



Madras HC apologises to SC for taking 6 years to dispose of a petition

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Bihar hooch death toll rises to 33; Nitish Kumar vows stern action

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Ethiopia rebels to 'join forces' to defeat Abiy Ahmed Govt.

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Shami, Jadeja set up India's big win over Scotland

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IN BRIEF



Punjab: Sidhu withdraws resignation as Cong. chief

CHANDIGARH
Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu on Friday said he had withdrawn his resignation as the party's Punjab chief but declared that he would not reassume charge till the State's new Advocate-General is removed.

NEWS PAGE 8

Namaz in the open will stop soon: VHP leader

GURUGRAM
Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Surender Jain said on Friday that the local administration had agreed that offering of namaz in the open was illegal and it promised to end the practice in three weeks.

CITY PAGE 3

Duty cuts, stock limits helped curtail edible oil prices: Govt.

No plan to extend free rations beyond Nov. 30

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The prices of most major cooking oils dropped about ₹5-10 a litre in Delhi and as much as ₹20 in some other cities in the run-up to Deepavali, Food Secretary Sudhanshu Pandey said on Friday, giving credit to the stabilisation of global prices as well as measures such as duty cuts and stock limits. However, the national average retail prices for cooking oils showed little change, and mustard oil, which is only produced domestically, continued to see rising prices.

Price chart

The retail prices of cooking oils dipped in select markets since October. The table shows the variation in edible oil prices between Oct. 31 and Nov. 3 (in ₹/kg):

Oil type	Delhi	Mumbai	Aligarh	Cuddalore
Palm	-6.0	-1.0	-18.0	-7
Soyabean	-5.0	-3.0	-5.0	NR
Groundnut	-7.0	-2.0	-5.0	-10
Sunflower	-10.0	1.0	NC	-1
Mustard	-6.0	-1.0	-10.0	NR

*NR: NOT RECORDED; NC: NO CHANGE | SOURCE: DEPT. OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS

"International edible oil prices remain high, but have stabilised over the past week. Interventions by the Central Government along with the State Governments' proactive involvement and

the cut in wholesale prices by major private players have led to retail prices cooling down much more than in the international market," the Food Secretary told journalists.

On the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), Mr. Pandey observed that there were no plans to extend the free ration scheme introduced as COVID-19 relief last year beyond November 30.

"...As the economy is also reviving and the OMSS [or open market sale scheme] is also exceptionally good, there is no proposal from the department for extension," he noted.

PMGKAY was rolled out in March 2020 and has been extended twice. It provides five kg of free foodgrains a month to the 80 crore beneficiaries of the National Food Security Act..

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

In poll-bound Uttarakhand, PM hails India's 'rishi tradition'

Modi inaugurates several development projects in Kedarnath

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday invoked the "rishi tradition" of India as he inaugurated several development works in Kedarnath, Uttarakhand, including the unveiling of a statue of Adi Sankara and monuments related to his *samadhi*. Significantly, Uttarakhand will be going to the polls in early 2022.

Mr. Modi emphasised the Government's work in reviving cultural and religious centres, including the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya and the building of a better ropeway to access the Hemkund Sahib gurdwara in Uttarakhand. He was addressing a meeting after offering prayers at the temple and unveiling the Adi Sankara statue.

Recalling the 2013 devastating floods in Kedarnath that caused extensive damage, he said: "People who used to come here used to say that will this, our Kedar Dham, stand up again? But my inner voice was saying that it will stand with more pride than ever before."

'Holistic path'

Talking about Adi Sankara, the Prime Minister, who personally supervised the plans for the restoration of the *samadhi* and building of the statue, said, "*Shan karoti*



Added attraction: Narendra Modi after unveiling the statue of Adi Sankara at Kedarnath, Uttarakhand, on Friday. ■ ANI

saha Shankar" that is, the one who does welfare is Shankar.

"There was a time when spirituality and religion started getting linked with stereotypes and outdated practices. Whereas, Indian philosophy talks about human welfare and looks at life in a holistic way. Adi Sankara did the work of making society aware of this truth," he noted.

"A grand temple of Lord Shri Ram is coming up in Ayodhya. Ayodhya is getting its glory back. Just two days ago, the whole world saw the grand celebrations of 'deepotsav' in Ayodhya. Today we can imagine how the ancient cultural form of India must have been," he observed and said that today's India was confident of its heritage.

The theme of reviving cultural and religious centres was echoed by BJP chief J.P.

Nadda and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. "With the visit to the Kedarnath temple, Prime Minister Modi has performed a 'mahayagya' to re-establish the traditions of 'Sanatan Dharma,'" remarked Mr. Chouhan, while Mr. Nadda pointed out that Adi Sankara did much to revive and re-establish 'Sanatana Dharma', and the Government under Mr. Modi was conscious of it.

Mr. Modi reviewed projects worth ₹130 crore that had been completed so far, including the Saraswati Ash-tapath, Tirth purohit houses and the Garud Chatti bridge over the Mandakini river. The Prime Minister also laid the foundation stone for projects worth ₹180 crore, including the redevelopment of the Sangam Ghat, and a hospital and administrative offices for those managing the Kedarnath shrine.

Pfizer says COVID-19 pill cuts death risk by 90%

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON

Pfizer Inc. said on Friday that its experimental anti-viral pill for COVID-19 cut rates of hospitalisation and death by nearly 90% in high-risk adults, as the drugmaker joins the race to bring the first easy-to-use medication against coronavirus to the U.S. market.

Competitor Merck's COVID-19 pill is already under

review at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) after showing strong initial results, and on Thursday, the U.K. became the first country to approve it.

Pfizer released preliminary results of its study of 775 adults on Friday. The company said it will ask the FDA to authorise its pill as soon as possible.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

U.S. jabs still out of reach in India due to indemnity issue

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

More than six months after the Central Government announced it would fast-track clearances for foreign COVID-19 vaccines to India, "facilitate quicker access" and "encourage imports", indemnity issues are still holding up the import of all American vaccines to India, including Pfizer, Johnson

and Johnson (J&J) and Moderna.

With the Australia-India-Japan-U.S. Quad pressing ahead with plans to produce J&J vaccines at a facility in Hyderabad, officials indicated that the indemnity clause, required by U.S. companies to avoid legal liability for their vaccines, could mean that India will produce the vaccines only

for export, and not to supply them domestically.

"Talks are on and yes indemnity clause is also being discussed. India has put across its stand and we are in dialogue," a senior Health Ministry official said, without specifying any timeline.

The issue has been pending since May 2021.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

Wankhede not to head cruise drugs probe

Special investigation team at NCB's Delhi headquarters takes over case

DEVESH K. PANDEY
NEW DELHI

A special team of the Delhi headquarters of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has taken over the case of drug seizure from a cruise ship, allegedly involving Aryan Khan, son of actor Shah Rukh Khan, from its Mumbai zone. With this, NCB Mumbai zonal director Sameer Wankhede will no longer be supervising the case.

"A Special Investigation



Change in role: Sameer Wankhede at the NCB office in Mumbai on Friday. ■ PTI

Team [SIT] comprising officers from the Operations Branch of NCB headquarters

has been constituted by the NCB Director-General to take over six cases from the NCB Mumbai zonal unit, which have national and international ramifications..." said Sanjay Kumar Singh, Deputy Director-General, NCB headquarters, on Friday.

In a statement, Mr. Singh said the decision was taken to conduct a deeper probe into forward and backward linkages in these cases. "No officer or officers have been

removed from their present roles and they will continue to assist the Operations Branch probe as required until any specific orders are issued to the contrary. It is reiterated that the NCB functions across India as a single integrated agency," he said.

The move comes weeks after various charges were levelled against Mr. Wankhede by Maharashtra Minister and senior NCP leader Nawab Malik and others.

Work on Central Secretariat set to start this month

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The construction of the first three office buildings of the new Common Central Secretariat along the Rajpath is likely to take off this month, sources in the Central Public

Works Department (CPWD) said. The CPWD had awarded the construction and five-year maintenance contract on October 27 to Larsen & Toubro Ltd. for ₹3,141.99 crore, the largest ever in the Central agency's history.

The buildings are proposed to be constructed on the plot of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts campus. When it starts, the CCS project would be the third component of the larger Central Vista revamp to be

under construction, after the new Parliament building and the redevelopment of the Central Vista Avenue. It has a targeted timeline of 24 months for completion.

DETAILS PAGE 10

Delhi's post-Deepavali air quality hits five-year low

Many cities in NCR face 'severe' pollution

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi's air quality entered the "severe" category on Friday for the first time this season after people in the city burst firecrackers on Deepavali night despite a blanket ban. The Capital registered its worst post-Deepavali air quality in five years, as per Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data.

Several other cities in the National Capital Region (NCR) such as Faridabad, Gurugram and Greater Noida and towns in north India such as Agra and Baghpat fared no better on Friday.

The AQI (air quality index) of Delhi was 444 at 6 a.m. on Friday. The AQI of the day was 462, as per CPCB's 4 p.m. bulletin, which is an average of the previous 24 hours.

Delhi's AQI a day after Deepavali in 2020 was 435, while it was 368 in 2019, 390 in 2018, 403 in 2017 and 445 in 2016. A higher value of AQI indicates more air pollution. The current air pollution levels "affect healthy people and seriously impact those with existing diseases", according to the CPCB.

"Firework emissions on



Pall of grey: Air quality deteriorated to the "severe" category in Delhi on Friday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

the night of Diwali degraded air quality from very poor to severe category as predicted by SAFAR. Last 24 hr PM2.5 level is higher as compared to 2020 but much less than that in 2018. However, it may be noted that local winds have picked up since morning and now the fast dispersion is expected," said government-run monitoring agency SAFAR (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research).

Relief ahead

According to SAFAR, without any more firecracker emissions the AQI is likely to improve to "very poor" category by Saturday night, but relief is expected only from Sunday evening.

MORE REPORTS PAGE 2

Stubble burning impacts lung health, says study

Over 3,500 persons tracked in two phases across six villages in Punjab

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

Pollution from stubble burning significantly reduced lung function and was particularly harmful to women in rural Punjab, says one of the largest studies of its kind in India, correlating the effect of air pollution on health.

The study was conducted in six villages of Patiala, Punjab, and spanned two phases. The first was in October 2018 and again the following summer from March to April

SPECIAL

2019 and the second phase was undertaken in the same villages during late October-November, 2018. The latter is the period when crop burning peaks and the two timeframes were considered to measure the change in air quality during both periods. Close to 3,600 participants, from 10-60 years of age, were included in the study.

While the links between particulate matter pollution and respiratory health are

widely documented, there have been limited studies in India that have clearly linked the impact of poor air on lung health. It emerged from the study that the concentrations of PM2.5, the category of unburnt carbon particles considered most harmful to respiratory health, was found to increase more than twice between the two phases, from 100 g/m3 to 250 g/m3. Incidentally these are around 10-15 times the WHO prescribed air quality standards though the permissible standards by India's Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) are higher.

More symptoms

During the crop residue burning period, a two- to three-fold increase was noted in most of the respiratory symptoms, including wheezing, breathlessness on exertion, cough in morning, cough at night, skin rashes, runny nose or itchiness of eyes, across all age groups. The highest number of complaints were reported by the elderly population (>40-60) and the lowest in the younger age group (<10-18) during crop burning period in Punjab, the study's authors note.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

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* Schedule subject to change

A day after, sparks of allegations fly thick and fast

BJP calls Govt.'s anti-cracker drive 'Aurangzeb-influenced political thinking'; Oppn. underestimating its effect on pollution: AAP



A girl bursting crackers to celebrate Deepavali in Delhi on Thursday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The bursting of firecrackers on Deepavali, despite a ban in the city, has turned political with the BJP accusing AAP of running an anti-cracker campaign based on an "Aurangzeb-influenced political thinking". AAP said the BJP has been underestimating the effect cracker have on air pollution.

"Gopal Rai's [Environment Minister] continuous anti-cracker campaign reflects his thought process influenced by Muslim monarch Aurangzeb. People of Delhi by bursting crackers yesterday [Thurs-

day] have given a befitting reply to this Aurangzeb-influenced political thinking," Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said.

"Mr. Rai has tried to squarely blame the Deepavali night crackers for air pollution and Chhath Puja at Yamuna ghats for Yamuna ji's water pollution in true Aurangzebi style," he added.

Mr. Rai said ever since the Government announced a ban on crackers, the Opposition had been underestimating the effect cracker have on pollution. "Leaders of the BJP have constantly given the rhetoric that this is a matter of religion, of a festival, even when all scientists say that crackers cause pollution."

The Minister said that a large population of Delhi did not burst crackers on Deepavali, but people belonging to the BJP deliberately did, causing the pollution levels to become deadly.

Lowest calls
This Deepavali, the Delhi Fire Services (DFS) received the lowest number of calls in a decade and it was 25% fewer than last year.

DFS chief Atul Garg said they received 152 calls, including 117 fire calls, 10 animal rescue calls, two road accidents, and one house collapse. "Only four calls were related to fire caused by crackers," Mr. Garg said, adding that no major injuries were reported. The fire department had responded to 205 fire-related calls last year, he added.

"The reduction in number of calls is also because of public awareness. There were fewer calls related to bursting of firecrackers as well," he said.

According to the data provided by the DFS, the highest number of calls - 36 - were received from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. on Thursday.

143 held for bursting firecrackers till Nov. 4

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi police have arrested 143 people between September 28 and November 4 for allegedly bursting firecrackers and registered 210 cases pertaining to such incidents.

The data provided by the police showed that 19702.489 kg of firecrackers were seized during this period. As many as 125 cases were registered in connection with the sale and supply of firecrackers, while 138 people were arrested.

The data further showed that West district and Rohini had the highest number of

cases registered against the sale of firecrackers at 14, while North district had the highest number of people arrested in relation to such incidents - 21.

For bursting firecrackers, the number of cases registered in West district was the highest at 35, while Shahdara saw the highest number of people arrested - 37.

According to the police, 38 internal meetings were held by DCPs and additional DCPs in all the 15 districts of the city to prevent smuggling and bursting of firecrackers. A total of 706 teams were constituted to prevent such incidents.

Delhi HC rejects plea of former BSF jawan

He was dismissed from service for links with alleged Pak. operative

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has rejected the plea of a former Border Security Force (BSF) constable, who was dismissed from service for having regularly contacted a suspected Pakistan Intelligence Operative (PIO) while being deployed on the Pakistan border.

A Bench of Justices Navin Chawla and Manmohan declined to interfere with the decision of the BSF dismissing Kishore Chandra Sahoo from service.

Mr. Sahoo, who had joined the BSF as a constable in 2002, was removed from service on an allegation that on November 23, 2020, while being deployed at the border, he had taken his mobile phone on duty and contacted a suspected PIO.

During a search of his belonging, Mr. Sahoo was found in possession of four

mobile phones and five SIM cards.

The Staff Court of Inquiry (SCOI) had found Mr. Sahoo guilty of remaining in contact with the PIO since 2018 and regularly conversing with him on messenger account; establishing a voice call from his registered mobile number with the PIO while being deployed on duty.

The SCOI also found him guilty of possessing four mobile phones and five SIM cards and regularly carrying said mobile phones during duty hours, day and night, in contravention of the standard operating procedures and instructions.

Mr. Sahoo had claimed that the four mobile phones found from his possession belonged to him and his family members.

The Bench termed Mr. Sahoo's explanation "completely fanciful" and rejected it. The High Court remarked that the submission made on Mr. Sahoo's behalf that there was no cogent evidence against him and that the order of dismissal was based only on suspicion could not be accepted.

Elderly couple found battered to death in Ghaziabad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GHAZIABAD

An elderly couple was battered to death in their house at Patel Nagar here on Deepavali night, the police said on Friday. The matter came to light when one of their daughters living in Noida called them up repeatedly and finding no response from them, alerted her parent's neighbours, City Su-

perintendent of Police (II) Nipun Agarwal said.

He said that on reaching the couple's residence, the neighbours found its doors ajar with the bodies of 72-year-old medicine dealer Ashok Zaidka and his wife Madhu Zaidka lying in a pool of blood.

The ornaments and the cash were found intact in the almirah, the SP said.

ST(E)PS for a cleaner Yamuna

A major cause of pollution in the river is the 22 drains dumping sewage and industrial effluents into it, prompting the authorities to build more sewage treatment plants in the city



1. Water in the Delhi Gate drain is dark, polluted, and has a stench. This water is taken to the STP through an underground tunnel, which is about 90-metre long



2. The water passes through two screens: a medium screen, which traps materials above 20 mm, and then through a fine screen, which traps all materials above 5 mm



3. Suspended particles are removed by adding ferric alum and polyelectrolyte in two different stages. As suspended particles become heavy, they settle down due to gravity



4. Dissolved particles are removed in aeration tanks, which have specific bacteria that eat the dissolved particles. Air is pumped into these tanks



5. Samples of water before and after being treated at the STP. This water is used for other purposes or released back to the drains from where it flows into the Yamuna

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Pollution in the Yamuna rises as the river enters deeper into the national capital. Once considered the lifeline of the city, the river currently carries fecal coliform (microbes from human and animal excreta) beyond prescribed levels at all points except Palla village, where the river enters Delhi.

A major cause of pollution in the Yamuna is the 22 drains dumping sewage and industrial effluents into the river. Illegal industries also add to the effluents ending up in the river. Because of this, the role of sewage treatment plants (STPs) becomes most important in depolluting the river water.

According to Government estimates, 14% of all sewage generated in the city is not being treated at present due to lack of facilities and the authorities are building more STPs to address this problem.

