN Chronicle

Balacheruvu favourable for steel plant

VISAKHAPATNAM, Nov. 26

The Geological Survey of India which has been exploring the Gazavaka-Kanithi-Balacheruvu area here to select a suitable site for the proposed steel plant has come to the conclusion that Balacheruvu area was the most favourable.

According to official sources here, the formal announcement on the final selection of the site would be made on Saeed Saturday.

The steel plant site at Balacheruvu would not include the nearby salt pans.

Saeed Naqvi

Wide Angle

Does a 'liberal' Muslim leader have a future in India's politics?

The quest for a liberal Muslim was always a contradiction in terms. But a search for a liberal Hindu, dalit, Christian or Sikh leader would also be a bogus one. As RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in their Hindutva chariot, hurtle towards Hindu Rashtra say, by 2025, the RSS' centenary, the very notion of a liberal Muslim in public life seems out of place. What would be the acceptable contours of a Muslim leader who is neither mute nor abrasive?

The enigma of Asaduddin Owaisi acquires new salience after his success in Bihar. Speculation centres on how he might fare in West Bengal, with a 30 per cent Muslim population, which is the backbone of Mamata Banerjee's support. As they are Mr Owaisi's hunting ground too, will the Muslim voter be confused? If Amit Shah hadn't made it his life's mission to oust or substantially diminish "Didi" and her TMC, Muslims may well have risked a breach in their absolute support for her. But now, any bid by Mr Owaisi to fish for a small catch, just to open an account in Bengal, will expose him to the slur that he's a "*vote katua*", a vote divider which is what parties, particularly the Congress, cast him as. This allegation of communalism against Mr Owaisi helps the Congress sustain the delusion it's still with the secular lineup. The Congress doesn't like the refrain: Congress and BJP, tweedledum and tweedledee. It must be admitted, of course, that there are differences between the two corporate-supported parties. Former Madhya Pradesh CM Digvijay Singh may, admittedly, drink a litre's cow urine daily, but his drinking habits don't come into conflict with the secularism a handful of Congressmen swore by earlier.

To fast forward the narrative, there were no cow vigilantes, no lynchings in the name of the cow, no "love jihad" bar. The Congress can't be blamed for such trends. The charge against them is different: extreme cowardice. When these shameful events happen, the Congress, instead of going for their opponents' jugular, just shuts up — in case taking sides leads to a loss of Hindu votes. No wonder the tag of "BJP's B team" has stuck on the Congress.

Take Amit Shah's latest fusillade directed at the "Gupkar gang" for "international conspiracy". Randeep Surjewala's tepid response says nothing. Why doesn't the Congress make its stand clear on Article 370?

Sheikh bhi khush rahey / Shaitaan bhi naraaz na ho (Keep the agents of God and Satan equally happy).

How can the Congress point fingers at Mr Owaisi's "pro-BJP stand" when it reduced senior leader Ghulam Nabi Azad to tears during the 2019 election: "Even district committees don't invite me to address rallies". Ahmed Patel, whose death we mourn today, was kept away from the campaign in Gujarat.

This is the pincer in which Mr Owaisi holds the Congress. He taunts the Muslims: "Congress has brought you down to the level described in the 2005 Sachar Committee report."

The thrust of Mr Owaisi's argument is that Muslims have been tricked into supporting "pseudo-secular" parties like the Congress, and caste parties in UP, Bihar, etc.

Muslims have been frightened into supporting these parties. The ogre that frightened them is obviously the RSS-BJP. Mr Owaisi's argument is that these so-called secular parties seek Muslim support not to defeat the BJP (of which they are incapable), but to enlarge their power base, a delusion at best, and end up doing nothing for Muslims.

With a population of 200 million, or 14 per cent of the total, there are 27 Muslims in a 543-strong Lok Sabha. The ratio in state Assemblies is even more embarrassing. Mr Owaisi's argument is simple: seven seats in Telangana, two in Maharashtra and now five in Bihar is 14 seats. Supposing Muslims pick up an average of even one seat in 28 states and eight Union territories, the figure 36 will not look so negligible.

The electoral weakness of India's Muslims is precisely this: though substantial in an overall sense, they are scattered all over. Ironically Covid-19, by linking schools, colleges, businesses and international conferences, the magic of virtual reality will come into play. Members of Assemblies can be in instantaneous contact.

The danger, of course, is that the growth of a Muslim entity might help accelerate Hindu consolidation. How does one obviate that emergency? By allowing the Muslim vote to habitually occupy frayed mattresses in parties like the Congress which are in fatal decline?

