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NEARBY



Fake currency racket, based in T.N., busted
MUMBAI
The Mumbai Police Crime Branch has busted a fake currency racket based in Tamil Nadu, where counterfeit notes were printed in Tiruppur and sent to Mumbai with couriers for circulation in the city's markets.

MUMBAI LOCAL PAGE 3

BEST to float tenders to tackle 'change' problem
MUMBAI

The Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) Undertaking will be floating tenders to appoint an agency or a bank to collect and deposit its loose change and currency notes. The BEST has seen a surge in collection of coins since it slashed fares last year. Senior officials said ICICI Bank had sought a handling charge which the BEST couldn't afford.

MUMBAI LOCAL PAGE 3

GR issued to regulate Ola, Uber fares
MUMBAI

App-based cab aggregators such as Ola and Uber can now charge surge pricing fares up to three times of the base fare of black-and-yellow (kaali peeli) taxis, which is ₹14.85 per km. This has come into effect after a Government Resolution (GR) issued on Monday. With the State accepting most of the recommendations of the Khatua Committee, the aggregators' fares could be regulated soon.

MUMBAI LOCAL PAGE 4

24 arrested for Meghalaya lynching

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI

The police in East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya on Tuesday arrested 24 persons in connection with the lynching of a man on Sunday night.

The incident, triggered by rumours about childlifters spread through social media, was similar to the killing of Goa-based sound engineer Nilotpal Das and his friend Abhijeet Nath in Assam's Karbi Anglong district in May 2018.

Witchcraft was initially believed to have made the villagers of Syntung attack a group of nine men from Shillong, who had gone there for a picnic.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

Scindia meets Modi, quits Congress

Former Minister set to join BJP, likely to file nomination for Rajya Sabha today

NISTULA HEBBAR NEW DELHI

The political crisis in Madhya Pradesh came to a head on Tuesday morning with former Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia quitting the Congress and all set to join the BJP.

Setting off a chain of events, the former MP from Guna drove to Gujarat Bhawan in the morning to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah. The two later left for the Prime Minister's official residence, 7 Lok Kalyan Marg, in Mr. Shah's vehicle. Mr. Scindia, 49, announced his decision to quit the Congress party right after his meeting with Mr. Modi.

Stifled in party

While Mr. Scindia's resignation letter was dated March 9, he made it public only after he met Mr. Modi. In his letter addressed to Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Mr. Scindia said he was unable to serve the people within the party and was hence taking this step.

The Congress later said it had sacked Mr. Scindia.

Mr. Scindia's loyalists in the Madhya Pradesh Congress (around 19 MLAs, including a Minister) had landed in Bengaluru on Monday, prompting an emergency meeting of the State Cabinet. Sixteen Ministers had submitted their resignation to Chief Minister Kamal Nath allowing a Cabinet revamp.

In talks for months

This, however, was not enough to pacify Mr. Scindia who has been having growing differences in the Congress over what is his due af-

ter the party gained power in the State.

Sources in the BJP said Mr. Shah and Mr. Scindia as well as a BJP spokesperson, who is a personal friend of the latter from his banking days, had been in talks for months. Later State-level leader Narendra Tomar had been roped in along with Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Around the last week of February, Mr. Scindia handed over a list of 24 MLAs who were with him. After this State BJP leader Narottam Mishra got in touch with the dissenters, while Mr. Scindia met with senior BJP leaders in Delhi. An abortive attempt on March 5 to spirit away MLAs was made, but on March 8, after finalising the offer of a Rajya Sabha seat for Mr. Scindia, 19 MLAs loyal to him were moved to the BJP-ruled Karnataka.

While Mr. Scindia did not join the BJP on Tuesday, sources say he is likely to do so on Wednesday in Bhopal and file nominations for the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

Mr. Scindia's aunt and BJP leader Yashodhara Rajee said on record that he would join the party soon.

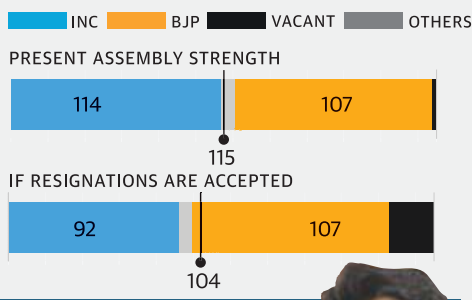
The BJP held a meeting of its Central Election Committee (CEC) on Tuesday evening but a member told *The Hindu* that the list of its candidates for next month's Rajya Sabha polls will only be out on Wednesday.

Speculation is rife over the future course of the Madhya Pradesh government and Mr. Scindia.

