# **The Indian EXPRESS**

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2024, NEW DELHI, LATE CITY, 20 PAGES

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#### **EXPRESS NETWORK**

**KERALA BJP** LEADER'S MURDER: 15 PFI MEN GET **DEATH PENALTY P7** 



### REMEMBERING THE MAHATMA

 $President\,Droupadi\,Murmu, Vice\,President\,Jag deep\,Dhankhar, Prime\,Minister\,Narendra\,Murmu, Vice\,President\,Murmu, Vice\,President, Vice, Vic$ Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and others pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi on his death anniversary at Rajghat on Tuesday. Renuka Pur

#### AN EXPRESS INVESTIGATION

## Polls on hold, Mumbai civic body gave Rs 500 crore for city upgrade — all to ruling BJP-Sena MLAs, none to Opp

Under BMC policy, up to Rs 35 crore can be given to every MLA. Of Mumbai's 36 MLAs, 21 from ruling alliance got funds; 11 of 15 Opp MLAs ask and wait

#### **PRATIP ACHARYA** MUMBAI, JANUARY 30

IN MUMBAI, the country's financial capital, with the civic elections on hold for two years now, the quality of infrastructure in your neighbourhood could very well depend on which party your MLA is from. For the purse-strings have been opened when the MLA is from the ruling party and closed when they are from the Opposition, an investigation by

The Indian Express has revealed. Mumbai has 36 MLAs: 21 of the ruling BJP-Shinde Shiv Sena alliance; and 15 of the Opposition. Under a February 2023 policy that allows MLAs to seek funds from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) for civic works, each of the 21 ruling al-

#### WHO GOT HOW MUCH IN MUMBAI

Party	No. of MLAs	Funds sought	Funds disbursed	
BJP	16	₹462 cr	₹374.58 cr	
Sena (Shinde)	5	₹191.1 cr	₹126 cr	
Congress	4	₹26.51 cr	Zero	
Sena (UBT)	9	₹84.75 cr	Zero	
NCP	1	NA*	Zero	
SP	1	₹25 cr	Zero	

Source: RTI; \*NCP's Nawab Malik was in jail from Feb 2022 to Aug 2023

liance MLAs sought, and promptly got, funds till December 2023, show official records obtained under the Right to Information Act and investigated by The Indian Express.

In stark contrast, not one of the 15 Opposition MLAs (of the Uddhay Bal Thackeray Shiy Sena and Congress) got any money even though as many as 11 of them had asked for funds. The *Indian Express* spoke to each of these Opposition MLAs to independently verify if they applied

for funds, and if the Guardian

Ministers approved it.

Incidentally, the Opposition MLAs applied for funds around the same time as those from the ruling party, February to December 2023.

Ruling parties

Opp parties

The money, if sanctioned. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

### Chhattisgarh: 3 CRPF men killed, at least 14 injured in Naxal attack

#### **JAYPRAKASHS NAIDU** RAIPUR, JANUARY 30

THREE PERSONNEL of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), including two from the specialised Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA), were killed and at least 14 others injured in an encounter with Naxals on the border of Sukma and Bijapur districts in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region on Tuesday.

The encounter took place in Tekulagudem village, which was the site of another encounter in

#### 2021 that left 23 security per-

sonnel dead.

Officials said Tuesday's incident took place hours after a new security camp was established in the village, which is 616 kilometres from state capital Raipur. After setting up the camp, a joint team of the CoBRA, Special Task Force and District Reserve Guard was conducting anti-Naxal operations in Jonaguda-Aliguda area when, at about 2 pm, Naxals opened fire at them, taking advantage of the forest cover.

The security personnel fired **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2** 

### Soren back in Ranchi, meets MLAs with wife; ED seizes cash, SUV

#### **ABHISHEK ANGAD** RANCHI, JANUARY 30

WHEREABOUTS Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren was at the centre of a fierce war of words in the state, with the opposition BJP saying he had gone "missing" and putting up posters to that effect, and the ruling JMM hitting back sharply. It was around 2 pm that Soren emerged and attended a meeting with his MLAs in Ranchi. Also present at the meeting was

his wife Kalpana Soren.