How does an STP work?

Stormwater drains are supposed to carry rainwater to a waterbody, which in case of Delhi is the Yamuna. Apart from this, there is supposed to be a separate sewage network, which is not connected to the stormwater drains, and the sewage from it is to be treated at the STPs.

In Delhi, however, the sewage flows into the stormwater drains at many points, polluting the water. So, in most cases, the STPs take water directly from the drains, clean it, and use it for other purposes (not drinking) or release it back to the drains from where the water flows into the Yamuna.

Primary stage

At Delhi Gate STP, water from the Delhi Gate drain is taken in through an underground tunnel, which is about 90-metre long. There is a coarse filter at the entrance of the tunnel to trap large floating waste and water from the drain flows under the effect of gravity to a storage sump inside the plant.

At this point, the water still has a lot of smaller floating bits. This water is then pumped up to a large overhead tank from where it flows through a slightly sloping path to different chambers.

Here it passes through two screens: a medium screen, which traps all waste bits above 20 mm in size and then through a fine screen, which traps all bits above 5 mm. At this point, the water is still blackish and has a stench. It then goes to a grit chamber (another tank) where heavy particles settle down due to gravity, and then through an aeration chamber where oil,

grease etc. are removed from the water by adding air and mixing it. Oil and grease froths to the surface of the water and goes to a separate chamber.

Secondary stage

Now, whatever pollutants are present in the water are either dissolved or suspended in it.

Suspended particles are extremely tiny and light pollutants floating in the water. They have to be made heavy to settle them at the bottom and remove them.

For this, first ferric alum is added to the water in a chamber and then the water is pumped to another chamber where polyelectrolyte is added.

This water is then introduced from one chamber to another through an opening at the bottom of a wall separating the two chambers.

As the water flows from the bottom to the top of the second chamber, heavy particles settle down due to gravity.

At this point, the biological oxygen demand (BOD) of the water is reduced by 75% and the colour of the water also improves. BOD is the amount of dissolved oxygen consumed by microorganisms to decompose organic matter present in the water. So, a higher value of BOD implies lower quality of water.

The heavy particles removed from the water form a sludge and it is removed to another tank. It is then passed through a filter press to drain off excess water before it falls through a pipe from the top into a dumper waiting near the gate. This sludge is used in landfills.

After the suspended particles are removed, only dissolved particles are left in the water.

The water now goes to aeration tanks, which have specific bacteria that eat the dissolved particles and air is also supplied to these tanks.

The water then flows into another tank, where a different type of bacteria eats up the ammonia present in the water. The BOD value of the water at the end of the process is 6.47 mg/l, which is better than the National Green Tribunal-recommended standard of 10 mg/l. The cleaned water is then supplied to Pragati Power Corporation Limited, where it is used for power generation.

According to the Delhi Pollution Control Committee, 22 out of the 33 STPs in the city do not comply with their standards. "At some STPs, the BOD of water after the process is more than 10 mg/l. But to reduce the BOD further, we need more tanks for various processes and many STPs do not have space for more construction," a Delhi Jal Board official said.

Bengaluru man cheats businessman of ₹10 cr.

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A man has been arrested for allegedly duping a businessman of over ₹10 crore on the pretext of selling radioactive material, the police said on Friday. The accused has been identified as Atheeq Ahmad, a resident of Bengaluru.

According to the police, complainant Sanjay Taneja, who runs a paint and hardware shop in east of Kailash, said a gang of 22 people, including Mr. Ahmad, had cheated him of ₹10.63 crore between March 2016 and September 2018 to facilitate the sale of the radioactive material, which was purportedly approved by the Defence Research and Development Organisa-

tion. Additional Commissioner of Police (Economic Offences Wing) R.K. Singh said the victim, through this deal, was assured of a profit of ₹500 crore.

"The money was taken through bank transfers, cheques and cash. The bank statements were analysed and it was found that the money had gone into the account of M/s Barclays Metal World. This was shown as a U.K.-based foreign company and a prospective buyer of radioactive material," the officer said.

On verification, M/s Barclays Metal World was found to be a single proprietorship dealing in 'metal scrap' and was owned by Mr. Ahmad.

Nine arrested for rioting

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Nine people were arrested in a case of rioting in Rohini's Budh Vihar on Tuesday night, the police said, adding that there was no communal angle to the incident.

A senior police officer said they received information about one Allah Rakha being involved in bootlegging. When a team reached to conduct a raid, it was pelted stones at, the officer alleged.

मतदाता सूची का विशेष संक्षिप्त पुनरीक्षण 2022
(01 नवंबर, 2021 से 30 नवंबर, 2021)

दिल्ली का
वोटर 3 त्सवे
SSR 2022
1 नवंबर से 30 नवंबर 2021

उम्र
1 जनवरी 2022 तक
18 साल

उपलब्ध सेवाएं:

- मतदाता सूची में नाम जुड़वाएं (फार्म 6)
- दिवंगत या स्थानांतरित मतदाता का नाम हटवाएं (फार्म 7)
- मतदाता प्रवृष्टि में सुधार करवाएं (फार्म 8)
- पते में परिवर्तन दर्ज करवाएं (फार्म 8A)

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Delhi Weather

	max	min
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Safdarjang	26	15
Palam	26	17

Delhi Palam Today
29°C A dry weather will prevail. The cool morning will be foggy. Day will be comfortable but polluted with few clouds.

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IN BRIEF

Minor burnt to death
NEW DELHI
A 12-year-old boy was found burnt to death at his residence in north-west Delhi's Tomar Colony after a fire broke out in the house on Friday night around 11p.m., Delhi Fire Services officials said.

Man killed in accident
NEW DELHI
A 26-year-old man died after a tanker hit his bike in south Delhi's Tigris on Friday. The tanker driver, Jitender (33), a resident of U.P.'s Hathras, has been arrested. The deceased has been identified as Rakesh, a resident of a JJ cluster.

'Namaz in the open will stop soon'

Local administration has sought three weeks to stop the practice, says VHP leader

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Surender Jain claimed on Friday that the local administration had agreed that offering of namaz in the open was illegal and promised to gradually put an end to the practice in the next few weeks.

He was speaking to media persons on the sidelines of "Govardhan Puja" held at Sector 12A by Hindu right-wing groups in protest against the offering of Jumma Namaz at the site. Bharatiya Janata Party leader Kapil Mishra and Surajpal Ammu were also present.

Muslim community representative Altaf Ahmad said community members decided not to hold namaz at



Hindu right-wing group leaders during the 'Govardhan Puja' programme in Gurugram. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

three sites – Sector 12, Sector 47 and Sector 18 – in view of the "Govardhan Puja" programme and as advised by the police. The namaz was peacefully held in the remaining designated sites, but Mr. Ahmad claimed that "there was a lot of fear, and Muslims were careful not to have any sort of confrontation with vigilante groups". Mr. Jain claimed the designation of 37 places for namaz three years ago was only a one-day arrangement, and

the list was not ratified by the administration. "The administration has conceded its mistake and categorically told our office-bearers that offering of namaz in the open is illegal and not allowed. They have requested three weeks' time to stop it and assured us that the number of public places for namaz will be gradually reduced during this time. But we don't trust them. It is good if they keep their word, or we will once again take to the streets. But we will not allow the highways to be blocked," said Mr. Jain, international secretary-general of the group.

Deputy Commissioner, Gurugram, Yash Garg did not respond to the claims of the Hindu right-wing groups.

Delhi Govt. clears proposals worth ₹1,500 crore to boost health infra

₹415 crore will be used for improving COVID-19 testing and labs

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Cabinet, in a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday, gave its nod to two significant proposals with a budget of over ₹1,500 crore for the Capital's health sector.

The Delhi Government's 'Emergency COVID Response Package' (ECRP) will be spent on enhancing testing and labs, procuring supplies, mobilising additional

human resources, increasing health facilities in hospitals and managing Covid Care Centres among others.

"As a responsible Government, we are taking all measures and steps necessary in this fight against COVID-19. In view of the advent of a possible wave, the Delhi Government is trying its best to strengthen its health systems and preparedness at every level," Mr. Kejriwal said.

The Government said it

has allotted ₹1,544 crore for the State ECRP for the fiscal year 2021-22.

Of the total budget, ₹415 crore will be used for improving COVID-19 testing and labs, ₹445 crore for procurement of supplies, ₹280 crore to bolster health facilities and hospitals, and ₹125 crore for management of Covid care centres. The city's ICU-bed capacity will be increased to 17,000 by adding 6,386 beds.

Civic bodies gear up for Chhath

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

With Chhath Puja celebrations to be held on November 10, Delhi's three municipal corporations – North, South and East – are gearing up for the festival with the North and South civic bodies having allocated ₹25,000 and ₹ 20,000 respectively to ward councilors for the preparation.

The funds will be used for augmenting streetlights in and around the Chhath ghats (ponds), ensuring sanitation and other facilities for devotees.

East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) Mayor Shyam Sunder Aggarwal said that "all efforts will be made to ensure sanitation and Covid-19 appropriate behaviour at the 54 points of celebration under our jurisdiction".

South Delhi Municipal



BJP workers protesting against the ban on Chhath Puja on the banks of the Yamuna in Delhi. ■FILE PHOTO

Corporation (SDMC) standing committee chairman B.K. Oberoi said while the previous years' celebrations were held on the banks of the Yamuna, this year, facilities were set up at ghats (ponds) across different wards as per the requirement.

Previously, a controversy had erupted when the Delhi

Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) had prohibited Chhath Puja celebrations for the second consecutive year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following criticism from the BJP, the DDMA allowed celebrations at designated spots, prohibiting celebrations on the banks of the Yamuna.

EDMC to reopen primary schools

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC) on Friday said primary schools under its jurisdiction will reopen on November 8 with 50% student capacity.

EDMC Mayor Shyam Sunder Aggarwal said parents' consent would be necessary for students to attend classes.

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No virus death in two weeks

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The city reported no new COVID-19 deaths in 24 hours for the 14th day and the death toll stood at 25,091, as per the Delhi government's health bulletin on Friday.

Thirty-two new cases were reported, taking the caseload to 14,40,035.

Oppn. asks Kejriwal to roll back VAT on fuel

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Following the Centre's reduction of excise duty on petrol and diesel, the BJP and the Congress on Friday demanded that the Delhi Government roll back VAT on fuel.

The Delhi Assembly's Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri warned

the Delhi Government of a sit-in by BJP MLAs outside CM Arvind Kejriwal's house starting Monday if the VAT was not reduced by ₹10 till Sunday. After the Centre had cut ₹5 per litre on petrol and ₹10 per litre on diesel, 13 States and Union Territories reduced VAT, but the Delhi Government was still silent, he said.

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Aryan appears before NCB to mark weekly presence

He was released on bail on October 30

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MUMBAI

Aryan Khan, son of Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan, on Friday appeared before the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) in Mumbai to mark his weekly presence before the anti-drug agency in connection with the cruise ship drugs case, sources said.



Aryan Khan arrives at the NCB office in Mumbai on Friday. • PTI

This was Aryan's first appearance at the NCB office after his release from the Arthur Road prison on October 30 following the bail granted by the Bombay High Court. As per one of the bail conditions set by the High Court, Aryan reached the NCB office at Ballard Estate in south Mumbai around 12.15 p.m., they said.

The 23-year-old was arrested by the NCB on October 3 following a raid on the cruise ship off the Mumbai

coast. The Central agency had booked him under relevant sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

He was granted bail by the High Court on October 28. However, he could not be released from the prison till October 30 as documents related to his release did not reach jail authorities in time.

Chhattisgarh sets up special cells to monitor social media posts

It also plans to develop surveillance tool

ANUP DUTTA CHHATTISGARH

The Chhattisgarh Government is forming a social media monitoring team in districts to screen overall trends and track adverse negative impact posts on social media platforms.

The special team will screen posts, observe social media trends and posts relevant to government related activities, which may have adverse negative impact on socio-economic fabric of the State, said an official. The government is planning to develop a surveillance tool to monitor individual users and track overall trends on social media platforms, among other things, he added.

In this connection, the Raipur and Bemtara district

administration has formed a special team. In Bemtara, the district media monitoring team will be led by Additional District Magistrate Durgesh Kumar Verma, Additional Superintendent of Police Pankaj Patel, Sub-Divisional officer Revenue Sandeep Thakur, District Information and Science Officer Rohit Chandravanshi and few others, the official said. In Raipur, the special cyber team will be led by Girish Tiwari.

A few days ago, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said: "Along with continuous monitoring of the law and order situation, it is necessary to strongly refute rumours and false propaganda spreading through social media".

Gangotri temple closed for winter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA UTTARAKASHI

With the onset of winter, the sacred portals of the Gangotri shrine in Garhwal Himalayas of Uttarakhand were closed on Friday amid Vedic hymns and elaborate rituals.

Gangotri Mandir Samiti co-secretary Rajesh Semwal said the temple gates were closed at 11.45 a.m. The idol of Goddess Ganga was then taken on a palanquin decked with flowers for Mukhba village, her winter abode, he said. Over 32,948 pilgrims visited Gangotri this season after the temple was opened for devotees in September.

5-year-old boy taken away by wild animal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA SHIMLA

A five-year-old boy was taken away by a wild animal from Himachal Pradesh's Shimla city while he was bursting crackers with his younger cousin on the eve of Deepavali, a forest official said on Friday.

This is the second such incident in three months in Shimla. In August, a five-year-old girl was taken away from Kanlog and mauled to death by a leopard.

'Maintenance awarded to 575 U.P. women not paid'

HC was hearing case of a woman whose husband is untraceable

OMAR RASHID LUCKNOW

Maintenance awarded to 575 women by courts in two major districts of Uttar Pradesh including Varanasi and Prayagraj has not been paid by their husbands, according to data submitted to the Allahabad High Court.

The district judges of Varanasi and Prayagraj submitted the information in the High Court which was hearing a case in which the Varanasi police were unable to explain why they have not been able to trace a man missing for over four years after a lower court directed him to pay a maintenance to his wife after alleged domestic violence.

Summons not served

In Varanasi, 136 such cases were before the district court while 347 were in the family court. The award of maintenance had been ordered in these cases but they were not executed as the summons had not been served till date, the High Court noted. In a letter submitted by the district judge Prayagraj on October 22, a similar reason was given about 92 cases.

The High Court had on two occasions in the recent months directed the two districts to submit the data



This court is sorry to record as to how many times and for how long, the Commissioner, Varanasi will pray for time to trace a person who is missing for more than four years

JUSTICE MANJU RANI CHAUHAN

while hearing the case of Priyanka Upadhyay whose husband Arvind Upadhyay has been untraceable since 2017.

Ms. Upadhyay had filed a case of domestic violence against her husband and on November 4, 2016 a lower court directed him to provide a separate living room to her and their daughter along with a maintenance of ₹1,000. The court passed another order saying if the husband did not comply with the first order, the local SHO must ensure its compliance.

The husband then moved the High Court against the orders and on December 5, 2016 got an interim order *ex parte* where both orders were stayed.

When the man was asked to be produced before the High Court, his counsel said he was missing since April 9, 2017. A missing person FIR was also lodged on May 16,

2018, his counsel told the court.

On October 27, Justice Manju Rani Chauhan granted Commissioner of Police Varanasi two weeks and no further time to trace Arvind Upadhyay, as the court came down on the authorities for not informing it about the status of the case.

Raps authorities

"This court is sorry to record as to how many times and for how long, the Commissioner, Varanasi will pray for time to trace a person who is missing for more than four years like the applicant and this court will continue to grant the same," Justice Chauhan said.

Varanasi Commissioner in an affidavit submitted in the High Court said a police team had been constituted to trace the man and the officers in Varanasi were trying their best to trace him.

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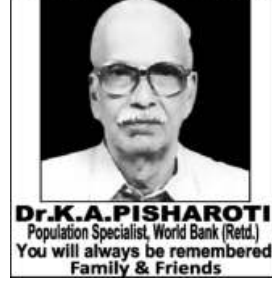
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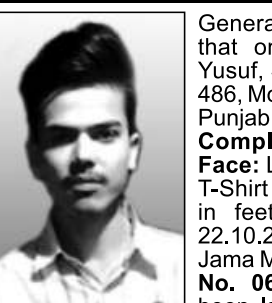
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SEARCH FOR MISSING



MOHD. YUSUF

General Public is hereby informed that one person **Namely:** Mohd. Yusuf, S/o: Mohd. Javed, R/o: H.No. 486, Mohalla Malet, Distt Maler Kotla, Punjab, Age: 21 Years, Height: 5'5", Complexion: Fair, Built: Thin, Face: Long, Wearing: Black Colour T-Shirt and Jeans Pant and Sandal in feet has been missing since 22.10.2021 from the area of P.S. Jama Masjid, Delhi. In this regard **DD No. 06A, Dated 28.10.2021**, has been lodged at **P.S. Jama Masjid, Delhi.**

Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the missing person but no clue has come to light so far. If anyone have any information about this missing person please inform to the following:-

Web-site : <http://cbi.nic.in> SHO
E-Mail ID: cic@cbi.gov.in P.S. Jama Masjid, Delhi
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A slip that would have proved costly

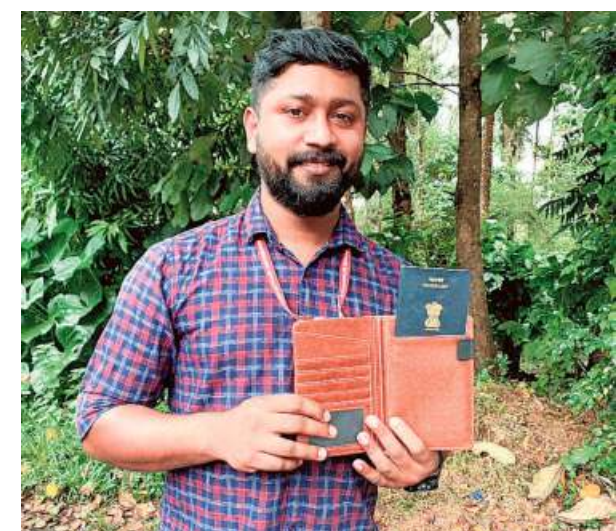
Wayanad man orders a pouch from e-commerce giant, gets a passport as well

STAFF REPORTER KALPETTA

A man in Wayanad has claimed that he was delivered a valid passport by an e-commerce giant along with a passport pouch for which he had placed an order a few days ago.