The durability of Mr Owaisi in public life denotes the failure of all parties to paint him in lurid, communal colours, much as they tried. Such a moment did come in 2013 when his younger, more firebrand brother, Akbaruddin Owaisi, made a provocative reference to police support for violence against Muslims. "Remove the police for 15 minutes and let's see." The speech smacked of a sort of Muslim macho, causing the media to go into convulsions.

Since then, Akbaruddin was clearly restrained. Asaduddin, a barrister, a restrained and skilful speaker, once a medium pacer for the South Zone cricket team, and one who anchors his political stance unerringly to the Constitution, is an uncommon phenomenon in public life. For the right, left and centre, Asaduddin is the exasperating opponent who doesn't deviate from good manners, logic, the Constitution and, woe of woes, is a Muslim. If he does have such qualities of heart and mind, why will sensible non-Muslims not turn to him some day?

The writer is a senior journalist and commentator based in New Delhi

LIVE RICH
FINANCIAL Chronicle
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM | FRIDAY | 27 NOVEMBER 2020

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	44,259.74	0.98
Nifty 50	12,987.00	1.00
S&P 500*	3,629.65	-0.16
Dollar (₹)	73.87	0.07
Pound Sterling (₹)	98.72	-0.11
Euro (₹)	87.94	0.03
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	48,257▲17	0.03
Brent crude ($/bbl)*	47.79	-0.82
IN 10-Yr bond yield	5.872	-0.014
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	0.882	0.00

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Import duty on crude palm oil slashed to 27.5%

The government cut the basic customs duty on crude palm oil to 27.5 per cent. The duty cut would help cool off rising edible oil prices. The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) in a notification said the basic customs duty rate on crude palm oil has been revised to 27.5 per cent with effect from Nov. 27 from 37.5 per cent currently. Palm oil constitutes over 40 per cent of India's edible oil consumption.

Bombay HC refuses to stay LVB-DBS merger

The Bombay High Court refused to stay Lakshmi Vilas Bank's (LVB) merger with DBS Bank India Ltd. A division bench of Justices Nitin Jamdar and Milind Jadhav was hearing petitions filed by a group of promoters of LVB and Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd, a shareholder, challenging the merger. "We are refusing the interim relief... The petitions shall be placed for hearing on Dec. 14," the court said.

Infotech sector visionary F.C. Kohli dead

Faqir Chand C. Kohli, considered the father of the IT industry, passed away on Thursday. Kohli, the founding CEO of TCS, was 96. TCS said it was JRD Tata's insistence that had got Kohli to join the Tata Group in 1969. "He pivoted first into management consultancy, and then over the next two decades, into software development."

Google India FY20 revenue rises 35% to ₹5,600 cr

Tech giant Google saw its India revenues grow 34.8 per cent to about Rs 5,593.8 crore in 2019-20 over the previous financial year against Rs 4,147 crore in the previous fiscal, according to Registrar of Companies filing shared by market intelligence firm Tofler. The net profit was higher by about 23.9 per cent at Rs 586.2 crore in FY20. Google India's total expenses rose 30.4 per cent to Rs 4,455.5 crore in FY20.

■ It's a process than an event: RBI Guv

Full capital account convertibility far off

FALAKNAAZ SYED
MUMBAI, NOV. 26

Shaktikanta Das

India will continue to approach capital account convertibility as "a process rather an event", Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Shaktikanta Das said on Thursday.

"Capital account convertibility will continue to be approached as a process rather than an event, taking cognizance of prevalent macroeconomic conditions. A long-term vision with short- and medium-term goals is the way ahead," Das said at an event of the Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association of India.

Though tremendous capital account liberalisation measures have been taken since the launch of economic reforms in the early 1990s, introduction of full capital account convertibility is yet to be implemented in India. There is partial capital account convertibility (CAC) in India. CAC refers to the freedom of foreign investors to purchase Indian financial assets such as shares, bonds, and that of the domestic citizens to purchase foreign financial assets. It provides rights for firms and residents to freely buy into overseas assets such as equity, bonds, property and acquire ownership of overseas firms besides free repatriation of proceeds by foreign investors.

"Over the last three decades, India has undergone a transformation from being a virtually closed economy to one that is globally connected and open to a much larger volume of international transactions and capital flows than before. Today, the capital account is convertible to a great extent. Inward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is allowed in most sectors and outbound FDI by Indian incorporated entities is allowed as a multiple of their net worth. The external commercial borrowing framework has also been significantly liberalised to include more eligible borrowers, even as maturity requirements have been reduced and end-use restrictions have been relaxed," Das said.