**Chief Minister Hemant** Soren leaves for a meeting with MLAs in Ranchi. PTI

The drama unfolded a day after a team of the Enforcement Directorate visited Soren's South CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

### Killing in US, village grieves in India: He was kind... So distressing we deleted video

### PAGE 1 ANCHOR

#### **SAURABH PARASHAR** BHAGWANPUR (PANCHKULA) JANUARY 30

VIVEK SAINI was supposed to fly home from the US on January 25 his first visit since 2022. The 25-year-old had made elaborate plans with his elder sister, who is



A road leading to Saini's house in Bhagwanpur. Saurabh Parashar

25, was killed by a homeless man whom he helped

settled in New Zealand. The siblings were to meet at the Delhi airport before heading home to their native village in Haryana.

Vivek did come home on that **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2** 

#### **8 AAP-CONG VOTES INVALIDATED**

## **BJP takes post** of Chandigarh Mayor, AAP and **Cong say fraud**

Denied win, alliance candidate moves HC to set aside election, hearing today

#### **HINA ROHTAKI**

CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 30

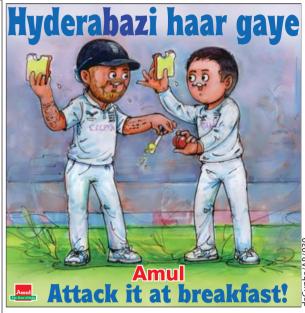
THE KEENLY contested election for the post of Mayor in the Union of Chandigarh descended into chaos Tuesday with the AAP-Congress combine questioning the manner in which eight of its votes were declared invalid by the presiding officer, tipping the scales in favour of BJP candidate Manoj Sonkar who was declared the winner.

As the angry AAP-Congress alliance, the first tie-up among the INDIA bloc constituents, alleged fraud and boycotted the electoral process for the remaining posts, the BJP also walked away with the seats of Senior Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayor.



BJP's Manoj Sonkar after he won the post of Chandigarh Mayor on Tuesday. Jasbir Malhi

Kuldeep Singh Tita, AAP councillor and alliance candidate for the post of Mayor, burst into tears after being denied victory. He later moved the Punjab and CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



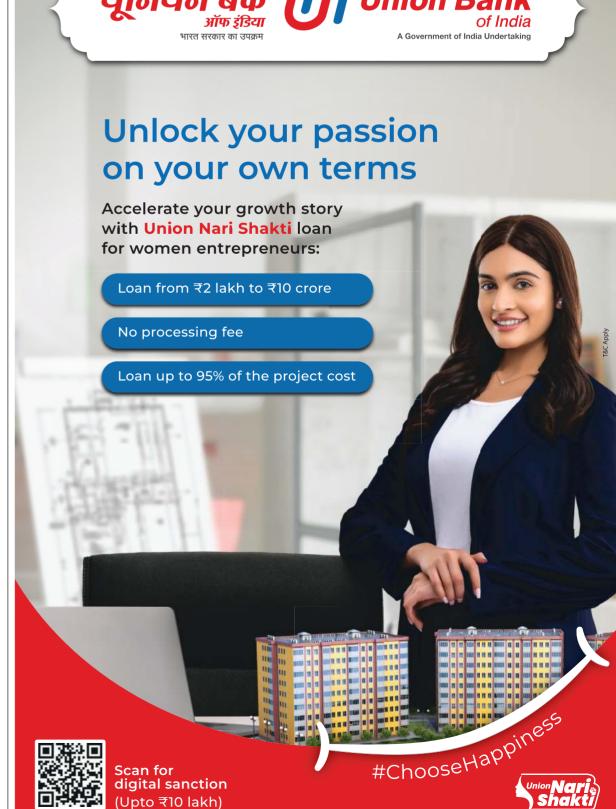
### **Budget Session begins** today, suspension of 14 Opposition MPs revoked

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

ON THE eve of Parliament's Budget Session, the suspension of 14 Opposition MPs — 11 from Rajva Sabha and three from Lok Sabha — was revoked Tuesday to enable them to attend the customary President's address to both Houses of Parliament on Wednesday.

fore senior ministers met Opposition leaders and floor leaders and sought their cooperation for conduct of a smooth session.