Mithun Babu, a resident of Cheengadi, near Kaniyampetta, said he had ordered for a passport pouch from Amazon on October 30 and he received the product on November 1. When he opened the box he found a passport along with the pouch.

The passport belonged to a minor boy from Kunnankulam in Thrissur. When the issue went viral in social media, his parents contacted Mr. Babu. They had also ordered for the product recently but found it was little smaller for their purpose and returned it without taking back the



Mithun Babu with the passport and the pouch.

passport.

"The pouch was meant for my husband, but it was found unfit and was returned. However, my son's passport was put inside the pouch and was not pulled out prior to

returning it. It was a mistake on our part," Asmabi, mother of the boy, said.

Without checking

"It is suspected that the returned product was not

properly inspected by the seller and was sold to me," said Mr. Babu.

He said he reported the incident with Amazon customer care but failed to get a proper response as to what to do with the passport with an executive saying that it would not be repeated and the seller would be instructed to be careful next time.

"I spent about 40 minutes speaking with three executives of customer care. But none told me what to do with an important document like a passport. Later, on the advice of a friend, I approached the police and surrendered the passport on Friday," he said.

There was no immediate response from Amazon. The Meerangadi police told the boy's parents to collect the passport from the station with valid identity proof.

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5		3A	BUNDU	767.41	7.68	10,000.00
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नियत कोराना के संबंध में विस्तृत जानकारी एवं सहायता हेतु Toll Free No.:- 104 पर संपर्क कर सकते हैं।

एसजेवीएन लिमिटेड SJVN Limited
(भारत सरकार एवं हिमाचल प्रदेश सरकार का संयुक्त उपक्रम)
(A Joint Venture of Govt. of India & Govt. of H.P.)
CIN No. L40101HP1988GOI008409
NATHPA JHAKRI HYDRO POWER STATION
PRESS NOTICE E-Tendering No. Package(P)-261R(O&M)

Online bids (e-tender) on Domestic Competitive Bidding (DCB) are invited on behalf of SJVN Ltd. for "Package(P)-261R(O&M)/2021-Engineering, Manufacturing, Testing, Supply, Insurance, Packing and Transportation of 12 Nos. (06 sets) of Turbine Cover Cheek Plates (Lower & Upper) of Francis Turbine" of NJHPS, SJVN Ltd. Jhakri. For details, please visit websites www.sjvn.nic.in, https://sjvn.abcpocure.com, & www.eprocure.gov.in.
Last date for downloading of bid documents is 25/11/2021 (12:00 Hrs.).
Last date for bid submission is 26/11/2021 (13:00 Hrs.).
Amendment (s), if any, shall be issued on above websites only.
Dy. General Manager P&C Deptt.,
NJHPS, SJVN Ltd., Jhakri, Distt. Shimla (HP)

APPEAL FOR IDENTIFICATION

General public is hereby informed that one male was found on Service Lane Footpath Behind Red Fort, Delhi on 29.10.2021. In this regard a **DD No. 93-A u/s 174 Cr.PC Dated 29.10.2021** has been lodged at **P.S. Kotwali, Delhi**. Dead Body Preserved for 72 Hrs. in Sabzi Mandi Mortuary. The description of the dead body is given as under:
Name: Unknown, **S/o:** Unknown **R/o:** Unknown, **Age:** About 50-55 years, **Height:** 5'6" **Face:** Long, **Hair:** White, **Complexion:** Shallow, **Built:** Thin **Wearing:** Checkdar Shirt, Blue Payjama and Bare Footed.
Sincere efforts have been made by local police to trace out the information about the dead male but no clue has come to light so far. If any one is having any information about this dead male please inform the undersigned.
S.H.O
P.S. Kotwali, Delhi
DP/1655/N/2021 Ph.: 011-23977100, 23953442, 8750870121

IN BRIEF



Kerala has no plan to cut tax on petrol, diesel
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Amid mounting pressure to reduce the tax collected by Kerala on petrol and diesel, Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal made it clear on Friday that the Government had no plan to go for a cut.

Mysuru receives highest rain in Nov. in a decade
MYSURU
Mysuru district recorded 68 mm of rainfall during the 24-hour period ending 8.30 a.m. on Friday following incessant overnight rain. According to the Indian Meteorological Department, this is the highest for November in the last 10 years. Mysuru district has received 304 mm of rainfall against a normal of 156 mm from October 1 to November 4.

Two migrant workers die while bursting crackers
HYDERABAD
Two migrant idol makers died while another suffered severe injuries after stone splinters hit their faces, following the explosion of crackers at Kandikal in Telangana on Thursday. According to police, the victims, Jagannath Malik and Vishnupadma Mahato, dug up a pit and buried four joint 'sutli bomb' and lit the firecracker, which resulted in the explosion.

Dry ganja valued at ₹80 lakh seized, three held
VISAKHAPATNAM
Dry ganja weighing 790 kg and valued at about ₹80 lakh was seized from the possession of three persons near Aganampudi on Thursday. The police, based on credible information, intercepted the vehicle near the Aganampudi toll-gate and seized the contraband. The police said that the accused had procured the ganja from the interior of Paderu in Visakhapatnam Agency area.

Case delay: Madras HC apologises to SC

High Court Judge dismisses plea by IPS officer accused of extorting ₹3 crore

MOHAMED IMRANULLAH S.
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court has apologised to the Supreme Court for taking six years to dispose of a writ petition filed by an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer accused of extorting ₹3 crore from a woman involved in an economic offence and not keeping up the hope and trust that the apex court had reposed on the High Court in 2015 by expecting it to dispose of the case at the earliest.

Dismissing the writ petition now, Justice C.V. Karthikeyan wrote: "I must append a note of apology. The High Court had not kept up the hope and trust of the honourable Supreme Court. The matter was heard in full after more than six years (since the Supreme Court had directed the High Court to take a relook into the mat-

ter) and the controversy is hopefully disposed of by this order."

The judge pointed out that the petitioner Pramod Kumar was serving as Inspector General of Police (West Zone) in 2009 when a case was booked by Tiruppur Central Crime Branch against three directors of Paze Forex Trading India Private Limited. They were accused of accepting deposits worth crores from the public by promising attractive returns. Subsequently, one of the directors Kamalavali Arumugam went missing on December 8, 2009 and a woman missing case was booked at Tiruppur North Police Station. The woman surfaced on December 11, 2009 and she claimed to the police that she was abducted by unknown persons.

However, on further in-



I must append a note of apology. The High Court had not kept up the hope and trust of the honourable Supreme Court. The matter was heard in full after more than six years and the controversy is hopefully disposed of by this order. — JUSTICE C.V. KARTHIKEYAN
JUDGE, MADRAS HIGH COURT

quiry, the woman accused Inspector of Police V. Mohan Raj of having demanded ₹3 crore from her for not taking action against her in the economic offence case.

She also claimed to have enacted a drama of getting abducted and told the police that she had already paid ₹2.95 crore since she was subjected to threats and harassment.

Thereafter, the woman missing case was altered into a case of extortion. During interrogation, the Inspector reportedly told the sleuths that he got involved into the

issue only on the instructions of the then IG (west zone).

CB-CID issued summons to the IG and questioned him. Meanwhile, disposing of a criminal petition filed by the investors of Paze, the High Court transferred the investigation in the economic offences case as well as the extortion case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) since they were connected.

The CBI arrested the IG on May 2, 2012. He filed a writ petition in August 2012 to restrain the CBI from investigating the case since it had

not obtained prior sanction from the Centre to prosecute him. A single judge dismissed the writ petition on December 5, 2012.

A writ appeal was also dismissed by a Division Bench of the High Court on April 29, 2013. However, when the matter was taken on further appeal, the Supreme Court on March 17, 2015 remanded the writ petition to the High Court for a fresh hearing. In the meantime, the CBI filed final reports before two different special courts in the economic offence case as well as the extortion case.

While the trial had commenced in the economic offence case, the extortion case was kept in suspended animation due to Supreme Court orders. Dismissing the 2012 writ petition once again after a full fledged hearing, Justice Karthikeyan directed the special court for CBI cases to proceed since *prima facie* materials were available against the accused.

Seek public opinion on inheritance Bill: activists

KHADC is scheduled to introduce Bill

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Political leaders and activists in matrilineal Meghalaya have advised the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) to seek public opinion before tabling an inheritance Bill aimed at "equitable distribution of parental property among siblings".

The KHADC is scheduled to introduce the Khasi Inheritance of Property Bill, 2021, during the autumn session of the council on November 8.

Congress veteran and leader of the Opposition in the KHADC, Pynshinglang N. Syiem, said any new legislation dealing with customs and tradition should be placed in the public domain before it is introduced. He said he would suggest this to the council's executive committee.

"The practice in the earlier days was for the khatduh, or youngest daughter, to get the lion's share of the ancestral or parental property. But things have changed, and most parents are now giving a share to all the siblings," he told journalists in State capital Shillong.

Michael Syiem of Maitshaphrang Movement, a local NGO focused on customs, said his group has been campaigning on the issue of inheritance for three decades. The matter should be debated within the family first, he said.

He favoured public consultation on the Bill since two other matrilineal communities - Garos and Jaintias - have a similar custom and there needs to be common legislation that will be applicable beyond the Khasi hills.

Karnataka ends night curfew, allows races

Decline in COVID cases prompts move

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

The Karnataka Government has withdrawn night curfew from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. in the entire State. The Government also permitted horse racing with adherence to COVID-19 norms.

Chief Secretary P. Ravi Kumar issued the order on November 5. The order states: "Night curfew, which is being imposed from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., is herewith withdrawn."

Night curfew had been in force in Karnataka for the past few months following the second wave of COVID-19. Now with a sharp de-

cline in COVID-19 cases, the Government has withdrawn night curfew.

The Chief Secretary, who is also chairman of the executive committee of the State Disaster Management, said horse racing is permitted to resume, while strictly adhering to COVID-19 appropriate behaviour and SOPs issued by the Health and Family Welfare Department of the State Government.

The number of racing patrons attending horse racing should be strictly as per the seating capacity of the venue, and only fully vaccinated people would be allowed to enter the premises.

Mullaperiyar row will be resolved amicably: Duraimurugan

Tamil Nadu will strengthen baby dam: Minister

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THEKKADI/IDUKKI

Tamil Nadu's Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan on Friday assured Kerala that it need not have any apprehension about the Mullaperiyar dam's safety.

He said the work to strengthen the main dam had already been done in compliance with the Supreme Court's direction. To strengthen the baby dam, it was necessary to remove three trees near it, he said. "After strengthening the baby dam, we will approach the Supreme Court and then the water level will be raised to



Minister Duraimurugan inspecting the dam at Thekkady on Friday.

152 feet," he said, after inspecting the dam.

The Minister said the relationship between Tamil Nadu and Kerala was good, and the row would be resolved amicably. He was accompanied by Ministers I. Periasa-

mi, P. Moorthy and R. Sakkarapani, MLAs and officials. Irrigation Secretary Sandeep Saxena, Theni Collector K.V. Muralidharan, PWD Mullaperiyar dam chief engineer Krishnan, R. Subramanian of the Cauvery Technical Cell and senior officers of the Public Works and Revenue Departments.

Mr. Duraimurugan told reporters that Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and his Kerala counterpart Pinarayi Vijayan had a special relationship and the issue would be sorted out soon. He said Mr. Vijayan is a seasoned politician and would be aware of the farmers' problems in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

"I couldn't visit the dam earlier owing to COVID-19

restrictions... I have planned to visit all major dams soon," he said.

The Minister said AIADMK leader O. Panneerselvam had no right to talk about the issue. "Neither he nor any other AIADMK Minister had ever visited the dam in the last 10 years. Now, they are faulting the functioning of the DMK government."

Water level

To a question on water withdrawal by Kerala, Mr. Duraimurugan said the Central Water Commission had recently introduced the 'rule curve' theory. Taking the measurement of storage over the last 30 years, engineers would implement it month on month, depending on the inflow and the rainfall.

He said the authorities would keep a tab on the level and release or store water accordingly. For instance, the level on Friday was 138.80 feet. In the event of a steady inflow, the PWD engineers could store 139.50 feet on November 10 and 142 feet on November 30, he clarified.

He said the government would consider the demands of farmers of the five districts, who have announced a 'padayatra'. He also ruled out Kerala's demand for the construction of a new dam. The Supreme Court and various government agencies had acknowledged that the dam was safe.

Earlier, DMK workers, accompanying the Minister, were stopped by the police at Lower Camp.

No role for RSS workers in Fasal murder: CBI

Agency submits report in special court

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCCHI

A report by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) submitted before the special CBI court here on Friday stated that workers of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) had no role in the Muhammad Fasal murder case.

The agency reiterated its earlier finding that the political murder was executed by a gang led by M.K. Sunil Kumar, alias Kodi Suni, who has been convicted in the murder of Revolutionary Marxist Party leader T.P. Chandrasekharan.

The CBI had arrested eight persons, including Karayi Rajan and Karayi Chandrasekharan, Communist Party of India (Marxist) leaders. Kodi Suni was named the first accused in the case. According to the agency, the

murder was masterminded by the Karayi brothers and executed by others.

The Kerala High Court had asked the CBI to carry out a further probe after the victim's brother cited the disclosure of a confession by 'Kuppi' Subeesh, an RSS worker, that Fasal was hacked to death by RSS workers, including himself.

Fasal, who was a worker of the National Development Front (now Popular Front of India), was murdered at Thalassery on October 22, 2006.

The report submitted by the CBI pointed out that Subeesh was forced to make a confession while in police custody in another murder case. The RSS worker had later retracted his alleged confession stating that he was tortured by the police into making the confession.

Going green



Full charge: S. Ramana Reddy, Vice-Chairman and Managing Director, New and Renewable Energy Development Corporation of Andhra Pradesh, inaugurating the first electric vehicle hot-swap station for autorickshaws in Tirupati on Friday. *A.D. RANGARAJAN

SCCL rolls out plan to ramp up production

Aims at surpassing annual coal production target through optimal use of state-of-the-art technologies

P SRIDHAR
KARIMNAGAR

Aiming to surpass the annual coal production target in the current fiscal, the Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) has rolled out an action plan to scale-up coal production by optimally utilising the state-of-the-art technologies, like continuous miners, to produce around 330 lakh tonnes of coal by March 31, 2022.

Against the stipulated production target of 680 lakh tonnes (68 million tonnes) for 2021-22, the government-owned coal mining giant produced 352 lakh tonnes of coal in the last seven months ending October this financial year, SCCL sources said.

The SCCL registered a growth of 60% in coal pro-



Powering through: A view of the open cast coal mine of Singareni Collieries at Kothagudem in Telangana. *G.N. RAO

duction as compared to the same period last year.

The coal output during the corresponding period of previous year was a meagre 220 lakh tonnes. This was largely due to the disruption

in coal production caused by the COVID-19 pandemic last year.

About 367 lakh tonnes of coal was transported by the company in the last seven months, registering a growth

of 68% on the coal dispatches front, and ensuring uninterrupted supply of coal to the thermal power stations as per the fuel supply agreements (FSA), SCCL sources said.

The SCCL has set in motion an action plan to ramp up coal production and dispatches area-wise in its coal fields within the next five months to surpass the annual production target.

The plan of action envisages maximising the use of modern machinery such as the remote-controlled continuous miners presently installed in PVK-5 incline and Kondapuram underground coal mines in Bhadradi-Kothagudem district, and GDK-II incline and Vakilpalli underground coal mines in

Peddapalli district.

Special focus has been laid on enhancing coal production in the Adriyala longwall project, considered to be the country's largest mechanised underground mine, in Peddapalli district to help achieve maximum productivity in compliance with safety standards.

SCCL Chairman and Managing Director N. Sridhar recently reviewed the action plan with the directors and general managers of 11 areas of the company via a video-conference from the Singareni Bhavan in Hyderabad.

He called upon all the Singarenians to strive to help the company to surpass the set targets of coal production and dispatches by the end of this fiscal.

Bengaluru honey trap racket busted

4 arrested, police suspect gang at play

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

Bengaluru city police have busted a honey trap racket and arrested four persons, including a 30-year-old woman. A retired school principal was victimised by the ring on October 2. Nandini Layout police, acting on a complaint he lodged in the last week of October, busted the ring. The principal, looking to open a bar and restaurant, was trying to procure an excise license, and the woman was introduced by one of his acquaintances as a broker who could fix the deal. She called him to her friend's house in Laggere and as the man was

in the house, three men barged into the house claiming to be from a Kannada organisation, alleged that they had caught them indulging in prostitution red-handed, and fled the retired principal of ₹3 lakh to let him go. Police suspect the same gang has similarly fleeced more than 20 men over the last few months. A further probe is on.