Referring to economic growth, Das raised concerns over demand sustainability with the close of the festive season and rise in Covid-19 infections in India which pose downside risks to growth.

"Even as the growth outlook has improved, downside risks to growth continue due to recent surge in infections in advanced economies and parts of India. We need to be watchful about the sustainability of demand after festivals and a possible reassessment of market expectations surrounding the vaccine. The monetary policy guidance in October emphasised the need to see through temporary inflation pressures and also maintain the accommodative stance at least during the current financial year and into the next financial year," added Das.

"After witnessing a sharp contraction in GDP by 23.9 per cent in Q1:2020-21 and a multi-speed normalisation of activity in Q2, the Indian economy has exhibited stronger than expected pick up in momentum of recovery. The global economy has also witnessed a stronger than expected rebound in activity in Q3. The IMF has accordingly revised its assessment for global growth in 2020 to a less severe contraction than what was assessed in June 2020."

LTC scheme: Insurance premium also eligible

New Delhi, Nov. 26: Premium paid for insurance policies purchased between October 12, 2020 and March 31, 2021 by central government employees will be eligible for reimbursement under the LTC cash voucher scheme.

Issuing the third set of FAQ, the Department of Expenditure under the finance ministry, also clarified that for purchases of goods like cars, employees can submit self-attested photocopy of bills instead of original bills as proof for availing the benefit under the scheme.

On October 12, the government announced the leave travel concession cash voucher scheme under which employees can purchase any goods or services with a GST rate of 12 per cent or above to avail of the benefit.

The expenditure department said payment of premium for existing insurance policies would not be covered under the LTC cash voucher scheme.

"However, payment of premium for insurance policies purchased during the period between October 12, 2020, and March 31, 2021, is eligible for reimbursement under the scheme," it said. Vouchers/ bills for availing of the benefit under the scheme has to be submitted on or before March 31. — *PTI*

Vedanta Resources sounds out bondholders on debt extension

BIJOU GEORGE & LUCA CASIRAGHI
NOV. 26

Anil Agarwal

Vedanta Resources Ltd has begun sounding out debt holders about the possibility of extending maturities on some of its dollar bonds to reduce refinancing pressures.

The mining giant started approaching the investors to discuss possible debt extensions after the company's failed attempt to delist its India unit, Vedanta Ltd, people familiar with the matter said.

The company's bonds due in June next year, which are among notes under discussion with holders, slumped as much as 7.7 cents after the news. That's set for the sharpest drop in more than six weeks, according to prices compiled by Bloomberg.

London-based Vedanta Resources must repay $670 million in outstanding principal on those securities.

Pressures are mounting after the delisting flopped, given it would have helped the holding company more easily access cash at the unit. That's triggered warnings from credit rating firms about Vedanta Resources' debt pile.

Holding companies, including Vedanta Resources, which are controlled by energy-to-mining tycoon Anil Agarwal, face their highest debt repayments in years.

A spokesman for the Vedanta group declined to comment.

— *Bloomberg*

Murugappa Group takes over CG Power, restructures board

New Delhi, Nov. 26: Chennai-based Murugappa Group on Thursday took over scam-hit CG Power and Industrial Solutions, infusing Rs 700 crore into the company and appointing directors on its board.

CG Power in a stock exchange filing said the company board at its meeting on Thursday issued 64.25 crore shares of Rs 2 at a price of Rs 8.56 per share aggregating to Rs 550 crore to Tube Investments of India Ltd (TII).

TII, a Murugappa Group firm, have been issued 1.52 crore warrants, each carrying a right exercisable within 18 months, for an aggregate consideration of Rs 150 crore.

"Post the allotment of securities, TII has acquired a controlling interest in the company and holds 50.62 per cent of the paid-up equity share capital of the company," it said.

TII paid Rs 5.87 crore towards subscription of equity shares and 25 per cent upfront consideration for warrants.

TII will eventually hold a 56.61 per cent stake once all warrants are converted into equity.

In a separate filing, TII said, effective Thursday, TII has been classified as the 'promoter' of the CG Power and the board of directors of CG Power has been reconstituted.

CG Power said its entire board, including non-executive chairman Ashish Guha and whole-time executive director Sudhir Mathur, have resigned.

Murugappa Group has appointed six members on the CG Power board, with Vellayan Subbiah, who currently is the managing director of TII, as its chairman. Natarajan Srinivasan, a director on Murugappa corporate board, has also been appointed as the new managing director. —*PTI*

Companies can classify NPS contribution as 'biz expense'

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, NOV. 26

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) has introduced a separate pension model for employers viz. corporate entities, PSUs, etc. to adopt the National Pension System (NPS) as a retirement benefit scheme for its employees. This is known as the NPS-Corporate Sector Model.