A record 146 Opposition MPs from both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, were suspended during the Winter Session for disrupting proceedings to pres their demand for a statement from Home Minister Amit Shah **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2** 





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### FROM PAGE ONE FULL REPORTS ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

## BJP takes post of Chandigarh Mayor

set aside the election which he called a "complete fraud". His petition will be heard Wednesday. Punjab Chief Minister

Bhagwant Singh Mann slammed the manner in which the elections were conducted, and called it "the death of democracy". AAP leader and Delhi Chief

Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who called it "a black day for democracy," said, "Gandhiji was assassinated on this date and after 76 years, they have murdered democracy... Anyone can win or lose elections, but the country should not lose... The issue is that they have won the Chandigarh Mayoral elections with open fraud."

Pawan Kumar Bansal, former Congress MP from Chandigarh and a Minister in the erstwhile UPA government, alleged that election agents of neither the AAP nor Congress were allowed to see the ballot papers. "The presiding officer an-

nounced the rejection of eight votes, declared the BJP candidate the winner and went away. BIP members rushed to the table and tore the ballot papers," Bansal said. Incidentally, in a first, the me-

dia was kept away from the House and the poll proceedings were beamed on a screen outside the Municipal House.

Elected for a year, the Mayor's powers are limited to calling meetings and deciding the agenda. This year, the three mayoral posts were reserved for Scheduled Caste candidates.

On the face of it, the scales seemed tipped in favour of the alliance which had 20 votes with

Haryana High Court, urging it to 13 AAP and 7 Congress councillors up against 14 BJP councillors. BIP MP Kirron Kher too had a vote. There was one councillor representing the SAD.

With 36 votes at stake, the AAP-Congress combine was confident of a victory. But eight of its votes were declared invalid and it managed only 12 in favour of its candidate. Sonkar, the BJP candidate, was declared the winner with 16 votes in his favour.

The AAP alleged that the presiding officer, Anil Masih, a nominated councillor who is the general secretary of the BJP minority cell, had himself scratched the ballot papers in a bid to invalidate them - a charge he rejected.

Masih said, "I invited polling agents of the two parties to come forward to check the ballot papers. Instead, two AAP councillors... attempted to seize the ballot papers, which got slightly torn. Fortunately, Chandigarh Police intervened, and marshals sealed the ballot papers. Everything has been videotaped." The voting began at 11.13 am,

after almost an hour's delay. Deputy Commissioner Vinay Pratap Singh said that voting would take place ward-wise. The lone SAD councillor asked if there was a provision for NOTA, but the DC said no.

Soon after the counting began, Congress and AAP councillors alleged that Masih was scribbling on ballot papers, and that led to 8 votes being declared invalid.

The moment Masih declared BJP's Sonkar the winner with 16 votes, there was a ruckus in the House and marshals were called

The alliance stayed away as the polls for Senior Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayor were held and the two posts too went

The BJP alleged that the moment Sonkar rose to take the Mayor's seat, AAP councillors tried to come near the dais and tear the ballot papers, a charge that the AAP rejected. The AAP instead accused the BIP of tearing the ballot papers.

Arun Sood, BJP in-charge for Chandigarh and a former Mayor, told The Indian Express that the AAP and Congress did not manage to keep their flock together. "The alliance was not be-

tween the two parties but between Pawan Bansal and (AAP Rajya Sabha MP) Raghav Chadha for personal objectives. They did not trust their own councillors who were kept hostage for days before this election," Sood al-"The councillors were asked

not to bolt the door even while going to the washroom. This mistrust led to gaps and eventually to this result. All our 16 votes remained intact." he said. The elections, which were ear-

lier scheduled for January 18, were deferred at the last minute when the presiding officer reported ill. Masih said he had a backache and was admitted to the government hospital in Sector 16. This was a day after Raghav

Chadha called the alliance the beginning of the end of BJP rule in the face of Opposition unity.

Thereafter, there was a move to defer the polls to February 6. but AAP approached the High Court which scheduled the polls

would have been used for vari-

ous development works in their

areas – from the repair of a drain

in Dharavi to the beautification

of a park in Sewri to the installa-

tion of paver blocks in

BMC Commissioner IS Chahal

was not available for comment.

elected BMC corporators would

have ordinarily undertaken. But

with the country's richest civic

body functioning without an

elected body for close to two

vears now, on February 16, 2023.

days after the Budget was pre-

sented on February 4, the BMC

passed a resolution saying funds

to run the city would be routed

The approval note that fol-

lowed said: "A large number of

letters have been received from

MLAs/MPs for providing funds

for various development works.

infrastructural works, beautifi-

cation work etc within their re-

Therefore, an approval was given

for this new provision by the ad-

ministrator on February 16,

body set aside Rs 1,260 crore –

constituencies.

through Mumbai's 36 MLAs.