In an eerily similar case, a 40-year-old engineer was called by a woman he had befriended on social media to a hotel room. Given the similar *modus operandi*, police have not ruled out the same gang carrying out the second incident as well.

Demolition of Kapico villas still in limbo

SAM PAUL A.
ALAPPUZZHA

Though nearly two years have passed since the Supreme Court ordered the demolition of the illegally constructed villas of Kapico Kerala Resorts Pvt. Ltd on Nedyathuruthu island in Vembanad Lake, the move to demolish the structures remains in limbo.

It was on January 10, 2020 that the Supreme Court dismissed appeals by Kapico against a Kerala High Court decision banning the construction of resorts and removal of structures on the backwater island. The court observed that the constructions had violated coastal and environmental regulations.



The cost of prohibition

The spurt in hooch tragedies in 2021 points to the failure of the alcohol ban policy in Bihar

The deaths in the last few days of at least 25 people in Bihar's Gopalganj and West Champaran districts and five in Muzaffarpur apart from several others taking ill after consuming spurious liquor points to the unintended but not unexpected consequences of the total prohibition law that has been in effect in the State for more than five years. Hooch tragedies such as these are a consequence of the unregulated production and sale of liquor via the black market, and the use of illicit liquor as a substitute due to the lack of the sale of over-the-counter and regulated drinks. Prohibition as a policy has been shown up as inadequate to curb the problem of alcoholism and the havoc wreaked by it on households due to excessive consumption for a variety of reasons in State after State. In Bihar, implementation has not been without immense public support, especially among rural women. Yet, despite significant steps taken to enhance enforcement by officials from the excise department, the police and local administration – over 3.46 lakh people arrested in the last five years and close to 150 lakh litres of country-made and Indian Made Foreign Liquor being seized from April 2016 to February 2021 – weaknesses in imposing the ban persist. It is well known that one of the negative externalities of prohibition is the creation of a parallel bootlegger economy that could lead to an increase in violent crime, and this seems to be borne out in Bihar as well.

The Chief Minister, Nitish Kumar, has been the strongest proponent of prohibition in the State and the policy has reaped electoral dividends for his party, the Janata Dal (United) and its ally, the Bharatiya Janata Party, as rural women have overwhelmingly welcomed the ban on alcohol. While initially, the ban on alcohol consumption helped rural households increase expenditure on basic goods related to food and education, there are reports from rural Bihar showing how these benefits have waned as spurious consumption is on the rise. Reportedly, illicit liquor in the State claimed at least 60 lives in 2021, much higher than the six deaths recorded by the National Crime Records Bureau's report on accidental deaths and suicides in India in 2020. The scale of the rise in hooch incidents and deaths should set alarm bells ringing about the inability of the administration in curbing the black market in liquor sales and consumption. Mr. Kumar insists that the success of prohibition is only a matter of implementation of the law and in a way has blamed the deaths on the ignorance of those who consumed spurious liquor. But the fact that these deaths persist should alert the government to the misgivings with the idea of total prohibition as a magic bullet in a State marked by weaknesses in institutions and low overall human development.

Keeping the faith

Following WHO approval, Bharat Biotech must prioritise global supply

Following months of speculation, the World Health Organization (WHO) has granted Emergency Use Listing (EUL) to Covaxin, manufactured by Bharat Biotech. This now allows the vaccine's better availability in many more countries, particularly via global groupings such as Covax. One of WHO's key aims is to have at least 40% of people in all countries vaccinated by the year-end – a tall order as the latest estimates suggest that only around 1% of people in low-income countries have received their jabs. Seventy countries are yet to vaccinate 10% of their populations, and 30 countries – including much of Africa – have vaccinated fewer than 2%. In Latin America, only one in four of the population has received a vaccine dose, according to *The British Medical Journal*. Covaxin is an indigenous, inactivated whole-virion vaccine that has been developed based on well-established protocols. This has meant that it was put on the regulatory speed belt at nearly every stage, the most significant being its emergency approval by India's drug regulators without any published phase-3 efficacy data. The ostensible reason for the haste was that India needed a low-cost indigenous vaccine that could be quickly administered to many.

Though Bharat Biotech has years of experience in producing crores of vaccines, the scale of quickly ramping up Covaxin supply has so far been beyond its capacity. In no month, since July, has Bharat Biotech actually delivered on its promised supply of vaccine, and even after over 107 crore shots have been administered, only around 12% have received Covaxin; many in India have been vaccinated with Covishield. Moreover, before the Centre agreed to take over 75% of the public supply, Covaxin offered no cost advantage – and in some instances was costlier – than Covishield. Bharat Biotech however moved to quickly get WHO's approval for its vaccine under its emergency listing process, in July. But unlike the rapid-fire clearance by India's Central Drugs Standard Control Organization, WHO's evaluation process has turned out to be considerably more involved. WHO cleared the AstraZeneca (Covishield) vaccine in four weeks but that Covaxin has required over 20 weeks – especially in a climate where much of the world is desperate – raises several questions. Bharat Biotech is no novice to WHO's clearance process and would surely be aware of all the requirements. While Covaxin's EUL may now ease foreign travel for a fraction of Indians, there is a real need to know why, in spite of Bharat Biotech's claims that it had furnished the required data whenever demanded, this approval took the time it did. With Covaxin close to being approved for children there will be significant demand now for this population segment; however, the company must work to improve its manufacturing supply and contribute to a larger share of the vaccines globally administered.

Charting a trade route after the MC12

An upbeat global trade scenario provides an ideal setting for Trade Ministers to correct iniquitous rules and provisions



BISWAJIT DHAR

The World Trade Organization (WTO)'s 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) is being convened in Geneva, Switzerland at the end of this month, a year-and-a-half after it was scheduled to be held in Kazakhstan (June 2020, but postponed due to the novel coronavirus pandemic). The MC12 is being held at an important juncture when the global trade scenario is quite upbeat.

The outlook

Recent WTO estimates show that global trade volumes could expand by almost 11% in 2021, and by nearly 5% in 2022, and could stabilise at a level higher than the pre-COVID-19 trend (<https://bit.ly/3EQTO55>). The buoyancy in trade volumes has played an important role in supporting growth in economies such as India where domestic demand has not yet picked up sufficiently. Therefore, these favourable tidings provide an ideal setting for the Trade Ministers from the WTO member-states to revisit trade rules and to agree on a work programme for the organisation, which can help maintain the momentum in trade growth.

But above all, the MC12 needs to consider how in these good times for trade, the economically weaker countries "can secure a share in the growth in international trade commensurate with the needs of their economic development", an objective that is mandated by the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization.

Does the run-up to the MC12 provide any evidence that the global trading system can be slightly less iniquitous than it has been? The answer lies in the possible

outcomes in some of the areas that are currently witnessing intense negotiations. These include adoption of WTO rules on electronic commerce, investment facilitation, and fisheries subsidies. But there is one issue that surmounts all others, namely, the WTO's response to demands that technologies necessary for producing vaccines, medicines, and other medical products for COVID-19 treatment should be available without the restrictions imposed by intellectual property rights (IPRs).

IPRs and vaccine issue

From the very outset of the COVID-19 pandemic it had become clear that IPRs protected using the provisions of the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) are formidable barriers to ensuring equitable access to vaccines. Pharmaceutical companies controlling the global markets have used monopoly rights granted by their IPRs to deny developing countries access to technologies and know-how, thus undermining the possibility of production of vaccines in these countries. The involvement of developing countries in vaccine production could have increased supplies of affordable vaccines to the low-income countries. Availability of vaccines remains a critical problem in these countries even after a year since the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine was administered. Recent statistics show that until now, a mere 4.1% of the population in low-income countries have received at least one dose of the vaccine (<https://bit.ly/3mKDK8G>).

To remedy this situation, India and South Africa had tabled a proposal in the WTO in October 2020, for waiving enforcement of several forms of IPRs on "health products and technologies including diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines, medical devices ... and their methods and means of manufacture" useful for COVID-19 treatment. By



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

doing so, barriers created by IPRs to timely access to affordable medical products could be removed. This proposal, supported by nearly two-thirds of the organisation's membership, was opposed by the developed countries batting for their corporates. However, after the Joe Biden Administration in the United States lent limited support to the India-South Africa proposal, there was a glimmer of hope that WTO members would agree to lift restrictions on access to technologies for COVID-19 vaccines and medicines; at least by the MC12. The unfortunate reality of the current discussions is that an outcome supporting affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines and medicines looks distant. A further confirmation of this possibly came from the WTO Director General, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, when in her recent musings on the MC12 in *The Economist*, she was completely silent on this issue.

Fisheries, e-commerce

Although discussions on fisheries subsidies have been hanging fire for a long time, there is considerable push for an early conclusion of an agreement to rein in these subsidies. However, the current drafts on this issue are completely unbalanced as they do not provide the wherewithal to rein in large-scale commercial fishing that are depleting fish stocks the world over, and at the same time, are threatening the livelihoods of small fishermen in countries such as India.

In recent months, the proposal by the members of the Organisa-

tion for Economic Co-operation and Development and the G-20 members to introduce global minimum taxes on digital companies has made headlines. But in the WTO, most of these countries have been investing their negotiating capital to facilitate the expansion of e-commerce firms. Discussions on e-commerce are being held in the WTO since 1998 (<https://bit.ly/302dkgf>), after the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration on Global Electronic Commerce where WTO members agreed to "continue their ... practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions". The more substantive outcome was the decision to "establish a comprehensive work programme" taking into "account the economic, financial, and development needs of developing countries".

Fast forward to the discussions in 2021, and a key focus of the 1998 e-commerce work programme, namely "development needs of developing countries", is entirely missing from the text document that is the basis for the current negotiations. On the negotiating table are issues relating to the liberalisation of the goods and services trade, and of course guarantee for free flow of data across international boundaries, all aimed at facilitating expansion of businesses of e-commerce firms. In fact, the decision on a moratorium on the imposition of import duties agreed to in 1998 has become the basis for a push towards comprehensive trade liberalisation – a perfectly logical way forward, given that the sole objective of the negotiations on e-commerce is to facilitate expansion of e-commerce firms.

Divisions over investment

Complementing the current focus of the WTO to promote the global interests of oligopolies is the initiative for the adoption of an investment facilitation agreement. Inclusion of substantive provisions on investment in the WTO has been

one of the more divisive issues. In 2001, the Doha Ministerial Declaration had included a work programme on investment (<https://bit.ly/3bJSeWw>), but it was soon taken off the table as developing countries were opposed to its continuation because the discussions were geared towards expanding the rights of foreign investors through a multilateral agreement on investment. An investment facilitation has reintroduced the old agenda of concluding such an investment agreement. The proponents have been careful not to load the agenda by seeking substantial commitments from the Government to promote the interests of foreign investors, but it should be clear even to the uninitiated that the ultimate objective is to bind host governments into a multilaterally agreed commitment to comprehensively protect investor interests.

One-sided negotiations

Besides the bias in favour of global oligopolies, the current negotiating processes in the WTO are fundamentally flawed. The negotiations on e-commerce and investment facilitation are being conducted not by a mandate given by the entire membership of the WTO in a transparent manner that are also consistent with the objectives of the WTO. Instead, these negotiations owe their origins to the so-called "Joint Statement Initiatives" (JSI) in which a section of the membership has developed the agenda with a view to producing agreements in the WTO. This will then be offered to the rest of the membership on a "take-it-or-leave-it" basis. This entire process is "detrimental to the very existence of a rule-based multilateral trading system under the WTO", as India and South Africa have forcefully argued in a submission against the JSIs early this year (<https://bit.ly/2ZXXN5XV>).

Biswajit Dhar is Professor of Economics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

The right time for India to have its own climate law

The country's existing laws are inadequate in dealing with climate change; India's situation is also unique



NEHA SINHA

As the world watches the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26, from October 31 to November 12, 2021), the most important climate summit in years at Glasgow, Scotland, India has said it wants to be a part of the climate solution.

The Indian proposals

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced, on November 1 at Glasgow, a "Panchamrit solution" which aims at reducing fossil fuel dependence and carbon intensity (reduce one billion tonnes of total projected carbon emissions by 2030), and ramping up its renewable energy share to 50% by 2030. Glasgow is important as it will call for practical implementation of the 2015 Paris Accord, setting the rules for the Accord. And as the world recovers from the biological and environmental stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters, climate change has also become personal.

Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupendra Yadav has reasserted the call for the promised \$100 billion a year as support (from the developed world to the developing world) but as we consider new energy pathways, we must also consider the question of climate hazard, nature-based solutions and national accountability.

This is the right time for India to mull setting up a climate law while staying true to its goals of climate justice, carbon space and environmental protection. There are a few reasons for this.

Current laws and gaps

Which law covers climate? First, our existing laws are not adequate to deal with climate change. We have for example the Environment (Protection) Act (EPA), 1986, the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 and Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974. Yet, climate is not exactly water or air. Which law would cover the impacts of a cyclone, for instance or work to reduce future climate impacts? And neither are we ready to tackle environmental/climate violations. The Environment (Protection) Act is grossly inadequate to deal with violations on climate. Clause 24 of the Act, "Effect of Other Laws", states that if an offence is committed under the EPA or any other law, the person will be punished under the other law (for example, Code of Criminal Procedure). This makes the EPA subordinate to every other law.

Second, there is a need to integrate climate action – adaptation and mitigation – and monitor progress. Comprehensive climate action is not just technological (such as changing energy sources or carbon intensity), but also nature-based (such as emphasising restoration of ecosystems, reducing natural hazard and increasing carbon sinks.)

Finally, India's situation is unique. Climate action cannot come by further sharpening divides



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

or exacerbating poverty, and this includes our stated renewable energy goals. The 500 Gigawatt by 2030 goal for renewable, solar or wind power for example (of installed power capacity from non-fossil sources), can put critically endangered grassland and desert birds such as the Great Indian Bustard at risk, as they die on collision with wires in the desert.

Create a commission

A climate law could consider two aspects. One, creating an institution that monitors action plans for climate change. A "Commission on Climate Change" could be set up, with the power and the authority to issue directions, and oversee implementation of plans and programmes on climate.

The Commission could have quasi-judicial powers with powers of a civil court to ensure that its directions are followed in letter and spirit. It should be assisted by a technical committee which can advise the commission in the discharge of its functions as well as guide various private and public agencies in meeting their climate-related obligations. As an example, the commission could look at agencies or institutions that have a disproportionate impact on cli-

mate or environment, and suggest lower energy pathways that are adhered to.

Tracing carbon footprints

What, for example, is the carbon footprint of a single activity from start to finish? We have the Bureau of Energy Efficiency, but we also need overall carbon efficiency that looks beyond electronics. How could intelligent interventions be made for reduction of footprints, along with common sense, and practical public health interventions which are unaccounted for so far? In a recent case in the National Green Tribunal it was revealed that the National Thermal Power Corporation did not even cover coal wagons with tarpaulin on railways, decades after environmental clearances were granted in 1999, in Chhattisgarh. In 2020, the Supreme Court passed an order directing for the wagons to be covered within a month's time. There will be eventual emissions by coal use. But there is also the issue of respirable coal dust that is spewed into the air through irresponsible transportation.

As of now, many environmental mediations remain glaringly haphazard. The ban on plastic bags in Delhi is a failure because plastic bag substitutes were never really pushed at scale by the understaffed environment department. A plastic bag ban to succeed in one State requires a similar commitment from neighbouring States. A nation-wide intervention here, led by a Climate Commission, considering substitutes at scale for plastic-based products (which are derived from petroleum) and looking at both innovation and implemen-

tation, would be useful.

Need for accountability

Second, we need a system of liability and accountability at short-, medium- and long-term levels as we face hazards. This also means having a legally enforceable National Climate Change Plan that goes beyond just policy guidelines. Are climate vagaries acts of god, or do certain actions exacerbate them? In an order of the National Green Tribunal in 2016, the court examined the damage caused when floods occurred in 2013 in Pauri, Uttarakhand. When Srinagar dam (Uttarakhand) opened its sluice gates, muck created 8-foot tall deposits, destroying property and fields.

While muck is not hazardous, the handling of the dam – especially in a mountainous area in the face of climate events – created serious damage. The court held the damage was not an 'Act of God' and invoked the Principle of No Fault liability. The Alaknanda Hydro Power Company was asked by the Tribunal to pay more than ₹9 crore in damages. But all this was after the disaster. A Climate Commission could ideally prevent such gross negligence in fragile areas and fix accountability if it arises.

We have an urgent moral imperative to tackle climate change and reduce its worst impacts. But we also should Indianise the process by bringing in a just and effective law – with guts, a spine, a heart, and, most importantly, teeth.

Neha Sinha is a conservation biologist and author of 'Wild and Wilful: Tales of 15 Iconic Indian Species'. The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Going door to door

The door-to-door vaccination plan touted by the Prime Minister now was long overdue. However, in an affidavit to the Bombay High Court, the Government had said: "In case of Any Adverse Event Following Immunisation, case management may not be proper and there will be delay in reaching the health facility and challenges in maintaining protocol of observation of patients for 30 minutes after vaccination. There were

chances of contamination as during door-to-door inoculation, the vaccine container will be taken out at each house, which could affect its efficacy". This was reported in April 2021. How things change suddenly now is a different question as going door to door seems to be with some political benefit in mind. "Har Ghar Dastak" (Knocking at every door") accompanied by another slogan, "Har Ghar Tika, Har Ghar Tika (Vaccine at every door step)" is akin to a similar

sounding political slogan used by the ruling dispensation. It is unlikely the Election Commission of India can make any intervention as the programme is aligned to preventing the spread of a virus.