Besides other employer benefits the NPS-CSM provides tax benefits, since employers can claim tax relief on the amount contributed towards NPS on behalf of employees.

"The employer can claim up to 10 per cent of the salary (basic and dearness allowance) contributed towards employees' NPS account as 'Business Expense' under Section 36(i)(iv)(a) of the Income Tax Act, 1961," the PFRDA said in a release.

It is cost-effective too, as employers extending NPS as a retirement benefit scheme to its employees need not establish and maintain a Trust, manage the funds or undertake recordkeeping activities, according to the PFRDA.

Also, it is not mandatory for the employer to contribute to employees' NPS account. Contributions to NPS depend on the employer's policy on compensation and retiral benefits extended to its employees. The NPS contribution can be either (i) equal contributions by both employer and employee (say, 10 per cent each) or (ii) unequal by employer and employee (say, 10 per cent by employee and 14 per cent by employer) or (iii) contribution by only employer or only employee, says the regulator.

Short-term rates crash with funds overflowing with cash

SUBHADIP SIRCAR
NOV. 26

A glut of cash chasing assets in India has caused short-term rates to plunge.

A three-month treasury bill was sold at a record low yield on Wednesday, while the market repo clocked a trade at 0.01 per cent. Key borrowing costs like the weighted interbank call rate and collateralised money-market rates are way below the Reserve Bank of India's benchmark in recent days, indicating investors such as mutual funds are accepting returns lower than what RBI's deposit window would offer banks.

Governor Shaktikanta Das has pledged to stay accommodative well into 2021 as he tries to dig the economy out of an unprecedented technical recession. But a liquidity bloat is coming from the central bank's intervention in the foreign currency market, as it seeks to rein in the rupee and keep exports competitive.

"The RBI's dollar buying to prevent the rupee from appreciating has driven liquidity to a large excess," said Arvind Chari, head of fixed income and alternatives at Quantum Advisors. "The RBI may have to act to suck out liquidity to maintain the sanctity of the reverse repo rate."

Banks have parked Rs 6.1 lakh crore ($82.5 billion) of excess cash with the central bank at the reverse repo rate of 3.35 per cent, according to the Bloomberg Banking Liquidity Index. Mutual funds and other such investors don't have access to this window, and ICICI Securities Primary Dealership suggests the RBI should consider including them if it's worried about the depression of overnight yields.

"A weekly or fortnightly liquidity absorption window with wider participation could address the skew in excess liquidity and reinforce the reverse repo rate as the floor," ICICI Securities economists including A. Prasanna wrote in a note. "A stronger option would be to introduce the Standing Deposit Facility at a rate slightly above reverse repo—say 3.5 per cent—so that money market rates reset."

The so-called SDF is a tool that would enable the central bank to take in money without offering collateral.

The State Bank of India, the nation's largest lender, warned that a sustained cash surplus may eventually push loan rates below similar-rated bonds, introducing policy unpredictability.

"Such type of irrational pricing, because of abundant liquidity, can impact banking sector profits and initiate asset liability mismatch, if the spread is more prevalent for lower-rated borrowers," according to Soumya Kanti Ghosh, group chief economic adviser at the lender. "A sure recipe for financial instability in the future."

— *Bloomberg*

THERMAX PLANS ACQUISITIONS TO EXPAND BIZ

SHWETHA SUNIL
NOV. 26

Thermax Ltd. is seeing most of its businesses bounce back to year-ago levels and is now focused on options for growth.

The maker of electricity-generation and pollution-control equipment will consider mergers and acquisitions, technological arrangements and geographic partnerships that are "small and easy to digest," chief executive officer Ashish Bhandari said in an interview on Thursday.

The company had Rs 1,703 crore ($231 million) in cash, cash equivalents and short-term investments as of September 30, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Its shares have recovered about 20 per cent from a six-year low in March.

Thermax is betting on technology to provide solutions to problems arising from urbanisation, such as air and water pollution. The company sees coal continuing to be used as a fuel in some countries and is offering solutions to reduce its environmental harm. — *Bloomberg*

BMW X5 M Competition launched at ₹1.95 crore

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, NOV. 26

BMW, India's second biggest luxury carmaker, on Thursday launched its all-new BMW X5 M Competition SUV in India priced at Rs 1.95 crore to boost sales in Asia's third largest economy.