Despite repeated attempts,

These are works that the 227

Satyanarayan Chawl.

### Suspension of 14 Opposition MPs revoked

on the Parliament security breach on December 13. While the other MPs were suspended for the remainder of the Winter Session, the suspension of 14 MPs was referred to the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha privileges committees.

The 14 MPs included 11 from the Rajya Sabha: Congress's Jebi Mather Hisham, Hanumanthaiah, Neeraj Dangi, Rajmani Patel, Kumar Ketkar and G C Chandrashekhar; CPI's Binoy Viswam and Sandosh Kumar P: DMK's M Mohamed Abdulla and CPM's John Brittas and A A Rahim. The remaining three from the Lok Sabha are: Congress's K Jayakumar, Abdul Khaleque and Vijay Vasanth.

Earlier in the day, the government said it had asked the presiding officers of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha to revoke the suspension. "Everybody's suspension will be withdrawn. We have requested the Speaker and the Chairperson on behalf of the government, and they have agreed," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi

Setting the stage, the Rajya Sabha privileges committee met and adopted a resolution recommending withdrawal of the suspension. Two weeks ago, the Lok Sabha privileges committee had adopted a similar resolution for revoking the suspension of the three Congress members.

Opposition sources said the MPs had written letters to the privileges committees expressing regret for their action, arguing that the disruptions were not intentional or personal indisci-

At the all-party meeting, the

government told the Opposition floor leaders that they should implement the decision on barring MPs from bringing placards or similar materials inside the

Opposition leaders are learnt to have sought discussions on a range of issues, including what they called misuse of the investigative agencies, attack on the federal structure and "overreach" by Governors.

Left MPs Elamaram Kareem and PSandosh Kumar expressed concern over attempts to "communalise" the polity. Kareem also sought a clarification from the government over remarks by ministers that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, which was passed by Parliament in December 2019 but whose rules are still to be framed, would be implemented across the country soon.

The meeting, chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, was attended by Leader of the House in Rajya Sabha Piyush Goyal, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Joshi and his deputies Ariun Ram Meghwal and V Muraleedharan. In attendance from the Opposition were Congress's Pramod Tiwari and Kodikkunil Suresh, TMC's Sudip Bandyopadhyay, DMK's T R Baalu, Shiv Sena's Rahul Shewale, Samajwadi Party's S T Hasan, JD(U)'s Ram Nath Thakur and TDP's Jayadev Galla.

Tiwari said he raised the issue of the "violent attack" on the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Iodo Nyay Yatra in Assam and the state government's curbs on it. An "unwritten dictatorship" prevails in the country, he said, and accused the central government of misusing probe agencies such as the CBI and ED to target Opposition leaders like Iharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren and RJD supremo Lalu Prasad.

Suresh said the Congress would try to raise the issue of unemployment, price rise, agrarian distress and the Manipur situation during the session. TMC's Bandyopadhyay said the Finance Minister should include the pending dues to West Bengal on account of various central schemes in the interim Budget.

SP's ST Hassan demanded steps to strengthen the Places of Worship Act, 1991, that freezes the status of religious places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947, and prohibits their conversion while ensuring the maintenance of their religious character. His demand comes in the wake of demands to hand over the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi to the Hindu community.

The session, the last before the Lok Sabha elections, will be a short one. It begins on Wednesday with President Droupadi Murmu's address to the joint sitting of both Houses - her first in the new Parliament building – and ends on February 9. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will table the interim Budget on Thursday, after which both the Houses will take up discussions on the motion of thanks to the President's ad-

"They have given suggestions, but since this is the last session of the present Lok Sabha, we have said we will give them an opportunity in the next session,"

#### Soren back in Ranchi, meets MLAs with wife; ED seizes cash, SUV

Delhi residence to question him case, but he was not present there. The ED claims to have owned" by him. seized Rs 36 lakh in cash, a BMW SUV "registered under a benami name", and documents from the Jharkhand via road late Monday premises. Its team camped there

The ED has issued 10 summons to Soren so far — the latest asked him to appear for questioning on January 29 or January 31. He was also questioned on January 20 at his Ranchi residence for seven hours.

for almost 13 hours.