N. NAGARAJAN,
Secunderabad

Powerful speech

The speech by the 14-year-old Tiruvannamalai girl, Vinisha Umashankar, at COP26 in Glasgow evoked pride in every

Indian. In fact she spoke for the whole of humanity. Her love for her village and the country through a universal outlook is magnificent. She not only represented youngsters but also large sections of right-thinking people. Her contempt for empty promises by leaders is clear when she said, "None of what we discuss today is practical for me." This should be a lesson and sound caution for all leaders who repeat the same promises at regular

intervals, only to forget them later.

P.R.V. RAJA,
Pandalam, Kerala

Gone with the wind

It is unfortunate that the Supreme Court of India's orders with regard to the bursting of crackers during the Deepavali festival celebrations were followed more in their gross breach than in strict adherence. The banning of serial crackers and fixing of specified timings were violated with impunity. The

minimal presence or absence of the authorities and agencies concerned emboldened people which caused nuisance and hardship to the sick, the elderly, children and even animals. The deterioration in air quality was terrible and motorists had a very difficult time. High-decibel crackers were set off late into the night, making a mockery of the orders.

V. JOHAN DHANAKUMAR,
Chennai

A missing baby and a flustered state

A mother's search for her baby who was snatched away by her parents and given up for adoption has snowballed into a political controversy and triggered discussions on women's choice. **R.K. Roshni** reports on a case that has put the Kerala Police, the Kerala State Council for Child Welfare and the CPI(M) in a tight spot

Two weeks ago, Anupama S. Chandran, 22, aggrieved and angry, stood outside the Kerala Secretariat holding a poster. "Keralame... Lajjiku! (Shame on you, Kerala!)" read the letters in red against a black background. Anupama was one among the many desperate people who often stand outside the building in the hope that their voices will be heard. But a crowd driven by curiosity had gathered around her because her case was novel. The young woman was seeking the whereabouts of her child who she claims was forcibly separated from her by her parents when he was just three days old and given up for adoption without her consent.

This personal case has blown up into a political controversy, for Anupama's parents are no ordinary people. Her father, P.S. Jayachandran, is a local Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader and her grandfather a former State committee member of the CPI(M). It has also led to discussions about a woman's agency and choice - Anupama had the baby boy with her partner who was married to someone else. The case, which weaves together familial, social, political, and legal issues, has put the Pinarayi Vijayan government in a tight spot over the last few weeks.

A controversial relationship

Anupama, a former leader of the Students' Federation of India, gave birth to a baby boy on October 19, 2020. Her partner, Ajith Kumar B., is a former leader of the Democratic Youth Federation of India. Both of them used to live in the Peroorkada area of Thiruvananthapuram.

Anupama's family came to know about her relationship with Ajith and the pregnancy only when she left home to be with him in the beginning of September. Her parents balked at the move as Ajith, a Dalit Christian, was a married man. They persuaded her to return home, especially since she was in the eighth month of pregnancy. But once Anupama was home, her parents did not allow her to contact Ajith.

Soon, there was also talk about an abortion. Anupama says she was made to undergo a scan to confirm the pregnancy. She was then taken to a hospital at Manjeri in Malappuram where a doctor ruled out abortion, but said the delivery could be advanced and the baby given up for adoption if she wished. Anupama refused this option. While in hospital, she contracted COVID-19 and was shifted to a COVID-19 centre. With her family not around to keep a watch on her, Anupama took the opportunity to get in touch with Ajith who promptly reached Malappuram to pick her up. Anupama's parents once again pleaded with her to return home. They promised her that she could have her child after her sister's wedding was solemnised in 10 days, she says.

But back in Thiruvananthapuram, Jayachandran and his wife Smitha James changed tack again. Less than a week later, Anupama was taken to a hospital in Kayamkulam in Alappuzha district and an attempt was made to convince her that the baby she was carrying had health issues and was unlikely to survive. Anupama alleges that during her pregnancy, Jayachandran hit her whenever she implored him to allow her to speak to Ajith and kept harping on Ajith's caste. At the fag end of her pregnancy, she was mentally and physically harassed, she says, but remained stoic for the sake of her child.

On October 18, Anupama was admitted to a hospital in Kattakada, not far from Thiruvananthapuram city. There, she tested positive for COVID-19 again. Her mother told her that the doctors had advised her to have the child through caesarean section. The next day, Anupama gave birth to a baby boy. Three days later, she was discharged from the hospital. But instead of being taken home, she was driven to her father's friend's house. En route, her father, who was in another car, stopped the car she was travelling in and took the baby away from her. Anupama, still recovering from childbirth and COVID-19, tried to protest, but her father covered her mouth and hit her, she says, even as her mother grabbed the baby and put him inside Jayachandran's car. That was the last time Anupama saw her baby.

The next morning, Smitha told Anupama that the baby would be kept away from her until her sister's wedding was solemnised. "I was assured that the family would not hurt him and would let me meet him," Anupama says. Anupama was shifted to her grandmother's house in Thodupuzha. Once in a while, she was taken to Ernakulam for a counselling session. Through all this, she kept asking about her child but was not given any answer. She was brought back to Thiruvananthapuram in time for her sister's wedding on February 4. A reluctant Anupama then accompanied the family to distribute wedding invites. No one could have suspected anything was wrong.



Anupama S. Chandran and her partner Ajith Kumar B. protest outside the Kerala Secretariat two weeks ago. (Below): The Kerala State Council for Child Welfare where Anupama's father, P.S. Jayachandran, left the couple's baby. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



The day before the wedding, Anupama, now desperate and losing hope, got hold of her grandmother's phone, told Ajith about their boy, and asked him to come by the house two days later. When Ajith reached her house, he was threatened and told that Anupama did not want to meet him. His divorce had been finalised by then; yet Anupama's family remained firm that she could not go with him. Later, she came to know that Ajith had been summoned to the police station five or six times and threatened. Soon, Anupama was back at her grandmother's house in Thodupuzha. She was told she would not get her child back and was threatened with incarceration in a mental health institution. Anupama managed to flee the house on March 19. She and Ajith intensified their efforts to trace their child. On April 19, she filed a complaint with the Peroorkada police, but no FIR was registered. On April 21, the couple was shocked to learn that Jayachandran had told the police that he had given away the child legally.

The desperate search for a child

On April 19, the same day she filed a complaint with the Peroorkada police, Anupama handed over a letter to CPI(M) district secretary Anavoor Nagappan and CPI(M) leader Jayan Babu, with a copy to the party State committee, seeking action against her parents. On April 22, Anupama got in touch with the District Child Welfare Committee (CWC) through videoconference, stated her case, and forwarded the relevant documents. The CWC chairperson told her later that there was no point in submitting a complaint. The CWC could do something only after the police located the child, the chairperson said.

A frustrated Anupama then met with the State Police chief, Loknath Behera, on April 29, who directed that a case be registered under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act (JJ

Act). However, no action was taken. After an agonising wait of two months, the couple finally submitted a complaint to the Chief Minister's Office on July 12.

It was in the last week of July, says Anupama, that the police handed over a consent letter produced by her father for her to read. The consent letter, allegedly signed by her, said that Anupama was not equipped to look after the child and was voluntarily handing him over. Anupama says the letter dates back to October 15, 2020, when her parents and two others asked her to sign on a stamp paper. When Anupama insisted on reading the document before signing it, she was hit and threatened with grievous injury to the child in her womb and her signatures were forcibly taken.

In the first week of August 2021, some 10 months after she had had her child, Anupama found out from a police officer that her father had given up the child for the Kerala State Council for Child Welfare's 'Ammathotttil' electronic cradle. The scheme was instituted as a "means of providing better life conditions for the destitute, abandoned and relinquished children." The police officer had also learned from the District CWC that two children had been given to the cradle on October 22 night. The gender of one of them had been wrongly registered as female and then corrected. Anupama is incredulous that a specialised adoption agency would commit such a grave error. "What about the doctor examining the child for the first time at the hospital? Will they not investigate if the child is a boy or a girl," she asks.

The couple rushed to the CWC the same day. They were told that one of the children had been given in adoption but the other was still at the council. Anupama was told she could meet the child and also apply for a DNA test if she wished. Anupama went in to see her child but came out confused and disappointed. She did not believe that the child was hers. To be sure, she applied for a DNA test; the result confirmed her suspicion. When Anupama expressed the possibility that the child given away for adoption was hers, a CWC member told her that there was no point in approaching the court as she would not

get the child back.

Discouraged, thwarted at every turn, and made to run from pillar to post for months to get back her child, Anupama went public with her predicament a few days later. Within days, the police registered an FIR against Jayachandran, Smitha, their elder daughter and son-in-law, and two others based on a complaint made by Anupama to the new State Police chief a month ago.

Not only the police, but the Kerala State Council for Child Welfare where Jayachandran said he had left Anupama's child is also under a cloud now. Anupama has alleged that the council abetted the adoption process. Ajith had visited the council in October last year after seeing an advertisement about a child being found at the council, she says. He had met the council's general secretary Shiju Khan J.S., but Shiju did not do anything to help him.

Jayachandran had earlier claimed that the child had been left in the Ammathotttil with Anupama's consent. He had also claimed that the child had been taken to the council through a judicial mechanism that ensured his protection. Anupama counters these claims. "If my child was surrendered to the CWC, then due legal steps should have been followed," she says. The Minister for Women and Child Development, Veena George, has also said that the child was not surrendered to the CWC.

A letter, purportedly from a section of employees of the council to the Chief Minister who is the president of the council, alleges that on the night in question, the Ammathotttil was not functioning. Jayachandran brought the child to the council with Shiju's knowledge and handed him over to a nurse on duty. The child was taken to a hospital for a check-up and the child's gender was registered as female. The motive behind the gender change and the correction is suspect, says Anupama, but Shiju argues that all the legal procedures were followed by the council.

In a tight spot

Meanwhile, with the case grabbing the headlines, the CPI(M) found itself in an embarrassing position. It has scrambled

to contain the political fallout of the adoption scandal. The Congress-led United Democratic Front as well as the Bharatiya Janata Party have said that this episode has undermined the CPI(M)'s credibility as a pro-women party.

Many communist leaders have been critical of the manner in which the issue has been dealt with. Revolutionary Marxist Party leader K.K. Rema, who moved an adjournment motion on the issue, accused the CPI(M) apparatchiks of abetting the crime to "protect the family's twisted sense of honour." CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Brinda Karat called the incident an "honour crime" and a wrong of "immense... proportion." But her intervention at the Chief Minister's level to reunite the parents and child failed. CPI(M) central committee member P.K. Sreemathy also admitted that her efforts to rope in the Chief Minister's Office to help the mother trace her child yielded no result.

In a damage-control exercise, the government ordered a probe into the procedures and timeline of events since the child was received at the council. The Women and Child Development Department, which is the State Adoption Resource Agency, filed a petition in the family court on Anupama's demand for the return of her child before the court passed final orders on the adoption. Veena George said the case was rare and complicated, and the mother would get justice. The party went silent on its earlier position that neither the CWC nor the police had erred in the matter.

Anupama is happy about the support she has received but she is also cautious. Had the CPI(M) acted at the outset, her child would not have been given up for adoption, she says. Anavoor says that a letter from Anupama to Kodiyeri Balakrishnan, former CPI(M) State secretary, was forwarded to the district office in the first week of September this year. Following its receipt, Jayachandran was asked to return the child to his daughter. It was then that he revealed that the child had been left in the Ammathotttil. Following this, Anupama was advised to take the legal route to get her child back, and assured of necessary support by the party.

Anupama says that even amid all the claims of support, the party has continued to speak out against Ajith. Anavoor says the party cannot condone Ajith entering into a relationship with Anupama when he was still married to someone else. Jayachandran had brought the matter to his attention and sought the party's intervention, he says. Ajith's father, who was a party area committee secretary, was asked to dissuade his son from pursuing this relationship. The party remains firm on this stance, he says.

The party position has brought into the spotlight questions about a woman's choice against the background of prevailing moral and social norms. Anupama's struggle has struck a chord with many, especially the youth who have been dismayed at the lengths to which

her parents have gone to separate the mother from her child. Activist P.E. Usha says, "The family is not above the rights of a citizen. How can a man offer up his grandchild for adoption just because he disapproves of his daughter's choice of a partner? The issue at stake is Anupama and her choice."

The question at the core of the case

The family court has stayed the adoption proceedings after Anupama argued that the child was put up for adoption against her will and her consent had been obtained through illegal means. The court also said that the CWC, which Anupama alleged had refused to return the baby on the ground that the adoption procedures were already in motion, could decide on a DNA test to determine the biological parentage of the child, besides adjudicating on whether the baby had been abandoned or surrendered.

The lack of clarity on whether the child was abandoned or surrendered with Anupama's consent is at the core of this case. The procedures to be followed in the case will be guided by this fact, which is for the police to probe. If the child was left at the council by the grandfather without any substantial reason, it could attract the provisions of Section 75 of the JJ Act, which reads: "Whoever, having the actual charge of, or control over, a child, assaults, abandons, abuses, exposes or wilfully neglects the child or causes or procures the child to be assaulted, abandoned, abused, exposed, or neglected in a manner likely to cause such child unnecessary mental or physical suffering, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years or with fine of one lakh rupees or with both."

Questions are also being raised about the role of the Child Welfare Council, a registered society under the Travancore-Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Registration Act, and the large amounts allocated to it by the government at a time when the CWC, a quasi-judicial body created under the law, existed. The CWC can conduct an inquiry and give directions to the police or the District Child Protection Unit, but its alleged failure to follow due procedure when approached by Anupama has raised eyebrows. Usha alleges that Jayachandran used the government machinery for a criminal act, knowing well that his daughter was opposed to giving up the child. "The complications that have arisen are owing to failure of these agencies to follow procedure. Whether the council and the CWC hastened the adoption procedures to avoid any claim to the child needs to be investigated," says a senior lawyer.

While Anupama's chances of getting her child back seem brighter in view of the concerns over procedural lapses and the government throwing its weight behind her, the court's final verdict will be eagerly awaited. And awaited not just by her and Ajith but by an entire State which has been keenly following this case about a mother's quiet determination to find her child.



FROM PAGE ONE

'Duty cuts, stock limits helped curtail oil prices'

Apart from the cuts in duties and cesses, the Centre had used stock limits to help control prices of both edible oils and pulses this year, using the provisions of the Essential Commodities Act.

The amendments to the Act, which were passed by Parliament last year but suspended by the Supreme Court in January due to opposition by farm unions, would not have allowed the imposition of stock limits given the current rate of price hikes.

Extraordinary times

"These are extraordinary times. Global commodity prices are extremely high. COVID-19 is a major factor, disrupting supply chains, closing down industry," Mr. Pandey said.

"There is insufficient labour in the oil production industry in many countries. Given the extraordinary circumstances, it is right to invoke this," he said explaining why the Government

had chosen to use the same legal provisions it had sought to remove through last year's amendments.

The retail prices of most major cooking oils were 35-45% higher than a year ago. However, a clear decline in prices was seen in Delhi from the beginning of the week till the Deepavali eve, with prices falling ₹5-10 a kg over the three-day period.

Some smaller centres saw even greater declines, such as the ₹18 a kg fall in palm oil in Aligarh and the ₹20 a kg fall in sunflower oil prices in Meghalaya.

Nationally, the palm oil prices fell about ₹1.45 a kg, while soybean oil increased the same amount.

Mustard oil, which accounted for 11% of the domestic consumption, saw a ₹2.29 a kg increase in prices, although Mr. Pandey hoped that the 12-15% increase in mustard acreage this winter season would cool down prices once the harvest comes in.

Pfizer says COVID-19 pill cuts death risk by 90%

Patients taking the company's drug along with another antiviral had an 89% reduction in their combined rate of hospitalisation or death after a month, compared with patients taking a dummy pill. Fewer than 1% of patients taking the drug needed to be hospitalised and no one died. In the comparison group, 7% were hospitalised and there were seven deaths.

Study participants were unvaccinated, with mild-to-moderate COVID-19, and were considered high risk for hospitalisation due to health problems like obesity, diabetes or heart disease.

Treatment began within

three to five days of initial symptoms, and lasted for five days.

Once Pfizer applies for Emergency Use Authorisation, the FDA could make a decision within weeks or months. Pfizer reported few details on side effects but said rates of problems were similar between the groups at about 20%.

An independent group of medical experts monitoring the trial recommended stopping it early, standard procedure when interim results show such a clear benefit. The data have not yet been published for outside review, the normal process for vetting new medical research.

U.S. vaccines still out of reach due to indemnity

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had then travelled to the U.S. to discuss U.S. supplies during the second wave of the pandemic. Subsequently, after U.S. Vice-President Kamala Harris spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the U.S. offered India a batch of Moderna vaccines through the COVAX network in June.

The shipment was stopped at the last minute, however, as Indian Embassy officials declined to sign indemnity clauses.

Asked about the lack of progress, at least two of the U.S. vaccine manufacturers told *The Hindu* that they are still in talks with New Delhi on indemnity.

"We are in ongoing discussions with the Government of India to accelerate availability of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine. It is premature for us to speculate on the timing of our vaccine deliveries," a spokesperson for J&J told *The Hindu* in an email.

Under the Quad agreement that was reached between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. President Joseph Biden, America will

partially fund the production of one billion J&J vaccines by the Hyderabad-based Biological E.

Biological E declined to comment on plans for the vaccine's distribution, but a government official told *The Hindu* that the Quad initiative at present is only "export-oriented" as it is meant for South-East Asian countries, and any domestic Indian distribution would depend on the liability issue being resolved.