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Crisis deepens

On Tuesday, at least 22 Congress MLAs resigned from the Madhya Pradesh Assembly. If the resignations are accepted, the Congress govt. will lose majority in the 230-member House. The BJP, with 107 MLAs, will be ahead of the half-way mark.



As you well know, this is a path that has been drawing itself out over the last year. JYOTIRADITYA SCINDIA in his resignation letter to congress chief Sonia Gandhi



Out of favour: A party worker breaking the name plate of Jyotiraditya Scindia at the State Congress headquarters in Bhopal. A.M.FARUQUI

As 22 Cong. MLAs quit, Nath govt. on the verge of collapse

Three more lawmakers join 19 Scindia loyalists

SIDHARTH YADAV BHOPAL

As many as 22 Congress MLAs in Madhya Pradesh resigned from the Assembly on Tuesday, plunging the government into a crisis.

As soon as Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia resigned from the primary membership of the party early in the morning after a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, 13 MLAs and six Ministers owing allegiance to him, sent in their resignations to the Governor via email, Raj Bhavan sources confirmed.

Later in the day, BJP leaders handed over hard copies of the letters to Speaker N.P.

Prajapati. Following the resignations, Chief Minister Kamal Nath requested Governor Lalji Tandon to issue orders for the removal of the six Ministers, who had resigned, from the Cabinet.

Three other MLAs also submitted their resignations to the Speaker.

'No threat to govt.'

As the government teetered on the edge of collapse, the Congress held a Legislature Party meeting in the evening that was attended by 92 MLAs, including four Independents. Four Congress MLAs did not attend, sources in the Chief Minister's Office said.

Late at night, Mr. Nath said there was no threat to his government. "We will prove our numbers. The MLAs they have held hostage are in touch with me. Why did they take them to Bengaluru? The BJP must bring them back to Bhopal," he said.

Omkar Singh Markam, one of the 16 Ministers who had resigned on Monday night to enable a Cabinet revamp, told reporters, "Our mission is to serve the people, not go after power. Congress gave us democracy, fought for independence. It will continue fighting."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

COVID-19 cases surge in country

Kerala, Karnataka and Maharashtra report fresh cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Fourteen more people have tested positive for COVID-19 — eight in Kerala and three each in Karnataka and Maharashtra, State authorities said on Tuesday, as the total number of cases in the country went up to 61.

Of the eight new cases in Kerala, six belong to the COVID-19 cluster that originated in Pathanamthitta district, all of which are linked to the family that arrived from Italy on February 29.

The other two cases are that of the parents of the three-year-old boy who tested positive earlier and is already in isolation at the Government Medical College Hospital, Ernakulam. This family too came from Italy but they landed in Kochi only on March 8.

The daughter of a Pune couple, who tested positive on Monday, a co-passenger and the Ola cab driver who ferried the couple from the Mumbai airport to Pune on their return from Dubai on March 1 were the latest to test positive in Maharashtra, said State health officials.

While all the new cases reported on Tuesday are yet to be confirmed by the Union Health Ministry, Special Secretary (Health), Sanjeeva Kumar, said: "The total number of positive cases are now 50. Of these, 34 are Indian nationals and 16 are citizens of



Chinese President Xi Jinping in Wuhan. REUTERS

President Xi visits Wuhan

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Tuesday made his first visit to Wuhan since the COVID-19 outbreak, in a sign that authorities' efforts to control the spread of the virus are working. PAGE 12

Italy. There has been no death in the country due to the coronavirus so far."

On Tuesday, 58 Indians were airlifted from Iran. "Mission completed. On to the next," Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar tweeted.

Visa curbs

The government on Tuesday barred entry of nationals of three more countries — France, Germany and Spain — suspending the regular as well as e-Visas granted to them till date, if they have not yet entered the country.

The Health Ministry said that it has, for the first time, used a combination of two drugs meant for HIV treatment. These drugs have been used for treating the coronavirus-affected elderly Italian couple at a Jaipur hospital.

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MORE REPORTS ON PAGES 6 & 7

Muted fun



Toned-down colours: Youngsters celebrating Holi on R.K. Beach in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday. Celebrations were a low-key affair across the country as people stayed away from big gatherings amid the COVID-19 scare. K.R. DEEPAK

COVID-19: BCCI yet to decide on IPL

AMOL KARHADKAR MUMBAI

Despite various State governments raising concerns about the COVID-19 threat to the Indian Premier League's (IPL's) 13th edition, scheduled to start on March 29, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has decided to adopt a "wait and watch" approach before taking a final call on the money-spinning T20 tourney.

With the number of confirmed coronavirus cases in India crossing 50, the Karnataka Health Minister B. Sriramulu joined his Maharashtra counterpart Rajesh Tope in appealing to the Centre to reschedule the IPL. The cash-rich league is scheduled to be played in nine States from March 29 to May 24.