Soren also chaired another meeting with IMM and ally Congress legislators in the evening. Sources said 35 MLAs attended the meeting. A legislator who was present said, "All MLAs entrusted their faith in the CM and said they will stand by whatever decisions he takes."

Those who were present also said they discussed what could happen in case Soren is arrested. According to sources, there was no consensus on whether his wife should step into his shoes since other members of his family could object. "We discussed several permutations and combinations," said an MLA.

In an email to the agency on Sunday, Soren agreed to record his statement on January 31 at 1 pm at his residence. He had said the agency's insistence on recording a statement on or before January 31 "reveals political agenda" to disrupt the functioning of the state government and prevent an elected representative from discharging his official duties. He wrote that most of the questions the ED had were "inaccuracies" in affidavits filed by him with the Election Commission and only three or

four questions were related to the plot of land in Bargai area "wrongfully alleged to be

Sources in the government said Soren had returned to

On Tuesday, hitting out at the BIP, the IMM said the CM had some work in Delhi following which he returned. "The CM is an institution, not a person. BJI has maligned him. He has been defamed. We will file a criminal case against the BIP chief and MPs who tweeted photos of Hemant Soren with Rs 11.000 prize money. My party will spend Rs 11 lakh on a psychiatrist who will find out what is happening with BJP's Babulal Marandi."

Marandi had led the attack on Soren through the day. "The Chief Minister of our state has been missing for the last 40 hours due to fear of the central agencies and has again run away hiding his face," he had posted Asked about the ED claiming

it found cash at Soren's Delhi res-

idence, JMM general secretary

Suprivo Bhattacharya said. "ED reaches before time at the CM's residence... Has the money been planted by Marandi? Openly hooliganism is being promoted. After a brief meeting with the MLAs in the afternoon, Sorer

paid homage to Mahatma Gandhi. Asked by reporters on his whereabouts, he said: "I was in your hearts." Meanwhile, the Ranchi dis-

trict administration issued prohibitory orders around 100 me tres of Soren's residence, the Raj Bhavan and the office of the Enforcement Directorate.

### • Chhattisgarh: 3 CRPF men killed

back, following which the Naxals ran away and took cover in the forests, said officials. The injured personnel have been airlifted to Raipur for treatment. "We have received informa-

tion that at least six Naxals were also killed in the encounter. Unfortunately, we lost three of our men in the attack," said Inspector General of Police for Bastar range, Sundarraj P. "The Naxals suffered heavy

casualties too. Video feed which we have received shows Naxals carrying bodies," said Chhattisgarh Director General of Police (DGP) Ashok Juneja, adding, "our jawans have suffered bullet or splinter injuries". "Our strategy is to go into the

core areas (of Naxals). The anti-Naxal operations will be intensified further. We will set up more camps in core areas and provide government schemes so that they (local people) break away from Naxals and connect with our government," said

Asked about reports of Naxals using a tunnel to attack security forces, Juneja said: "Let the video feed come. We will decide accordingly.

Speaking to reporters, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said "over 500" Naxals were involved in the attack. "Our jawans fought with great valour. The Naxals were in a big number and made use of homemade bombs. The police camps are set up to provide government schemes. The Naxals are shocked by the formation of the BJP's double-engine government, and are carrying out such cowardly attacks. Naxalism is nearing its end. Our double-engine government will end it completely," he said.

This is the first major Naxal

attack under the new BJP gov-

who were killed have been identified as constables Deven C and Pawan Kumar from CoBRA 201, and constable Lambdhar Sinha from CRPF battalion 150. The CoBRA is a specialised force under the CRPF to combat extremists and insurgents in guerrilla/ jungle warfare operations.

Earlier this month, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had chaired a review meeting with stakeholders in Raipur on Left Wing Extremism, where he said the Naxal menace should end in the next three years. January has also seen five al-

leged Naxals, including two women, being killed in encounters in the state. A six-monthold girl had also died in crossfiring during an anti-Naxal operation. Since November last year,

nine new police camps have come up in Sukma and Bijapur districts. This Republic Day, the Tricolour was hoisted for the first time in two police camps in remote Chintagufa area, on the Sukma-Bijapur border.