The BMW X5 M is being imported by the German firm as a completely built-up unit (CBU) and competes with the likes of the Audi RS Q8 and Porsche Cayenne Turbo.

"BMW M is driven by a single-minded passion for creating authentic motorsport functionality with everyday usability. The all-new BMW X5 M Competition inherits this DNA," Vikram Pawah, president at BMW Group India, said.

CUTTING | RISKS

Company building assembly lines for iPad and MacBook

Foxconn to shift some Apple production to Vietnam from China

YIMOU LEE
TAIPEI , NOV. 27

Foxconn is moving some iPad and MacBook assembly to Vietnam from China at the request of Apple Inc, said a person with knowledge of the plan, as the US firm diversifies production to minimise the impact of a Sino-US trade war.

The development comes as the outgoing administration of US President Donald Trump encourages US firms to shift production out of China. During Trump's tenure, the United States has targeted made-in-China electronics for higher import tariffs, and restricted supplies of components produced using US technology to Chinese firms it deems a national security risk.

Taiwanese manufacturers, wary of being caught up in the tit-for-tat trade war, have moved or are considering moving some production from China to countries such as Vietnam, Mexico and India.

Foxconn is building assembly lines for Apple's iPad tablet and MacBook laptop at its plant in Vietnam's northeastern Bac Giang province, to come online in the first half of 2021, the person said. The lines will also take some production from China, the person said. "The move was requested by Apple," the person said. "It wants to diversify production following the trade war."

Foxconn said, "As a matter of company policy, and for reasons of commercial sensitivity, we do not comment on any aspect of our work for any customer or their products." — *Reuters*

'India can beat China in low-cost mfg'

New Delhi, Nov. 26: India has the potential to surpass even China in low-cost manufacturing if the government and industry work in a cohesive manner, Maruti Suzuki India (MSIL) chairman R.C. Bhargava said on Thursday.

"India has the capability to become a lower cost country than China if the industry and the government work together," Bhargava said, sharing his views at an online event.

He said the only objective of government policies should be to increase the competitiveness of Indian industry so that it can make things at the lowest cost along with the best quality in the world.

R.C.Bhargava

"The more the industry can sell, the more jobs will be created in the economy," he noted.

Bhargava pointed out that creating jobs across sectors was important for the overall growth of the economy. He, however, criticised states which have reserved jobs in manufacturing for locals. "It is an anti-competitive step." He also said MSMEs have to be as globally competitive as the large companies because the supply chain determines the overall competitiveness.—*PTI*

3 bn people live in water-scarce areas

MEGAN DURISIN
NOV. 26

Roughly 40 per cent of the world's people live in farming areas facing large water shortages, and scarce supplies pose an increasing risk to food security, the United Nations said.

About 3.2 billion people live in agricultural areas with "high to very high" water shortages and competition over resources is rising, the UN's Food & Agriculture Organization said in a report. Many farms that depend on rain are at risk as severe droughts become more common, and bigger global incomes are spurring demand for water-intensive foods like meat and dairy.

Of the total, 1.2 billion people—a sixth of the global population—are in areas with severely constrained water supplies, and the amount of freshwater available per person has dropped 20 per cent in the past two decades. Swathes of Asia and North Africa have been most affected, while small numbers of people in Europe and the Americas have seen extreme restrictions.

Agriculture accounts for 70 per cent of the world's freshwater withdrawals, and the UN called for better management to keep resources in check and boost agricultural yields.

— *Bloomberg*

DATE OF BIRTH: October 30, 1960
PLACE OF BIRTH: Buenos Aires, Argentina
DATE OF DEATH: November 25, 2020
PLACE OF DEATH: Tigre, Argentina
HEIGHT: 1.65m

PLAYING CAREER
- Argentinos Juniors (1976-81)
- Boca Juniors (1981-82)
- Barcelona (ESP/1982-84)
- Napoli (ITA/1984-91)
- Sevilla (ESP/1992-93)
- Newell's Old Boys (1993)
- Boca Juniors (1995-97)

INTL CAPS: 91 (1977-94)

INTL GOALS: 34
Position: attacking midfielder/playmaker

Honours
- FIFA World Cup winner (1986)
- FIFA World Cup Golden Ball (1986)
- UEFA Cup winner (1989)
- Italian champion (1987, 1990)
- Argentine champion (1981)
- Spanish Super Cup (1983)
- Spanish Cup (1983)
- Italian Cup (1987)
- Italian Super Cup (1990)
- Top scorer in Italy (1988), Argentina (1979, 1980)
- FIFA Player of the Century (2000)

