

NATION

Cracks in I.N.D.I.A bloc over seat sharing? **page 7**

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Robust economic growth to continue in Q4: FinMin **page 8**

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Russia launches biggest airstrike on Ukraine, kills 27 civilians **page 9**

Political slugfest breaks out over Kaleshwaram

Govt to order probe into 'quality lapses' 'Bid to divert focus from 6 guarantees'



Ministers Uttam Kumar Reddy, D Sridhar Babu, Ponnamp Prabhakar, Komatireddy Venkat Reddy and others at the Medigadda barrage on Friday.

STATE BUREAU
 HYDERABAD

Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy said the State government will order a judicial probe into the irregularities in the implementation of the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS).

"The government has nothing personal against any official or anyone else involved in the construction of the barrages as part of KLIS. But the concerns being raised by people have to be addressed and responsibility should be fixed for quality lapses," he said while speaking to media persons at Medigadda

on Friday. Dismissing the bomb blast theory that sought to be attributed to the sagging of piers, the Minister said it sounded improper.

"The probe will be entrusted to a sitting judge. The inquiry, investigation and repair works will happen and this will make the project non-operational or less operational for some time," Uttam Kumar said, adding that due to the damage of the Medigadda and Annaram barrages, the SRSP Phase II ayacut would be reduced in this crop season. As of date, the total cost of the project is Rs 1.27 lakh crore and there was no clarity on how much more would have to be incurred. (SEE PAGES 2, 5)

STATE BUREAU
 Hyderabad

In a scathing rebuke, BRS MLA and former Deputy Chief Minister Kadiam Srihari slammed the Congress government, accusing it of orchestrating political theatrics in the guise of white papers and judicial investigations. He said the Congress, which made 412 promises during the elections, is now resorting to diversionary tactics only to cover up its failure to secure funding for fulfilling its schemes.

Addressing a media conference at the BRS Legislature Party office here on Friday, Srihari criticised the Ministers' visit to the Medigadda barrage, alleging that they aimed to mislead the public rather than fulfil their responsibilities. He feared that the Ministers were trying to influence the proposed judicial probe demanded by the BRS to ascertain the facts, by delivering judgements on allegations, even before conducting an investigation.

In a point-by-point rebuttal, the former Deputy Chief Minister said the presentation on the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS) during the Ministers' visit

exposed the false propaganda of the Congress. He highlighted that the State government confirmed the Rs 93,000-crore expenditure for the project, rebutting allegations of senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy of Rs 1 lakh-crore scam in the project construction. He pointed out that while the Congress leaders alleged that no new ayacut was created under KLIS, the officials revealed that over 98,000 acres of new ayacut was created, besides stabilising ayacut of over 15 lakh acres.



KLIS underwent meticulous re-design process after Maha's objections, says Kadiam

Condemning the Congress leaders for questioning project cost escalations, Srihari said the Kaleshwaram project underwent a meticulous redesign process after Maharashtra's objections, which in turn resulted in the increased estimated cost from Rs 38,000 crore proposed for construction at Thammidihatti during the Congress regime to more than Rs 80,000 crore due to multiple barrages and reservoirs constructed as part of the Kaleshwaram project. "Is there any irrigation project in the country which was completed at the proposed cost?" he questioned. (SEE PAGE 2)

Assam peace pact signed with ULFA

Amit Shah calls it big day; outfit agrees to disband



Home Minister Amit Shah, Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma and Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla with an ULFA member during the signing of the peace accord, in New Delhi. — Photo: PTI

NEW DELHI

The pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) on Friday signed a peace accord with the Central and Assam governments, agreeing to shun violence, disband the organisation and join the democratic process.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who was present along with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at the signing of the accord here, said it was a very big day for the people of Assam. "Assam has suffered for long due to the violence of the ULFA and 10,000 people lost their lives in this violence since 1979," he said.

Shah said the ULFA, the oldest insurgent group of Assam, agreed to abjure violence, disband the organi-

sation and join the democratic process. He said a big development package will be given to Assam as part of the accord. Every clause of the pact will be implemented fully, he said. He said that now violence has come down in Assam by 87 per cent, deaths by 90 per cent and kidnappings by 84 per cent.