During the state's twophase polls in November, members of the banned CPI(Maoist) had killed two security personnel and injured another in three separate attacks using IEDs.

between February 2023 and In 2022, 10 security person-December 31, 2023, Municipal Commissioner Administrator Chahal disbursed Rs 500.58 crore, all to 21 MLAs belonging to the BJP and the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, while the Opposition MLAs drew a blank killed last year.

### Orders to review curbs on Internet in J&K not meant for cupboard: SC

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** 

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

THE SUPREME Court on Tuesday told the Jammu and Kashmir administration that review orders of the special committee under the Union Home Secretary on restoration of Internet services in the Union Territory are "not meant to be kept in the cupboard" but must be published.

Hearing a plea by NGO Foundation for Professionals, a bench of Justices B R Gavai and Sanjay Karol gave the UT administration two weeks' time to appraise it whether the orders have been

published or not. 2020, the In January Supreme Court on a plea by journalist Anuradha Basin had ordered a review of the restrictions

ernment in the state. Sai and his deputy, Vijay Sharma, also visited the injured men at the hos-The three CRPF personnel

nel. 33 civilians and 32 Naxals were killed in Chhattisgarh. But the election year, 2023, saw a sharp rise in the deaths of security personnel, with 24 casualties in the state. Further, 31 civilians and 23 alleged Naxals were

placed in J&K in the wake of ab-

rogation of Article 370 of the

Constitution on August 5, 2019.

the NGO, the court had in May

2020 directed the J&K adminis-

tration to constitute a special

committee headed by the Union

Home Secretary to "immediately

determine the necessity of the

continuation of' limiting mobile

internet to 2G speed in the re-

gion... and allowing faster inter-

net (3G or 4G) on a trial basis in

Shadan Farasat, appearing for

the Foundation for Media

Professionals, submitted that as

per the Anuradha Bhasin judg-

ment and the Indian Telegraph

Act, the administration is re-

quired to publish the review or-

ders and the mother order on in-

ternet restrictions in the UT.

On Tuesday, advocate

certain geographical areas...".

Subsequently, on a plea by

#### The process and how it was selective

The region that falls under the BMC's jurisdiction has 36 MLAs in the current Maharashtra Assembly, of which

Eknath Shinde-Shiv Sena, nine of the UBT Shiv Sena, four of the Congress and one each of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Samajwadi Party (SP).

15 belong to the BJP, six of the

Under the BMC's special policy, Guardian Ministers -Maharashtra has Guardian Ministers for each of the 36 districts who oversee its planning and development; Mumbai has two - are authorised to clear proposals from MLAs seeking funds for development work in their constituencies, and forward the cleared proposals to the BMC, which would then disburse the funds. Until this policy came into place, there was no provision for legislators to withdraw money from the civic body's corpus

Following the BMC resolution, funding requests by MLAs were cleared by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and the two Guardian Ministers of Mumbai: Mangal Prabhat Lodha (Mumbai Suburbs – 26 Assembly seats) and Deepak Kesarkar (Mumbai City - 10 Assembly seats). Following the approval of the CM and the Ministers, the BMC

As per this provision, the civic started disbursing the funds. Documents accessed by The around 2.5 per cent of the Rs Indian Express show that in 11 52,619 crore BMC budget — for cases, fund requests from Opposition MLAs to Guardian civic works to be carried out in the constituencies of the 36 Ministers were yet to be cleared MLAs. Each MLA was entitled to and forwarded to the BMC. Letters written by Opposition seek a maximum of Rs 35 crore. MLAs reveal that in some cases, However, in the 10 months the requests for funds were sent to the ministers as early as March

> On the other hand, records show, requests from MLAs belonging to the BJP and Shiv Sena were cleared by the Chief Minister and the two Guardian Ministers, with some being forwarded to the BMC in a little over a week. Four MLAs - three Sena and one BJP — wrote directly to the Chief Minister, while the others wrote to the Guardian Ministers.