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Coaching career
- Textil Mandiyu (1994)
- Racing Club (1995)
- Argentina (2008-2010)
- Al Wasl (UAE/2011-12)
- Al-Fujairah (UAE/2017-18)
- Dorados (MEX/2018-19)
- Gimnasia Esgrima La Plata (2019-20)

Uncontrollable Argentina cries

Country mourns death of favourite son Maradona

"It is a very sad day for all Argentines and football. He leaves us but he does not go because he is eternal. I am left with many of the nice moments we shared and I want to send my condolences to all his family and friends."
— Lionel Messi, six-time Ballon d'Or winner

"Today I say goodbye to a friend and the world says goodbye to an eternal genius. One of the best ever. An unparallelled magician. He leaves too soon, but leaves a legacy without limits and a void that will never be filled. Rest in peace, ace. You will never be forgotten."
— Cristiano Ronaldo, five-time Ballon d'Or winner and Juventus forward

"RIP Legend. You will stay in the history of football forever. Thanks you for all the pleasure you gave to the whole world."
— Kylian Mbappe, French World Cup winner and Paris Saint-Germain forward

"What Diego has done for football, for making all of us fall in love with this beautiful game, is unique. It is, as he is, simply immense."
— Gianni Infantino, FIFA president

"I'm 53 years old and it feels like my entire life, he was part of it. When I was very young — maybe eight or nine, 10 years old — I saw him for the first time and he was 16 or 17. In any video, juggling the ball, from that moment on he was the player for me."
— Jurgen Klopp, Liverpool manager

"There are a few incredible players in all of history, he is one of them. For people of our generation, the World Cup in '86 in Mexico was something which made this sport better."
— Pep Guardiola, Manchester City manager

"Our sport lost one of its biggest idols. I lost a great friend, whose talent inspired me from the time I was a boy. I'm in shock that he's gone, but grateful that our paths crossed in life. El Pibe, your legacy is eternal. Your magic on the pitch will never be forgotten."
— Ronaldo, former Brazil, Barcelona and Real Madrid striker

Buenos Aires (Argentina), Nov. 26: Impatient fans were confronting police as thousands lined up to say goodbye to Diego Maradona on Thursday at the Argentine presidential mansion staging the funeral of one of football's greatest stars.

Fans threw bottles and metal fences at police near the Casa Rosada in the heart of Buenos Aires.

Open visitation started at 6.15 am local time after a few hours of privacy for family and close friends.

Maradona's wooden casket was in the main lobby of the presidential office, covered in an Argentine flag and a No.10 shirt of the national team. Dozens of other shirts of different football teams were thrown in by visitors who passed by in tears.

Maradona died on Wednesday of a heart attack in a house outside Buenos Aires where he recovered from a brain operation on November 3.

The first to bid farewell were his daughters and close family members. Then came former teammates of the 1986 World Cup-winning squad including Oscar Ruggeri. Other Argentine footballers, such as Carlos Tevez of Boca Juniors showed up too.

The lines started outside the Casa Rosada only hours after Maradona's death was confirmed. Among those present were the renowned barrabravas fans of Boca Juniors, one of his former clubs.

The first fan to visit was Nahuel de Lima, using crutches to move because of a disability. At the same time, a wave of people tried to get ahead and confronted police, who used tear gas to contain them.

Bodyguards were stopping fans from taking pictures and controlling access to the building. Many fans were breaking down as soon as they left.

Fans who walked past the casket blew kisses into the air, struck their chests with closed fists, and shouted 'Let's go Diego.' Most, but not all, wore masks due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A giant black screen in front of the Casa Rosada was showing historic photos of Maradona as fans go.

Fans also gathered outside the humble home where Maradona was born and raised in the Villa Fiorito neighbourhood. They went to the stadium of Argentinos Juniors, where he started as a professional footballer in 1976. They stood at the historic La Bombonera stadium of his beloved Boca Juniors. More were at the headquarters of Gimnasia La Plata, the team he was coaching. — *AP*

In this photo released by Argentinas Presidency, the coffin with the remains of Diego Maradona lies in state inside the presidential palace as mourners file past in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on Thursday. — *AP*

People react as they leave the presidential palace in Buenos Aires, Argentina, after paying tribute to football legend Diego Maradona's coffin. — *AFP*

A LIFE IN 10 KEY DATES

From his birth in 1960 to Argentina's World Cup triumph in 1986 and his positive drug test at the 1994 finals — here are 10 key dates in the colourful life of Diego Maradona.

OCTOBER 30, 1960: Maradona is born in Lanus, to the south of Buenos Aires. The son of Diego Maradona and Delma Franco, he was one of seven children.