No breakthrough

Separately, a representative for Pfizer also confirmed that indemnity talks are ongoing but there has been no breakthrough yet.

"In markets that do not have the legal or legislative protections that are available in the United States, we work with governments to find mutually agreeable solutions, including contractual indemnity clauses," said Pfizer's global media relations head for Asia, Roma Nair.

(With inputs from Sriram Lakshman in Washington and Bindu Shajan Perappadan in New Delhi)

Stubble burning impacts lung health, says study

There was decline in lung function with increase in PM2.5 concentration across all age groups even after controlling for several other exposure variables, such as the influence of cooking fuel, ventilation, and distance from road. The authors reported a 10-14% decline in lung function in men and nearly 15-18% decline in women across all age categories.

The study, authored by researchers at The Energy Resources Institute, Delhi has contributions from experts from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi, and the Punjab Agricultural University.

The findings, which have not been peer reviewed as yet, appear on the website of the CPCB, which has supported the study.

Hooch death toll rises to 33 in Bihar

CM Nitish Kumar vows stern action against those responsible for the sale of spurious liquor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA

The death toll in the latest hooch tragedy in Bihar climbed to 33 on Friday. Arrests were made and officials punished in connection with the sale of spurious liquor, even as Chief Minister Nitish Kumar called for a fresh campaign to dissuade people from drinking alcohol in the dry State.

However, officials in West Champaran and Gopalganj districts claimed only 25 of the deaths could be confirmed as having been caused by the consumption of spurious liquor.

In West Champaran, alleged hooch trader Ram Prakash Ram (50), besides Dhani Lal Ram (40), Jhakkad Paswan (64) and Vikas Ram (25), died in hospital. They were residents of Dakshin Telhua village in the Nautan police station limits, where local people consumed liquor on the eve of Deepavali.

Pranav Kumar Pravin, Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Champaran Range, said the death toll in West



Champaran rose to 14 with the four casualties. Seven people were undergoing treatment at the Government Medical College and Hospital in Bettiah town.

Hospital superintendent Pramod Tiwari said, "Among those who died, three were brought dead. Bodies are being handed over to the bereaved family members after postmortem examinations." Those undergoing treatment included a 70-year-old person who lost his eyesight on Friday morning, a common side-effect of consumption of spurious liquor.

Mr. Pravin said, "Two offi-

cial - Manish Sharma, the in-charge of Nautan Police Station, and a village chowkidar - have been placed under suspension for their laxity. One of the alleged sellers died, while another, Munna Ram, is absconding and a search has been launched to nab him."

However, according to sources in the local administration, two others who died were cremated by their family before word spread about the hooch tragedy.

In Gopalganj, District Magistrate Nawal Kishore Chaudhary confirmed 17 deaths in the Mohammed-

pur police station area but said that only 11 of these could be blamed on consumption of spurious liquor.

"Three persons - residents of a village in the Mohammadpur police station limits - had been cremated by family members before post-mortem. Family members of another three deceased resisted post-mortem claiming that the deaths were on account of natural causes," Mr. Chaudhary said.

Superintendent of Police Anand Kumar said Ranjan Kumar, the in-charge of Mohammadpur police station, and a chowkidar had been suspended, and three alleged sellers - Chhote Lal Sah, Jitendra Sah and Ram Praveesh Sah - arrested.

He said searches conducted in various places in the area had led to recovery of 100 litres of spurious liquor.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, in Patna, vowed stern action against those found responsible for the tragic deaths but expressed dismay over people continuing to consume *galat*

cheez (wrong thing) during festivals.

Replying to questions from presspersons outside the Assembly, where he went to attend the swearing-in of two newly elected MLAs, Mr. Kumar said, "I will conduct an in-depth review of the enforcement of prohibition in the State. But, it appears that we need another extensive campaign to spread awareness about the ill-effects of drinking."

Sale and consumption of alcohol were completely banned in the State in April, 2016. Leader of the Opposition Tejashwi Yadav tweeted attacking Mr. Kumar over the hooch deaths and accusing those in his government of being involved in sale of spurious liquor.

BJP State spokesperson Nikhil Anand hit back, asserting that it was the Opposition party which was working hand-in-glove with the spurious liquor traders but had the temerity to come out with "baseless allegations" against the ruling dispensation.

Assam 'tea tribes' get medical quota

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Assam Cabinet on November 4 approved the reservation of seats in the State-run medical colleges for students from the "tea tribes" community.

Assam has eight Government medical colleges. Adivasis associated with tea plantations are considered a major vote bank that swung from the Congress to the BJP.

"Seats for MBBS and BDS reserved for the tea garden communities have been proportionately divided between the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The Cabinet decided to reserve 24 MBBS and three BDS seats for the tea garden community working across 803 major estates and numerous small tea gardens; 18 for Brahmaputra Valley and six for Barak Valley students. Two BDS seats are for the Brahmaputra Valley and one for the Barak Valley students.

National painting contest to be held

Young World to associate with event

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Club Mahindra has announced the National Painting Competition 2021 in association with *The Hindu* Young World to be held online. The online registration and submission portal closes on November 23.

The topics for the prelims are: Sub-Juniors (Classes 3-5) - My best holiday memory, Best resort holiday with family, The perfect holiday destination.

Juniors (Classes 6-8) - Holiday with grandparents, Best recreational activity at a resort, My favourite holiday memory with cousins.

Seniors (Classes 9-12) - The best view from our resort room, My dream destination, An unforgettable holiday memory with friends.

Participants paint on A3 size (11.7 x 16.5 inches) drawing sheet on any of the given topics.

The physical art work should reach the nearest



The Hindu office before November 25. If the participant qualifies for the finale, the date and details will be intimated through the registered email ID.

For registration and details log on to www.ywc.thehindu.com/clubmahindra. For clarifications, call toll-free number 1800 102 1878 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Monday to Saturday)

There will be three top prizes and seven consolation prize winners in each category. The winning paintings also stand a chance to be displayed at select Club Mahindra resorts.

Can't quash case for delay in inquiry: SC

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has held that delay in completion of the Preliminary Enquiry (PE) is not a ground for quashing a corruption case.

The PE is only an enquiry to gather *prima facie* information to register an FIR and not an investigation under the Code of Criminal Procedure, a Bench of Justices M.R. Shah and A.S. Bopanna observed in a recent judgment.

"While considering the *prima facie* case for the purpose of registering the FIR, some enquiry/investigation is bound to be there. However, the same shall be only for the purpose of finding out a *prima facie* case for the purpose of registration of the FIR," Justice Shah clarified in the judgment. The court said whatever enquiry was conducted at the stage of PE could by no stretch of imagination be considered as investigation under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). An investigation under the CrPC could only be after registration of the FIR.

Further, the Court said a corruption case could not be quashed by a lower court merely on the ground that "some more time" was taken to find out whether the allegations against the suspected person were *prima facie* true and warranting the registration of an FIR under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Kerala to Kendrapara, a bus takes Odisha migrants home

Post-pandemic, it is the choice transport for them

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

Bharat Behera has just returned from a long bus journey covering 2,000 km - from India's southwestern coast to its eastern coast. And, no, it was not an adventure trip.

Mr. Behera's coast-to-coast bus trip from the industrial hub of Perumbavoor in Ernakulam district of Kerala to the nondescript village of Bagapatia - a rehabilitation colony for climate refugees in Odisha's Kendrapara district - was unthinkable and unheard-of two years ago and was spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic. With hundreds of youth from Odisha migrating to plywood industries of Kerala every year, buses, which were once hired by desperate migrant workers during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, have now become the mode of choice for travel.

"In April 2020, when train services were stopped due to COVID-19 emergencies, we did not have any option to return home. At that moment our company came to our rescue, hiring a bus for us. We returned home safely," Mr. Behera recalls.

As the economy reopened but with few train services resuming, it became difficult for the plywood factory owners in Kerala to arrange



Here to stay: The bus service connecting Kerala and Odisha has become a routine affair now. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tickets for the workers from Kendrapara to Kerala. It was then that some enterprising bus service providers in Kerala thought of starting regular long-distance services. Today, a bus leaves Bagapatia every Friday and reaches Perumbavoor by the evening of the following Sunday.

Bagapatia, a coastal village, houses around 570 families from Satabhaya villages that have been steadily devoured by the sea over the last three decades.

Few opportunities

Livelihood opportunities in the village are few.

"Of a population of 4,000 in Bagapatia, nearly 1,700 villagers - both men and women - migrate to Kerala and Tamil Nadu to work," Mr. Behera said.

"Most men in lower-middle class families leave for Kerala soon after they appear for the Class 10 exami-



NCP chief Sharad Pawar

greetings. Last year, Mr. Pawar's family did not celebrate Deepavali in Baramati due to COVID-19.

"Last year, due to COVID-19, we had to follow certain restrictions, but now the danger of COVID-19 is slowly declining in the country. As far as Maharashtra is concerned, the State Government took some important decisions, as a result of which, we are witnessing a decline in the number of coronavirus patients," he said.

Even this year, the family was in a fix on whether or not to celebrate Deepavali as usual, he said, adding, "But

people and colleagues insisted that we celebrate Deepavali in Baramati and assured that they would follow all the COVID-19 norms during their visit. Today, hundreds of people, party colleagues visited and offered their greetings in a disciplined manner."

The former Union Minister said he is confident that the coronavirus situation would improve further.

"We are coming out of danger... I am sure that we will go back to normal and will be able to compensate for the losses incurred during the pandemic and we will be able to revive the economy... I wish a warm Deepavali to all the people and I am sure that we will be able to start again with new hope," Mr. Pawar said.

On the relief given by the Centre on fuel prices and asked if the State Government will offer some respite to the people, Mr. Pawar said that he needs to talk to State Government on this issue.

"The State Government has indicated that it will provide some relief for sure, but the Centre should pay the GST compensation and only if it is given it will be possible for it to take a decision in favour of people," he said.

On Wednesday, the Central Government cut the excise duty on petrol and diesel by a record ₹5 and ₹10 per litre, respectively, to help bring down rates from their highest-ever levels.

MSRTC strike

When asked about the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC) employees' strike, Mr. Pawar said the main office-bearers of the workers' unions met and told him that they do not want to go ahead with the strike.

"They told me that they do not want to cause any inconvenience to people during Deepavali, but some people [ST workers] have taken an extreme stand of continuing the strike," he said.

Sidhu puts riders, takes back resignation

Makes it conditional on A-G's removal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu on Friday said he had withdrawn his resignation as the party's Punjab chief but would not re-assume charge till the State's new Advocate-General A.P.S. Deol is removed.

Even while announcing that he was withdrawing his resignation, Mr. Sidhu continued to target the Congress Government led by Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi in the State.

He resigned from the post on September 28, triggering a fresh crisis in the party's Punjab unit ahead of the Assembly election to be held in 2022, resulting in the ouster of then Chief Minister Amarinder Singh.

Mr. Sidhu has opposed the appointment of Advocate-General A.P.S. Deol and Director-General of Police Iqbal Preet Singh Sahota, considered Mr. Channi's choices. He had earlier indicated that these two appointments were among the reasons he quit.

Mr. Sahota had headed the SIT formed by the previous SAD-BJP Government to investigate the desecration of the Guru Granth Sahib in 2015.

As a lawyer, Mr. Deol had represented former DGP Sumedh Singh Saini, who headed the State police six years ago during the inci-



Navjot Singh Sidhu

dents of sacrilege and a police firing on protesters.

"It is not any personal ego," Mr. Sidhu said, arguing that the offices of the A-G and the DGP are crucial to take the Bargari sacrilege and drug trafficking cases to their logical conclusions.

Firing a salvo against his own Government, Mr. Sidhu said all he was asking was what had the Channi Government done in the past 50 days on the sacrilege case and on making a special task force report on drug cases public. The party would not be able to face the people on the sacrilege and drugs issues.

The Congress came to power in 2017, promising action on these issues.

Mr. Sidhu's detractors claim that he is looking at the possibility of becoming the Chief Minister if the Congress returns to power in the State after the Assembly election, which is just months away.

Duty cut too little, too late: Left parties

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Left parties have called the slash in the excise duty on fuel, announced on Deepavali eve, as too little, too late, and said it was the adverse by-election results that forced the Government's hand.

CPI general secretary D. Raja said the decrease was nominal, especially since it came amid a daily hike in prices. "People have been going through hardships because of the cascading effect on the prices of essential commodities because of the exorbitant fuel prices," he noted.

CPI(M) Polit Bureau, in a statement, expressed said the cut would not provide the necessary and long-awaited relief. The party demanded more cuts in the Central excise duty and doing away with the special cess imposed on fuel.

Fuel price cut not enough: Cong.

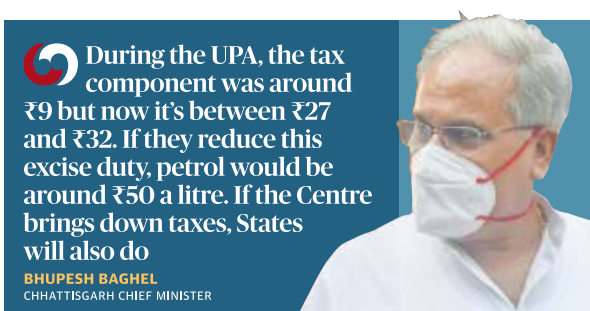
Party to go ahead with protests, says the reduction is linked to bypoll defeats

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Claiming that the Narendra Modi Government increased diesel prices by as much as ₹26 in 2021 before announcing an excise duty reduction of ₹10 on the eve of Deepavali, the Congress on Friday said it would go ahead with its agitation against inflation from November 14.

Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said the reduction was not adequate and the party's jan jagran abhiyan between November 14 and 29 would go ahead as announced earlier.

Asked why the Congress-ruled States had not reduced the value-added tax (VAT) and other local tax components, Mr. Venugopal said the party "will look into it but already States such as Chhattisgarh have lower rates compared with others".



"During UPA [United Progressive Alliance] rule, the tax component was around ₹9 but now it's between ₹27 and ₹32. If they reduce this excise duty, petrol would be around ₹50 a litre. If the Centre brings down taxes, States will also do," Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel told presspersons in Raipur.

He said that the Congress Government in Chhattisgarh did not add even a rupee to VAT charged during the previous BJP Government in the State.



"Look at the lies about the loot. The Modi government this year alone has increased the price of diesel by ₹26. By reducing the price by ₹10, they are trying to garner credit and say a big Deepavali gift has been given," Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala told presspersons.

Calling the Centre's cut in excise duties on petrol and diesel an "eyewash", Mr. Venugopal said the Congress would go ahead with its agitation over inflation and increase in fuel prices later this

month. Several other Congress leaders including former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra linked the excise duty cuts to the "set-back" to the BJP in the recent by-elections in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka. "This isn't a decision taken from the heart but out of fear. The answer to the loot by an extorting government should be given in the upcoming election," Ms. Vadra tweeted on Thursday.

"The results of the 30 Assembly and 3 LS by-elections have produced a by-product. The Centre has cut excise duties on petrol and diesel! It is a confirmation of our charge that fuel prices are high mainly because of high taxes. And our charge that high fuel taxes is because of the greed of the central government," Mr. Chidambaram tweeted.

Cong. doing 'petty politics' over fuel prices, says BJP

It slams Opposition-ruled States for not reducing VAT

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday alleged that the Opposition parties were doing "petty politics" over high fuel prices by not reducing the value-added tax (VAT) in the States ruled by them, two days after the Centre reduced the excise duty on petrol and diesel by ₹5 and ₹10, respectively.

At a press conference at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi, party spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said the Opposition attacked the Centre over high prices of diesel and petrol but did not follow suit in the States ruled by them when the Union Government slashed the excise duty.

"States ruled by the party have slashed VAT on fuel to add to the relief provided to



the common man by the Centre, but the States ruled by the Opposition parties like the Congress, Trinamool Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party have not done so," he said. "If the Centre and the BJP-ruled States can give relief to people, then why not the Congress-ruled States."

Noting that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had dubbed the Central Government a

"pickpocket" over the high fuel prices and used the "extortion" barb at it, Mr. Bhatia said it appeared that there was no bigger "pickpocket" than the Congress.

"The VAT on petrol in the Congress-ruled Rajasthan is ₹32.19, and it is ₹31 in the Opposition alliance-ruled Maharashtra now compared with ₹21.86 and ₹20.46 in the BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand," he added.

Bengal Minister Subrata Mukherjee dies at 75

He was a key Minister in TMC Cabinet

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA

Senior West Bengal Minister Subrata Mukherjee passed away in Kolkata on Thursday. He was undergoing treatment at the State-run SSKM Hospital.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was among those who visited SSKM Hospital after the Trinamool Congress leader breathed his last. "He was expected to be discharged from the hospital tomorrow. He suffered a cardiac arrest and passed away," Ms. Banerjee said. She described Mr. Mukherjee's death as a "great loss".

Mr. Mukherjee, who was a key Minister in the Mamata Banerjee Cabinet, was 75. He held several portfolios, including the Panchayat department. He started his career with the Congress and, at 26, was one of the young



Subrata Mukherjee

Ministers in the Congress Government led by Siddhartha Sankar Ray. He switched sides and joined the Trinamool Congress in 1999.

In his political career spanning over five decades, Mr. Mukherjee had represented several Assembly constituencies in Kolkata, including Chowringhee. He was elected MLA for Ballygunge in the 2021 polls.