The Chief Minister termed the accord "historic" and said it has fructified due to the guidance and leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Shah. The accord came after 12 years of unconditional negotiations between the ULFA faction, led by Arabinda Rajkhowa, and the government, officials said. The peace pact is expected to end decades-old insurgency in Assam. PTI (THE PATH TO PEACE PAGE 7)

RPO Hyd sets record

HYDERABAD | PAGE 03

Polls: Maine bans Trump

WORLD | PAGE 09



Avesh Khan in India squad

SPORT | PAGE 10



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Centre likely to cut fuel rates ahead of LS elections

NEW DELHI

The Central government is likely to reduce petrol and diesel prices ahead of the Lok Sabha polls as crude oil prices have also come down in the international market, which will enable the oil marketing companies to bear the burden.

According to sources, the Ministry for Petroleum and Natural Gas has worked out various combinations and permutations on the price cuts ranging from Rs 4 to Rs 10 per litre in the two fuels and the impact it will have on oil companies.

The government is also looking at reduction in the excise duty on petrol and diesel so that the entire burden of the price cut is not borne by the oil PSUs — In-



Worked out various combinations and permutations on price cuts ranging from Rs 4-10/litre of petrol, diesel

dian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum. The final decision on the price cut will be taken at the level of the Prime Minister,

sources said. The last time the prices of petrol and diesel were reduced was in May last year when the Finance Ministry cut the excise duty on petrol by Rs 8 per litre and that on diesel by Rs 6 a litre.

Crude oil prices have also been falling in the global market. The price of benchmark Brent crude was hovering at around \$77 a barrel in the international market on Friday. This is down from the \$85-\$90 range in earlier months, which makes it easier to go for a price cut in fuel prices.

Meanwhile, the shares of Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum crashed by 4 per cent in Friday's trade amid reports of a likely cut in petrol and diesel prices. IANS

Treading carefully



SUB-ZERO CONDITIONS: People cross a wooden bridge amid dense fog in Srinagar on Friday. Several parts of Kashmir recorded minimum temperatures below the freezing point as Chilla-i-Kalan, a 40-day period of harsh winter, grips the Valley. — Photo: PTI

Telangana sees 18% jump in cybercrime

CITY BUREAU
 Hyderabad

Cybercrime has seen a staggering increase of 18 per cent in 2023 in Telangana, with 16,339 cases being registered this year as against 13,895 in 2022.

According to the annual crime data, 10,724 general offences were booked this year as against 9,815 in 2022, and 1,845 cases of phishing were registered as against 1,663 last year.

Likewise, 2,571 online fraud cases were booked in 2023 as compared to



1,158 in the previous year, and 1,087 cyberstalking cases were registered as against 1,118 last year. While 141 cases of obscenity over websites and e-mails were booked in

2022, 112 were booked in 2023. Director General of Police (DGP) Ravi Gupta said cybercrime was one of the biggest challenges being faced by police and an Additional DGP-rank

officer was posted to head the cybercrime wing recently to strengthen it. The Telangana State Police has been a pioneer in establishing an exclusive Cyber Security Bureau, making it the only agency of its kind in the country.

"We were also the first to have a dedicated call centre (1930), the national helpline for cybercrime. Since the establishment of the bureau, we have received 90,000 complaints and registered 14,000 FIRs apart from freezing Rs 133 crore in banks in cybercrime cases," he said. (REPORTS PAGE 3)

Revanth for Davos from January 15-19

STATE BUREAU
 Hyderabad

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy will attend the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting at Davos from January 15-19.

He will be accompanied by Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu and senior officials.

The 54th annual meeting of the WEF will provide a crucial space to focus on the fundamental principles driving trust, including transparency, consistency and accountability. (SEE PAGE 2)

Nitish elected JD(U) chief

NEW DELHI

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was elected Janata Dal (United) president on Friday at the meeting of the party's national executive which lauded his role in bringing together opposition parties and spearheading the demand for caste census. Party's chief spokesperson KC Tyagi said Kumar has agreed to take over the mantle from Lalan Singh.

Singh stepped down at the closed-door meeting and proposed Kumar's name, saying his leadership will be needed at this crucial juncture in the run up to the



2024 Lok Sabha polls while he will be busy fighting his own election. He currently represents Munger constituency in Lok Sabha. The national council meeting of the party, scheduled to be held later in the day,

will ratify decisions, including on his presidency, taken in the executive meeting. Sources said most key leaders within the party were of the view that Kumar being its most prominent face should take charge of the organisation at this crucial time.

The party is part of the opposition INDIA bloc. Singh's leadership style was also criticised by several leaders within the party in their recent interactions with Kumar, the sources said. Amid reports of rift within the party, the Chief Minister worked to project a picture of unity by keeping him by his side. PTI