OCTOBER 20, 1976: Makes his debut in Argentina's top flight for Buenos Aires side Argentinos Juniors, just before his 16th birthday. He went on to win his first cap for Argentina in February 1977, selected by coach Cesar Luis Menotti for a 5-1 win against Hungary. His first goal for Argentina came in a 3-1 win over Scotland in Glasgow in 1979.

SEPTEMBER 7, 1979: Wins the World Youth Championship, scoring the third goal as Argentina beat the Soviet Union 3-1 in the final in Tokyo.

JUNE 13, 1982: Maradona takes part in a World Cup match for the first time as the holders lose 1-0 to Belgium in the opening game at the tournament in Spain.

JUNE 22, 1986: Scores his two legendary goals against England in the World Cup quarter-final in Mexico, the "Hand of God" and then his stunning high-speed slalom that was later named "Goal of the Century" by FIFA. Argentina went on to win the trophy, beating West Germany 3-2 in the final.

JULY 8, 1990: Captains Argentina to a 1-0 defeat against West Germany in the World Cup final in Rome.

JUNE 25, 1994: Skippers Argentina to a 2-1 win over Nigeria at the World Cup in the United States. After the match he tests positive for ephedrine and is suspended for 15 months. He had already been suspended for 15 months for cocaine use in his Napoli days. Maradona retired from playing in 1997.

NOVEMBER 4, 2008: Becomes coach of Argentina, leading them to the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. Eliminated in the quarterfinals by Germany.

NOVEMBER 3, 2020: Four days after his 60th birthday, Maradona undergoes brain surgery on a blood clot.

NOVEMBER 25, 2020: Dies of a heart attack at home in the Buenos Aires. — *AFP*

GOA SET TO INSTALL MARADONA STATUE

Panaji, Nov. 26: The Goa government will install the life-size statue of late Argentine football legend Diego Maradona in the coastal belt of North district by early next year, a senior minister said.

Maradona's statue is already under making with a Maharashtra-based artist working on the mould, Calangute MLA and state Ports Minister Michael Lobo said.

Lobo had announced installation of the statue of Maradona in 2018. "The statue would be installed somewhere at Candolim or Calangute to inspire the football playing youth," he said.

Lobo said the mould of the statue is ready. "It is an actual-size statue as tall as late Maradona," the minister said, adding that the 350-kg statue is part of the state government's initiative to encourage football culture.

Lobo said a statue of another football legend Cristiano Ronaldo is also being prepared which will be installed in North district of the state. — *PTI*

FOOTBALL TOURNEY IN DIEGO MEMORY

Hyderabad, Nov. 26: A football tournament is being conducted in Hyderabad in memory of Argentine legend Diego Maradona at the weekend.

The Under 15 boys knockout tournament will be played on November 28 and 29 at Skykings football ground in Bowenpally. Players born on or after 01.01.2006 are eligible to participate. They have to furnish a valid Date of Birth certificate.

The last date for entries is November 27. For further details, contact All India Football Federation 'D' Licence coach Shashikanth on phone number 9703674343.

STADIUM IN NAPLES AFTER MARADONA

Naples (Italy), Nov. 26: The mayor of Naples proposed that the Stadio San Paolo be renamed in honour of the city's beloved footballer, Diego Maradona. "Let's name the San Paolo Stadium for Diego Armando Maradona!!!" Mayor Luigi de Magistris wrote on Twitter.

The stadium on Wednesday was illuminated in honour of the former Napoli player who died of a heart attack at age 60, as fans gathered outside to mourn.

Maradona led Napoli to their only two league titles in 1987 and 1990, becoming a legend in the working-class city, where fans on Wednesday poured into the streets after hearing of his death. — *AFP*

WHEN MARADONA GRIPPED KOLKATA

Kolkata, Nov. 26: His promise to bring "big-time" football to India remained unfulfilled as Diego Maradona died after cheating death more than once, leaving a cricket-mad nation devastated in an appropriate reflection of his immortal status.

A lot many in the 'City of Joy' will recall how a little bulky version of Maradona huffed and puffed during a charity football game here three years ago.

The Argentine legend, who was 57 when he came here, had managed to dribble, show glimpses of his deft left foot and even crooned Spanish songs, as he sweated it out with a bunch of school children and bid them adieu with a promise to "bring football" to India.