While IPL chairman Brijesh Patel didn't respond to

a query, a BCCI executive confirmed to *The Hindu* that the league authorities are monitoring the situation but won't take any drastic step unless instructed by the government.

"Anyway the South Africa (ODI) series is going to be played to packed houses and a veterans league is already attracting large crowds in Maharashtra, so for the time being, the question of exploring other options doesn't arise," the executive said.

Depending on the government's decision, the IPL committee may consider exploring back-up venues from the regions that aren't hit by the virus or play in a few grounds to empty stands.

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CABINET LIKELY TO TAKE STOCK TODAY PAGE 5

6 contacts of Pune couple isolated

JYOTI SHELAR MUMBAI

Six people who came in contact with the Pune couple, who tested positive for COVID-19, have been placed under isolation at the Kasturba Hospital here on Tuesday. Additional municipal commissioner Suresh Kakani said their samples have been collected and reports are expected to come by Wednesday. According to civic officials, the Centre had sent the list with the names of the six co-passengers of the Pune couple, who returned to India from Dubai on March 1. They were then contacted and sent to the isolation facility.

THREE MORE TEST POSITIVE IN MAHARASHTRA PAGE 7
MORE REPORTS ON PAGE 2, 13

Yes Bank effect: a word of caution

State to focus on nationalised banks

ALOK DESHPANDE MUMBAI

In the wake of the collapse of Yes Bank, the Maharashtra government has directed all its departments, civic bodies and semi-government corporations to not transact with private banks for the time being, and focus only on nationalised banks.

Minister of State for Finance, Shambhuraje Desai, told *The Hindu*, "Finance Minister Ajit Pawar and I held a meeting with senior officials, including the Chief Secretary and finance secretary after the Yes Bank episode. We discussed the situation and have given directions to the administra-

tion," he said.

The Minister said no new transaction will be initiated with a private bank for the time being. "Government departments, semi-government corporations and civic bodies have independent accounts. Many in the State had already opened accounts with Yes Bank and are facing problems now. We do not want government money to be stuck and have therefore ordered the departments and corporations to go ahead with new transactions with nationalised banks only," said Mr. Desai.

According to sources in the Finance Department, the Yes Bank episode may impact the Mahatma Phule Crop Loan waiver scheme as a few cooperatives had their

deposits with the bank.

The Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation, the Mumbai and Thane fire brigades too had their accounts with the bank, apart from the City and Industrial Development Corporation's home loan account, and the Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Limited.

A senior official from the Co-operation Department, which is executing the crop loan waiver scheme, said the issue is likely to be discussed in Wednesday's Cabinet meeting.

"We have not received any serious complaints as of now, but will be monitoring the situation and if needed, steps will be taken accordingly," he said.

On a long quest to rediscover Mhatre's frozen art

A Mumbai surgeon is on a mission to locate the noted sculptor's work

JYOTI SHELAR MUMBAI

A Mumbai-based surgeon is on a quest to trace all 372 sculptures made by his great grandfather, the iconic sculptor Ganpatrao Mhatre, who took the art world by storm in the 19th century with 'Mandirpathagamini' (To the Temple). The life-size statue shows a Maharashtrian woman in a nine yard sari, on her way to a temple.

Dr. Hemant Pathare has located 280 figures so far. Among the ones he is still looking for are a Saraswati standing on a peacock that

went missing from a Sangli museum, a marble statue of Lord Ram, a bust of King George V that disappeared from a Gujarat college and another of Sir William Dring of the East Indian Railway Company that once stood at Howrah station.

Life-size statues

"There was also a full-size marble bust of Zarathustra made for Parsi philanthropist Bomanji Dhinshaw Petit, and a seated Ganesha for Sir Hurkisondas Narrotamdas. No one knows their current location," said Dr. Pathare. At least 50 of



From another era: Dr. Hemant Pathare with the replica of the Mandirpathagamini figure at his residence. PRASHANT NAKWE

the yet-to-be-traced sculptures are life-size statues and busts. Mhatre's preserved records are his main references, but articles, books and relatives have also helped. In 1896,

Mandirpathagamini won the best sculpture prize and a medal from the Bombay Art Society. "Till then, all memorial sculptures, bronze or marble, were done by Europeans. Indian

royalty did not entrust such tasks to Indian sculptors," said Dr. Pathare.

"It is easy to identify his work. The eyes, face, features, everything is true to life," he said.

The doctor's search has taken him across the country. He traced some figures in the State Bank of India, Central Bank of India and the Masina Hospital in Mumbai and some across the border at the Karachi Parsi Institute. "The royal family in Mewar graciously allowed me access to their collections," he said.

Dr. Pathare, who is attached to the Jaslok Hospital, plans to publish his work as a coffee-table book.