BJP leaders face farmers' wrath

In separate incidents, farmers attack MP's car, hold former Minister hostage

ASHOK KUMAR GURUGRAM

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders faced the ire of farmers in Haryana in separate incidents on Friday. While farmers protesting against the agricultural laws broke the windscreen of the car of the party's Rajya Sabha member Ramchandra Jhangra in Hisar, 30-odd party leaders, including a former Minister, were held hostage inside a temple in Rohtak for several hours.

Mr. Jhangra was in Narnaund village to inaugurate a community hall around noon when farmers gathered in large numbers, to protest against his visit to the village. The protest turned violent when the mob broke the windscreen of Mr. Jhangra's car. The police used mild force to disperse the crowd and detained two persons, said Nitika Gahlaut, Su-



Anger unleashed: Farmers attacking BJP Rajya Sabha member Ramchandra Jhangra's car in Hisar in Haryana on Friday.

perintendent of Police, Hansi.

Kuldeep Satrod, 40, sustained head injuries in the incident.

In another incident, former Haryana Minister Manish

Grover and several other BJP leaders were held hostage by protesting farmers in Rohtak during the day when they went to a temple at Kilo village to watch the live telecast of Prime Minister Narendra

Modi's programme in Kedarnath. Dozens of farmers surrounded the temple, preventing the leaders from leaving its premises, and also deflated the tyres of the leaders' cars.

JeI leader advises cadres to be peace-loving citizens

JeI is accused of collecting funds for secessionist activities

PEERZADA ASHIQ SRINAGAR

An internal note circulated by a senior leader of the banned Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) in the Kashmir Valley has asked its cadres to be "peace-loving citizens" and "obey the law of the land".

The JeI has faced multiple raids by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) since August.

"Hope all cadres belonging to the JeI, before the ban, obey the law of the land as peace-loving citizens, giving chance to the law enforcing agencies to take any action against them," the note, accessed by The Hindu, reads.

It also stated: "The Jamaat before the ban was not involved in any illegal or un-



The JeI was banned in 2019 after the Pulwama attack left 40 CRPF jawans dead.

lawful activity whatsoever. It was a socio-religious organisation working since Partition. It has always respected the law of the land as an organisation."

The JeI was banned in February 2019 as "an unlawful

association" under Section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 immediately after the Pulwama attack left 40 Central Reserve Police Force jawans dead in south Kashmir.

Secessionist activities

The NIA lodged a fresh case on February 5, 2021 "in connection with separatist and secessionist activities of the JeI", and accused the members of "collecting funds domestically and abroad, which are being used for violent and secessionist activities".

About 73 locations in 14 districts in J&K, where the outfit's cadres live, were raided by the NIA in August and October.

TRF man flees shoot-out in Srinagar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR

A "wanted" militant of The Resistance Front (TRF) escaped a covert operation by the police on Friday at the SKIMS Medical College and Hospital in Bemina, Srinagar, after engaging them in a brief shoot-out.

Police sources said a special team of the police in civilian attire engaged the TRF militant in a gunfight on the parking lot of the hospital.

Panic triggered

However, the militant opened fire from his pistol and escaped from the spot. The shoot-out between militant and security forces triggered panic outside the busy medical college.

A police spokesperson said there was a "brief fire-fight" between militants and security forces at the SKIMS Hospital and "they managed to escape, taking advantage of civilian presence".

No arrest

Additional personnel were rushed to the spot after the shoot-out and the area was cordoned off for a search operation. However, no arrests were made.

Stationing of CRPF personnel in Srinagar halls invites flak

Security stepped up to curb movement of militants: officials

PEERZADA ASHIQ SRINAGAR

Stationing of additional CRPF companies in community marriage halls in Srinagar in the wake of growing militant attacks has locals and Mayor up in arms.

There is growing concern among the locals after the marriage halls and government accommodations were taken over by the security personnel in congested localities such as Suthra Shahi and Illahi Bagh, where such facilities are also used by children as recreation

centres. "The SMC [Srinagar Municipal Corporation] wasn't consulted on this decision. These community halls are integral to social and community functions and are constructed in areas where people don't have huge houses and lawns," SMC Mayor Junaid Azim Mattu said.

The Srinagar municipality has raised the issue with the Divisional Commissioner. "The Divisional Commissioner has assured me that alternative options will be explored. I have strongly

urged for this. It is very important that community facilitation services are not hampered," Mr. Mattu said. Officials said hundreds of CRPF personnel were being shifted from north and south Kashmir to Srinagar.

The augmentation came days after Union Home Minister Amit Shah presided over security review meetings during his three-day tour of the Union Territory last month. Multiple targeted attacks by militants left seven civilians dead in the city in October.

GOVERNMENT OF PUDUCHERRY CENTRALISED ADMISSION COMMITTEE - CENTAC. MBBS/BDS/BAMS/B.V.Sc & A.H COURSES FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2021-22. Online applications are invited from NEET UG Qualified candidates for admission to the first year MBBS/BDS/BAMS and B.V.Sc & A.H courses in Government and Self Financing Medical / Dental and Veterinary colleges in the UT of Puducherry.

MATSYAFED RE - E - TENDER NOTICE. No.Mfed/Mktg/11/1914. Tender ID: 2021_MFED_450165_1. E-bids are invited from registered manufacturers / Dealers for the supply, erection and commissioning of Centrifugal separator/Hydro extractor of 100 Kg capacity for its fish net factory at Kannur.

TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS:TIRUPATI MARKETING DEPARTMENT e-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTICE. e-tender cum e-Reverse tendering is invited for procurement of the following item by the Marketing Department, T.T.D., Tirupati. Name of the item: Cow Ghee with Agmark Special Grade through Tankers from National wide Dairies.

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT BUILDING ORGANISATION, BLDGS (C&M) CIRCLE, CHEPAUKU, CHENNAI-5. SHORT TERM TENDER NOTICE No.10 BCM/2021-22 / Dated: 02.11.2021. FORM OF CONTRACT: LUMPSUM / Two Cover System.

The Andhra Pradesh Mineral Development Corporation Limited. EMPLOYMENT NOTIFICATION FOR VARIOUS POSITIONS ON CONTRACT BASIS. APMDC invites applications for Certain managerial positions. In various disciplines from the eligible candidates with requisite qualifications.

ANDHRA PRADESH CENTRAL POWER DISTRIBUTION CORPORATION LIMITED. Tender Notice No: CGMP/PROJ/JAJ/JHC/SIP - 15 to 18 / 2021-22. Bids through eprocurement.gov.in are invited from eligible bidders for 4No works pertain to electrification of newly formed layouts by erecting DTRs, 11KV lines and LT lines in Jagannath colonies of phase - 1 under PEDALANDARKI ILLU-NAVARATNALU scheme in Krishna, guntur and prakasam district of AP/CPDCL on turnkey basis in 4 Packages.

कार्यालय अतिरिक्त मुख्य अभियन्ता सार्वजनिक निर्माण विभाग, संभाग-द्वितीय उदयपुर मुख्यालय बांसवाड़ा (राज.). निविदा सूचना संख्या: 08/2021-22 NIB CODE: PWD2122A1885. राजस्थान के राज्यपाल महोदय की ओर से संभाग द्वितीय उदयपुर, मुख्यालय बांसवाड़ा के अंतर्गत केन्द्रीय सड़क इन्फ्रस्ट्रक्चर निधि योजना के अंतर्गत चौड़करण एवं सुदृढीकरण मय पांच वर्ग की सड़क/रोड निर्माण अर्थात के लिये उपर्युक्त श्रेणी सार्वजनिक निर्माण विभाग राजस्थान में पंजीकृत सर्वेक्षकों को आमंत्रित करके केन्द्र सरकार के अधीनस्थ संवर्द्धन, केन्द्रीय लोक निर्माण विभाग, उदयपुर एवं संभाग विभाग, राजसे इत्यादि में पंजीकृत सर्वेक्षकों, जो कि राजस्थान सरकार के उपर्युक्त श्रेणी के सर्वेक्षकों के सम्बन्ध में, ये कार्यवीर्य हेतु ई-टेंडरिंग के माध्यम से निविदा प्रपत्र में प्राप्त की जावेगी। निविदा से संबंधित विवरण वेबसाइट http://dipr.rajasthan.gov.in या http://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in या http://proc.rajasthan.gov.in पर देखा जा सकता है। कार्यालय की सूचना संख्या: 08/2021-22 (हरिकेश मोहन), अति. मुख्य अभियन्ता (निविदा प्रपत्र), अति. मुख्य अभियन्ता

कार्यालय अतिरिक्त मुख्य अभियन्ता, सार्वजनिक निर्माण विभाग, संभाग-भारतपुर. निविदा सूचना संख्या : 09/2021-22(परमत्त एवं सुदृढीकरण कार्य) राजस्थान के राज्यपाल महोदय की ओर से भारतपुर संभाग में जिला भारतपुर एवं काली की अंतर्गत आने वाली नगर निगम, नगर परिषद एवं नगर पालिका क्षेत्र की श्रेणी की परमत्त एवं सुदृढीकरण कार्य हेतु निविदाओं को आमंत्रित करके केन्द्र सरकार के अधीनस्थ संवर्द्धन, केन्द्रीय लोक निर्माण विभाग, भारत एवं संभाग विभाग, राजसे इत्यादि में पंजीकृत सर्वेक्षकों, जो कि राजस्थान सरकार के उपर्युक्त श्रेणी के सर्वेक्षकों के सम्बन्ध में, ये कार्यवीर्य हेतु ई-टेंडरिंग के माध्यम से निविदा प्रपत्र में प्राप्त की जावेगी। निविदा से संबंधित विवरण वेबसाइट "www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in" एवं "www.sppp.raj.nic.in" पर देखा जा सकता है। इच्छुक सर्वेक्षकों को अपने निविदा प्रपत्र के माध्यम से वेबसाइट "www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in" पर रजिस्टर करके आवेदन करें। NIB CODE-PWD2122A1933



IN BRIEF
Name terminal after my father: Karan Singh

NEW DELHI
Senior Congress leader Karan Singh wants the new terminal building in Jammu airport to be named after his father, Hari Singh, who ruled the erstwhile princely state. In a letter to Jammu and Kashmir Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha, Mr. Singh wrote that it was his father who built the airport for his personal use and it was used by the royal family for many years. He made a similar request to the Civil Aviation Minister.

CBI books 2 Delhi-based companies for bank fraud

NEW DELHI
The Central Bureau of Investigation has booked two Delhi-based companies and their directors in separate cases for allegedly misappropriating funds taken from banks. In the first case, the agency has named CBS Steel Private Limited and its directors, Pradeep Singla, Yashpal Singla and Vikas Singla, for allegedly cheating the Union Bank of India to the tune of ₹32.89 crore. The CBI has named Era Infra Engineering Limited and six others in the second case, in which they have been accused of cheating the Punjab & Sind Bank.

Odisha CM likely to face protests at Kalahandi

BHUBANESWAR
The Congress and the BJP have planned a wave of protests during Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's visit to Kalahandi district on November 8. They have demanded the ouster of Minister Dibya Shankar Mishra over the issue of a teacher's murder in the district. The man accused is said to have close links to the Minister. Mr. Patnaik is visiting Kalahandi district to distribute smart health cards at Bhawanipatna.

Work on Central Secretariat set to start

Public Works Department official says L&T is likely to begin the construction this month

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The construction of the first three office buildings of the new Common Central Secretariat (CCS) along the Rajpath is likely to begin in November, Central Public Works Department (CPWD) sources say.
On October 27, the CPWD awarded the construction and five-year maintenance contract to Larsen & Toubro Ltd. for ₹3,141.99 crore. This was the largest contract in CPWD history, senior officials say.

An official said that L&T was mobilising its resources, and work was likely to start this month. The project has a targeted timeline of 24 months for completion. The



Brick by brick: The new Secretariat is part of the larger Central Vista Redevelopment Project in New Delhi. •R.V. MOORTHY

buildings are proposed to be constructed on the plot of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) campus, which has been shifted to the former Janpath

Hotel temporarily. The new IGNCAs campus would be built at Jamnagar House.

As part of the Central Vista redevelopment, the Centre has proposed a CCS

of nine office buildings and a conference centre on the Rajpath to accommodate all Ministries. The existing structures on the plots, including the IGNCAs, Shastri Bhavan, Nirman Bhavan, Udyog Bhavan and Krishi Bhavan, are proposed to be demolished to make way for the new buildings, according to the plan drawn up by the Centre's consultant, HCP Design, Planning and Management.

Large expanse
While inviting bids for the three buildings of the CCS, the CPWD had estimated the cost to be ₹3,254 crore. The tender document said the total built-up area of a building would be 4.46 lakh square

metres spread over two basements, a ground floor, an upper ground floor and six storeys.
The three buildings would be constructed on the same plot, with connected basements and a common boundary wall. The tender document stated that each building would be split into cores and wings. The wings would be the components where workplaces would be located, while the cores would have shared amenities and utilities. When it starts, the CCS project would be the third component of the larger Central Vista revamp to be under construction, after the new Parliament building and the redevelopment of the Central Vista Avenue.

I-T searches on dry fruit firms in J&K, Punjab

'Income of ₹200 cr. not accounted for'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Income Tax Department's searches against people engaged in the business of dry fruits in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab have led to the detection of unaccounted-for income exceeding ₹200 crore, officials said.

During the searches, the department found digital evidence indicating that an assessee group had been inflating purchases of dry fruits over the years. It is alleged that unaccounted-for cash was being received back by the directors of the group against payment made to various entities for such purchases.

The department found that one group maintained a parallel set of books of accounts and that there was a huge difference between the sales and purchases recorded in both books. "One of the groups was also indulging in unaccounted purchases and sales of dry fruits. Excess stock to the tune of ₹40 crore has been found," said the department, adding that a *benami* proprietary concern was also being run.

In both groups, the claim of deduction under Section 80IB of the I-T Act was found to be fake and estimated at ₹30 crore. The department further stated that they froze 14 bank lockers.

Martial moves



Celebration time: A Nihang warrior performs gatka, an ancient form of Sikh martial arts, in Amritsar on Friday. •AFP

Goa Maritime Conclave to discuss security challenges

Naval agencies from Indian Ocean Region to participate

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

At the third edition of the Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC) next week, Navy chiefs and the heads of maritime agencies of the Indian Navy and 12 other littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) will deliberate on the significance of interoperability to effectively deal with emerging and future maritime security challenges in the region, the Navy said on Friday.

The biennial GMC under the aegis of the Naval War College, Goa is scheduled to be held on November 7 and 9 on the theme "Maritime security and emerging non-traditional threats: a case for proactive role for IOR Navies".

"There would also be extensive deliberations in the domains of hydrography and maritime information sharing," the Navy said in a statement. "As part of the conclave, visitors would also be afforded an opportunity to witness India's indigenous shipbuilding industry at the 'Make in India exhibition' and the capabilities of Deep Submergence Rescue Vessel (DSRV) for submarines at the Marmugao Port Trust, Goa."

Multinational platform
At GMC-21, Navy chief Admiral Karambir Singh would be hosting dignitaries from Bangladesh, Comoros, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, the Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thai-

land. With the IOR becoming the focus of the strategic landscape in the 21st century, the GMC aims to "bring together regional stakeholders and deliberate on the collaborative implementation strategies in dealing with contemporary maritime security challenges", the statement said.

The GMC is the Indian Navy's outreach initiative providing a multinational platform to harness the collective wisdom of practitioners of maritime security and the academia towards garnering outcome-oriented maritime thought, the Navy added.

The Defence Secretary and the Foreign Secretary would also be addressing the conclave.

IIM Udaipur project to understand rural consumer behaviour

The research will attempt to find out the correlation between the choices of people and Internet penetration in Rajasthan

MOHAMMED IQBAL
UDAIPUR

Focusing on the consumer needs of southern Rajasthan's tribal population, a Consumer Culture Lab (CCL), established at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Udaipur, has taken up research to find out the correlation between the choices of rural populace, Internet penetration in villages and the challenges faced by those at the bottom of the pyramid. Researchers have extensively toured the tribal-dominated region to understand the ground realities.

The CCL was set up in 2020 as a unique initiative to develop an atmosphere of creative research in the field of management in order to



Unique research: Students of IIM-Udaipur in a tribal village as part of a "rural immersion" activity. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

bridge the knowledge gap and shift the focus on consumer culture and qualitative explorations. It also highlighted new opportunities for rural people to bring forth their narratives through social media. The latest project

launched by the CCL involves a social and anthropological study of the tribal population in Udaipur, Durgapur and Banswara districts in Rajasthan. It would make a "softer aspect" of cultural practices affecting consumer behaviour available to

the business analytics which had so far depended solely on data mining and statistical analysis, IIM-Udaipur Director Janat Shah told *The Hindu*.

Unexplored area
Professor Shah said the CCL had made an intervention in a hitherto unexplored realm of digital anthropology, which would make a significant impact on big data analysis to anticipate consumer trends and help make cogent business decisions.

"If the product maker or service provider observes a consumer in his cultural perspective, his choices can be understood in a better way," he said. About 30 students of IIM-

Udaipur have volunteered to visit the remote villages and study the underlying phenomenon of the tribals' choices and preferences in the consumption of various commodities.

This has enabled the researchers to develop a nuanced understanding of the way of life, indigenous food practices, celebration of festivals and social interactions among the tribal population.

Some of the assignments have assessed the opportunity gaps for the village youths, financial and digital inclusion in villages and the daily workload of rural women and its impact on their health. Findings on malnutrition and open defecation

were presented to the local administration to facilitate government intervention.