In December 2017, he turned up in shorts, enjoyed every bit of the maddening attention even though the gruelling session literally drained him as he was seen drenched in sweat, pouring water on his head. But he had no complaints and was eloquent in his three-minute Spanish speech. — *PTI*

In this photo taken on December 6, 2008, Diego Maradona gestures as he attends a felicitation programme at Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata. — *AFP*

KERALA DECLARES 2-DAY MOURNING

Thiruvananthapuram, Nov. 26: A day after Diego Maradona died of heart attack in Buenos Aires, the Kerala government on Thursday announced a two-day mourning in the state's sports sector and appealed to everyone in the fraternity to join as a mark of tribute.

Considered the greatest footballer of all time alongside Brazil's Pele, the Argentine player had a great fan following in the football crazy southern state.

Announcing the mourning, state sports minister E. P. Jayarajan said the demise of Maradona has saddened football fans around the world. "In Kerala also, lakhs of fans could not believe his departure," he said.

"There is no cancellation of any event or anything like that as part of the mourning announced in the sports sector. It is just an appeal to the general public, sports buffs and those in the sports fraternity to mourn the death of the legendary footballer," a staff in the minister's office said.

However, no sporting events are scheduled due to Covid-19, he added. — *PTI*

Live on TV

CRICKET

Australia vs India: First ODI from 9.10 am on Sony Six, Ten 1, HD

Lanka Premier League: Jaffna vs Galle from 8 pm on Sony Six, HD

South Africa vs England: First T20 from 9.30 pm on Star Sports 1, HD

WWE

Smackdown: Bouts from 6.30 am (Saturday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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**

India take on Oz in top ODI clash

Sydney, Nov. 26: India are promising to play "hard, aggressive" cricket when they emerge from coronavirus quarantine to face Australia in a blockbuster limited-over series beginning in Sydney on Friday.

The first of three ODIs, followed by three Twenty20s next week, comes after the visitors had to endure wrangling over quarantine requirements and an outbreak of the virus in Melbourne, which delayed confirmation of the tour until just weeks ago.

Virat Kohli's squad have been in isolation since their arrival a fortnight ago, although they have been allowed to train within a bio-secure bubble.

It has been an equally odd build-up for Aaron Finch's Australia, with the likes of David Warner, Steve Smith and Pat Cummins, who played in the Indian Premier League, also undergoing the mandatory 14 days of quarantine, which ended Thursday.

The lack of international cricket this year makes it hard to determine form, although Australia head into the white-ball series on the back of beating 50-over world champions England in September.

India haven't played together since a tour of New Zealand in February, when they clinched the Twenty20 series but were whitewashed 3-0 in the ODIs.

The first of three ODIs, followed by three Twenty20s next week, comes after the visitors had to endure wrangling over quarantine requirements and an outbreak of the virus in Melbourne, which delayed confirmation of the tour until just weeks ago.

But they can take solace from winning their last Test and ODI series in Australia two summers ago, although Smith and Warner were banned for ball-tampering.

India have separate squads for the one-dayers and T20s, both led by Kohli, but without Rishabh Pant, an explosive batsman who became a viral sensation on India's 2018-19 tour with his banter behind the stumps.

Injured star opener Rohit Sharma and fast-bowler Ishant Sharma are also missing.

Shikhar Dhawan is likely to open the innings, potentially alongside Mayank Agarwal with wicketkeeper Rahul pushed down the order.

The potent combination of Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah will spearhead a dangerous pace attack on expected lively pitches, with all six white-ball games either at the Sydney Cricket Ground or the Manuka Oval in Canberra.

Langer may pick highly-rated young in-form all-rounder Cameron Green, who was a surprise inclusion, but will largely stick with the side that beat England in September, minus the injured Mitch Marsh and with Smith returning after missing the series with concussion.

All-rounders Glenn Maxwell and Marcus Stoinis will complement the four frontline bowlers. — *AFP*

Six Pak players test positive for Covid

Wellington, Nov. 26: Six of Pakistan's squad tested positive for Covid-19, hosts New Zealand Cricket said on Thursday, throwing preparations for their five-match tour into turmoil and causing a scare in a country that has largely eradicated the virus.

The squad's "exemption to train while in managed isolation has been put on hold until investigations have been completed," the governing body said, adding that the six positive players would be moved into strict quarantine.

New Zealand's ministry of health said 53 team members passed a symptom check before leaving Lahore and were tested on arrival in Christchurch on November 24.

Six of those results have come back positive, although two of the six cases are believed to be "historical".

New Zealand Health also revealed that "several team members have been seen on CCTV at the facility breaching managed isolation rules, despite clear, consistent and detailed communication of expected behaviours".

"The team as a whole has been issued with a final warning," it said. — *AFP*