Regular interaction with tribals, who comprise 85% of the population in the region, will not only inculcate sensitivity among the management graduates to relevant issues, but will also equip them to formulate policies and come up with new strategies for rural development, Prof. Shah said.

Interaction with devices
Faculty member Rajesh Narpuzha, supervising the CCL's operations, said this year's theme was identified as "understanding consumer in the digital heartland" to study how the villagers were interacting with devices.

30 more test positive for Zika virus in Kanpur

Mosquito control drive stepped up

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KANPUR

Thirty more people have tested positive for Zika virus here, taking the total number of those infected in the district to 66, including nine Indian Air Force (IAF) personnel, a senior official said on Friday.

Of those infected, 45 are men and 21 women, according to officials.

The first case in Kanpur was reported on October 23 when an IAF warrant officer tested positive for Zika virus. "Thirty more people have tested positive in Kanpur," District Magistrate Vishak G. Ayyar said. Samples were collected

from various pockets in the neighbouring areas of IAF station hangars and sent to the lab at King George's Medical University, Lucknow for testing. Thirty of them came back positive for Zika virus, he said.

Zika is a mosquito-borne virus and hence, getting rid of mosquitoes is the safe way out, he said. To check the spread of the disease, health teams are undertaking sanitisation programmes, including anti-larvae spraying and identifying fever patients, screening seriously ill people and pregnant women. Health teams have been asked to step up door-to-door sampling.

THE CROSSWORD + 13395
(set by Arden)

Display keystrokes of genius. Type your answers in our online grids: @ <https://qrqo.page.link/jjptn>

ACROSS

- Large craft, the passage is slow (5)
- Trade depots collecting business address at last (8)
- Stylish teen modeled in set (7)
- Language close to German, close overall (7)
- Capital to fall back I see... (7)
- ... if such a variety blooms! (7)

DOWN

- Making a mark additionally inland (8)
- Give up because of vanity (6)
- Drops one family that's allowed in game (10)
- Like exposing past life totally... (2,2)
- ... and not even his disfigurement seemed peculiar (6)
- Religious representative's support for a treatise lacks substance (6)
- Can a stadium hold the game? (7)
- Do talk about energy (5)
- Measure of impatience shown to get Aadhar card, say (5,5)
- Art must represent class (7)
- Wind flower, see all around (8)
- Disposed about hundred, rate? (5)
- Look to play a cricketing shot (6)
- Idea of half-time during the middle of the day (6)
- Must come, save half of all membranes (6)
- Once again the house leaders promise (4)

14 Cryptic clue - it's hidden in opening signal (11)

19 Fibs about a way to fill containers (7)

21 Her heart filled with love, she's often in distress (7)

23 Release bird amid building blocks (3,2,2)

25 One in Paris not even called, one in London needs a scrub (7)

26 Foundation, say for an extra-terrestrial coming in from outer space (8)

27 Fifty deposited in bank, it gives some relief (5)

SUDOKU

7	6							8
			8	2	6			
	2				3			1
6	4				8			
3	5			6			8	2
			4				3	6
1		3						2
			9	4	2			
4						3		5

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 13394

C	O	N	D	E	S	C	E	N	D	I	N	G
F	P	I	H	C	E	E	S					
U	S	H	E	R	E	C	E	P	I	E	N	T
N	I	T	U	E	O	D	A					
D	O	D	E	C	A	G	O	N	T	A	I	N
A	I	H	T	R	O	S	T	R	A	L		
M	E	A	N	E	S	T	R	O	S	T	R	A
N	O	H	O	P	E	R	C	H	A	B	L	I
T	A	L	A	M	I	T	A	S				
A	L	L	O	T	A	C	O	R	D	I	O	N
L	O	A	G	R	W	D	E					
L	E	G	I	S	L	A	T	E	E	L	L	I
Y	E	E	N	P	L	O	S					
U	N	W	R	I	T	T	E	N	L	A	W	S

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

4	8	1	3	6	7	2	5	9
6	3	9	8	5	2	4	7	1
5	2	7	1	4	9	6	3	8
3	7	8	4	9	6	1	2	5
9	4	5	2	1	8	3	6	7
2	1	6	5	7	3	9	8	4
8	5	2	9	3	1	7	4	6
1	6	4	7	2	5	8	9	3
7	9	3	6	8	4	5	1	2

FAITH

Ambal - Vedas personified

Abirami Bhattar, in his Abirami Anandi, says Goddess Tripurasundari is like the Upanishads, said M.A. Manickavelu in a discourse. The Vedas have two kandas - karma kanda and jnana kanda. Karma kanda deals with rituals, like performance of yagas, mantras to be recited at these times etc. The jnana kanda deals with liberation of the atma, and thus is concerned with philosophical matters, and not with ritualistic ones. It is the jnana kanda which is relevant at all times.

For instance, in the modern world, most of the yagas prescribed in the Vedas are not being performed. But the desire to understand Brahman, the Supreme Truth, is present in all generations. This desire to understand Brahman and to attain moksha will continue in future generations too. Bhattar compares Ambal to this jnana kanda segment of the Vedas. The Vedas are always relevant, and the Goddess who is seen as an embodiment of the Vedas is ever youthful. One of the names of Ambal in Lalitha Sahasranama is Veda Janani. The Pranava mantra is fundamental to the Vedas and it is said that everything came from pranava. Ambal is the embodiment of this pranava.

The Vedas may be compared to the all-giving Kalpaka tree. While describing the Vedic aspect of Ambal, Bhattar says She is like the middle portion of this tree, the top portion and the root. The top and middle portions of a tree are visible to the eye. But we cannot see the root, and you need to put in some effort to get to the root. Brahma tattva is similar to this. That is why Bhattar first talks of the middle and top portions and then mentions the root. You must meditate and contemplate on God to understand Brahma tattva. Kumaraguruparar in his Meenakshi Pillai Tamizh gottivas Ambal as the substance of the Vedas.

State of emergency

Ethiopia's government has declared a national state of emergency after rival Tigrayan forces seized two strategic cities in an apparent push towards the capital, Addis Ababa



Under attack: A file photo of the site of an air strike in Mekele, Tigray. ■ AP

Nov. 4, 2020: Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed orders a military response to what he calls a "traitorous" attack by the TPLF on federal army camps in Tigray

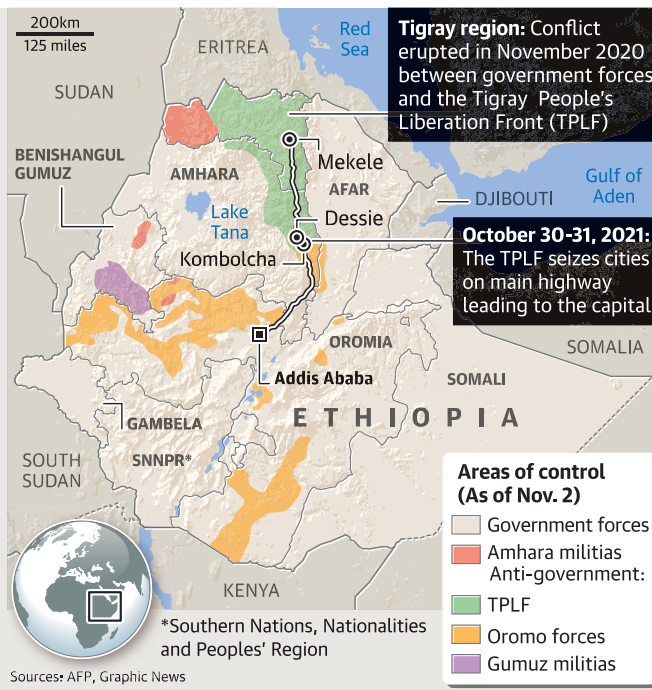
Nov. 28: Abiy announces military operations are "completed", but fighting continues

Feb. 2021: Amnesty International says Eritrean soldiers killed "hundreds of civilians" in November in the holy city of Axum

June 28: Ethiopian officials flee Mekele in the face of a rebel advance. They take the Tigray capital and push south

Oct. 4: Abiy is sworn in for a new five-year term in office

Nov. 5: Nine rebel groups, including the TPLF, agree to "collaborate and join forces" against the government of Prime Minister Abiy



Tigray region: Conflict erupted in November 2020 between government forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)

October 30-31, 2021: The TPLF seizes cities on main highway leading to the capital

Areas of control (As of Nov. 2)
 ■ Government forces
 ■ Amhara militias
 ■ Anti-government:
 ■ TPLF
 ■ Oromo forces
 ■ Gumuz militias

*Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region
 Sources: AFP, Graphic News

China to punish Taiwan independence 'diehards'

They are severely undermining cross-strait relations: Beijing

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

China vowed on Friday to punish "diehard" Taiwan politicians, saying it would ban several from visiting the mainland, as tensions between Beijing and Taipei spiked to their highest level in years.

China claims Taiwan as its territory – to be seized one day, by force if necessary – and has intensified efforts in recent years to isolate the self-ruled island on the international stage. On Friday, the Taiwan Affairs Office in Beijing warned that "the mainland will pursue criminal responsibility for Taiwan independence diehards in accordance with the law, to be effective for life".

The statement by spokeswoman Zhu Fenglian named Taiwanese Premier Su Tseng-chang, Parliament Speaker Yu Shi-kun and Foreign Minister Joseph Wu as among a minority of independence supporters.

Ms. Zhu said the politicians "have tried to instigate cross-strait confrontation, maliciously attacked and slandered the mainland... severely undermining cross-strait relations". She added

'More interactions needed'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
TAIPEI

The head of a European Parliament delegation on Friday urged the international community to interact more with Taiwan to help defuse tensions with China, dismissing its claim that visiting the island was a provocation.

China has slammed visits by overseas politicians as

"provocations". Beijing on Thursday expressed "strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition" to what has been described as the first "official" delegation to Taipei from the European Parliament.

"It's not a provocation to come to Taiwan. It should be normal," French MEP Raphael Glucksmann told a press conference in Taipei.

Ethiopia rebels 'join forces' against govt.

TPLF, which has joined hands with Oromo rebels, says Addis Ababa could fall within weeks

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
ADDIS ABABA

Nine rebel groups battling Ethiopia's government joined forces on Friday, as fears grow of Tigrayan fighters advancing on the capital.

The alliance includes the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which has been locked in a year-long war against Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government.

The TPLF said on Wednesday that its fighters had reached the town of Kemisie in Amhara region, 325 km northeast of the capital, and were running "joint operations" with the OLA, which predicted Addis Ababa could fall in a matter of weeks.

The nine groups, in a statement, said they were forming a united front "to reverse the harmful effects of the Abiy Ahmed rule on the peoples of Ethiopia... and in

recognition of the great need to collaborate and join forces towards a safe transition in the country".

United Front

It is unclear whether the alliance, named the United Front of Ethiopian Federalist and Confederalist Forces, will affect the trajectory of the conflict, which Mr. Abiy's government has termed "an existential war".

The TPLF and the OLA,

which the government officially designated as terrorist groups in May, are well-known, but the alliance's other seven members are obscure, said one diplomat following security matters.

"If they are really serious about taking up arms against the government then it's potentially a real problem for the government," the diplomat said. "I don't know the majority of them, I don't know how many people they

have, what resources they have." The government has dismissed rebel claims of territorial gains, saying on Thursday the TPLF was "encircled" and close to defeat, while also urging Ethiopians to unite and join the fight.

On Friday, the Defence Ministry called on veterans to re-enlist in the armed forces.

The U.S. Embassy issued an advisory urging citizens to leave the country as soon as possible.

Act now on climate, youth tell leaders

Greta Thunberg labels COP26 a 'failure'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GLASGOW

Thousands of young people marched through the streets of Glasgow on Friday to protest against a lack of climate action with a clear message to negotiators at the COP26 summit: "If not now, when?"

Two days of demonstrations are planned in the Scottish city to highlight the disconnect between the glacial pace of emissions reductions and the climate emergency already swamping countries across the world.

Swedish campaigner Greta Thunberg branded the UN summit a "failure" and said that pledges from some nations made during COP26 to



Clean up your mess: Climate activist Greta Thunberg taking part in a protest march in Glasgow on Friday. ■ GETTY IMAGES

accelerate their emissions cuts amounted to little more than "a two-week long celebration of business as usual and 'blah, blah, blah'."

"It is not a secret that COP26 is a failure," she said at the mass protest. "This is no longer a climate conference. This is now a global

greenwashing festival." Onlookers to Friday's march lined the streets and hung out of windows to watch the stream of protesters, who held banners reading "No Planet B" and "Climate Action Now".

"I'm here because the world leaders are deciding

the fate of our future and the present of people that have already been impacted by climate crisis," said 18-year-old Valentina Ruas.

"We won't accept anything that isn't real climate policy centred on climate justice."

Sixteen-year-old Beth Donaldson said young people were fed up with hollow promises from leaders.

"We see on the TV all these political leaders saying they're going to take action but we never see what action they're actually going to take," she said.

School children were out in force, with some schools allowing pupils to skip lessons to see the march and one young green warrior holding a placard that read: "Climate change is worse than homework".

Iran may have 210 kg of 20% enriched uranium

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TEHRAN

Iran's atomic agency said on Friday that its stockpile of 20% enriched uranium has reached over 210 kilograms, the latest defiant move ahead of upcoming nuclear talks with the West.

The figure, attributed to agency spokesman Behrouz Kamalvand, was carried in a report by the semi-official

Tasnim and Fars news agencies. Under the historic 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and the World Powers, Iran was not meant to enrich uranium above 3.67%. Enriched uranium above 90% can be used for nuclear weapons.

After months of delays, the European Union, Iran and the U.S. announced on Wednesday that indirect talks to resuscitate the deal

would resume on November 29 in Vienna.

The nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, promises Iran economic incentives in exchange for limits on its nuclear programme, and is meant to prevent Tehran from developing a nuclear bomb.

Mr. Kamalvand also said that so far his agency has al-

so produced 25 kilograms of 60% enriched uranium, a level that only countries with nuclear weapons have the physical capabilities to produce.

The U.S. unilaterally pulled out of the nuclear deal in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump, but Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia have tried to preserve the accord.

ELSEWHERE



Hamas law keeps woman from studying abroad

GAZA CITY
Afaf al-Najar had found a way out of Gaza. The 19-year-old won a scholarship to study communications in Turkey, secured all the travel documents and even paid \$500 to skip the long lines at the Rafah crossing with Egypt. But she failed to do so because of a male guardian law enacted by the militant group Hamas, which rules the territory. The law says that a male relative can petition a court to prevent a woman from travelling if it would result in "absolute harm." Al-Najar's father filed a petition, and the court prevented her from travelling so that it could consider it. AP

U.S. cancels deal with troubled vaccine maker

It had produced contaminated jabs

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

The Federal Government has canceled a multimillion dollar deal with Emergent BioSolutions, a Maryland-based vaccine manufacturer with facilities in Baltimore that were found to have produced millions of contaminated Johnson & Johnson vaccine doses this spring, the *Washington Post* reported.

Emergent disclosed the development on Thursday. Emergent said it will forgo about \$180 million due to the contract's termination.

Emergent played a role in the Trump administration's effort to speed up vaccine development and distribution. But after winning a

contract from the previous administration, it quickly ran into production problems.

In March, ingredients intended for use in producing the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine shots contaminated 15 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The problems with the vaccines caused a delay in production.

After that, the Biden administration put Johnson & Johnson in direct control of vaccine production there.

In June, the Food and Drug Administration decided to discard at least another 60 million additional doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine produced at the plant.

Extremists kill 69 people in western Niger

ASSOCIATED PRESS
NIAMEY

Suspected Islamic extremists ambushed a self-defence brigade in western Niger, killing 69 people in the latest attack in the volatile border region near Mali, the Interior Ministry said.

The violence took place earlier this week near Bani-Bangou, some 250 kilometres north of the capital, Niamey, the Ministry said in a statement on Thursday.

The town's Mayor was among those killed in the Tuesday attack and 15 other members of the village defence group were wounded in the ambush, the statement said.

The local self-defence groups have been helping Niger's military fight extremists who have stepped up attacks on civilians this year blamed on Islamic State-linked militants.

The resurgence of extremist violence began with a January attack on two villages that killed at least 100 people.

The following month 237 more were killed in a series of attacks at the hands of armed gunmen riding motorcycles.

The mounting violence poses a strong threat to Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum, who was sworn into office in April only days after security forces thwarted an attempted military coup at the presidential palace.

Chinese journalist jailed over COVID-19 reports 'close to death'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

A citizen journalist jailed for her coverage of China's initial response to COVID-19 in Wuhan is close to death after going on hunger strike, her family said, prompting renewed calls from rights groups for her immediate release.

Zhang Zhan, 38, a former lawyer, travelled to Wuhan in February 2020 to report on the chaos at the pandemic's epicentre, questioning

authorities' handling of the outbreak in her smartphone videos.

She was detained in May 2020 and sentenced in December to four years in jail for "picking quarrels and provoking trouble" – a charge routinely used to suppress dissent.

She is now severely underweight and "may not live for much longer", her brother Zhang Ju wrote last week on a Twitter account verified by people close to the mat-

ter. Ms. Zhang has been on a hunger strike and was forced through nasal tubes, her legal team, which did not have information on her current condition, told AFP earlier this year.

"She may not survive the coming cold winter," Mr. Zhang Ju wrote, adding that he had urged his sister in letters to "take care of herself".

"In her heart, it seems there is only God and her beliefs, with no care for anything else."

This **CHILDREN'S DAY** let's discuss the **'S' word** with **THE HINDU** on Sunday **IN SCHOOL**

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