And when it came to his own

### Funding process, its flaws

• Polls on hold, Mumbai civic body gave Rs 500 crore for city upgrade — all to ruling BJP-Sena MLAs, none to Opp

WHILE ELECTIONS to the BMC have not been held because of a pending case in the Supreme Court on OBC reservation in local bodies. the civic body's process to approve disbursal of funds to MLAs for development work in their areas raises two critical issues. One, if Guardian Ministers of ruling alliance do not clear proposals by Opposition MLAs, then the upgrade of civic infrastructure in key areas like Dharavi

Waikar) suffers. Two, at a time when political lines are blurred in the state with both Shiv Sena and NCP witnessing a split, and nearly 80 MLAs switching sides over the last 18 months, there exists the possibility of the ruling alliance dangling the carrot of funds to lure legislators wrote to Chahal and asked him

(Congress MLA Varsha

(Shiv Sena Uddhav B

Gaikwad) or Jogeshwari

Thackeray MLA Ravindra

and got funds. On June 23, 2023, Lodha, the BJP MLA from Malabar Hill, sent a letter to Chahal seeking Rs 30 crore. In less than a week, on June 28, the civic body cleared an initial disbursement of Rs 24 crore (80 per cent of funds sought).

constituency, Guardian Minister

Lodha went directly to the BMC

#### The 21 ruling MLAs who got funds promptly cleared

Among the other cases where members of the ruling alliance sought and got funds in-

On May 11, 2023, BJP's Mulund MLA, Mihir Kotecha, wrote to Guardian Minister Lodha seeking Rs 26.34 crore for carrying out civic works. On May Lodha wrote Administrator Chahal directing him to immediately disburse Rs 26 crore to the MLA. The BMC approved the funds, saying the remaining 20 per cent would be given once the work began.

On May 9, Atul Bhatkhalkar, BJP's Kandivali MLA, wrote to CM Shinde, Deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis and minister Lodha, seeking Rs 24.27 crore. On May 26, Lodha

to immediately make the funds available. On June 2, the BMC wrote to the local ward office, giving a go-ahead for the fund. On July 18, Sena's Dadar

MLA Sada Sarvankar wrote to

minister Kesarkar seeking Rs 35 crore. On August 7, the BMC approved Rs 28 crore and said the remaining amount would be sent in due time On July 18, Kesarkar cleared a proposal by Assembly

Speaker Rahul Narwekar, seeking Rs 35.85 crore. The BMC approved the transfer of Rs 28 crore on August 7. The RTI documents showed that minister Kesarkar cleared

the proposals almost the same

#### Opposition MLAs, meanwhile, continue to wait

day MLAs wrote to him.

Over the past two months, The Indian Express reached out to each of the 15 Opposition MLAs; as many as 11 have confirmed they had written to their respective Guardian Minister seeking funds from the BMC, but haven't received thus far.

Of the remaining four MLAs, the sole NCP MLA, Nawab Malik,

laundering and released on bail on medical grounds. The other three - UBT Sena's Aditya Thackeray, Prakash Phaterpekar and Rutuja Latke - haven't written to the Guardian Ministers seeking funds. On June 23 last year,

was in jail in a case of money

Ravindra Waikar, Sena UBT legislator from Jogeshwari, wrote to Lodha seeking Rs 16 crore, citing a slew of civic infrastructure works such as road widening and nullah repair that needed to be carried out in his constituency. On August 26, Waikar wrote to CM Shinde complaining that he was vet to receive the funds from the civic body. He wrote that despite writing to minister Lodha. "not a Rupee has been allotted" to his constituency, while "15 MLAs of the ruling alliance have received the

The same day, in a separate letter to Chahal, he reminded the Administrator about his request for funds and mentioned that the lack of funds have led to deterioration of the existing civic infrastructure in his ward.

funds in their ward offices".

■On February 26, 2023, Sena UBT MLA from Sewri, Ajay Chaudhuri, wrote to Kesarkar seeking Rs 68.75 crore for a slew of infrastructure works that had to be taken up in 62 municipal beats of the constituency However, Kesarkar's office is yet to clear the proposal.

■ Dharavi MLA and Congress's Mumbai chief Varsha Gaikwad wrote to Kesarkar in March 2023 seeking Rs 26.51 crore. However, the BMC is yet to disburse the fund.

Samajwadi Bhiwandi MLA Rais Shaikh wrote to Chahal and CM Shinde on August 3, 2023, seeking Rs 4.6 crore for civic works in Byculla, of which he was corporator until March 2022. However, Shaikh is yet to receive the funds.

No pending requests: **Guardian Minister** 

When The Indian Express reached out to Guardian Minister Lodha on January 9, he maintained that funds will be disbursed to every MLA "irrespective of the party he/she be-

"At present, I don't have any pending letters in my possession from the Opposition MLAs. We are disbursing the funds in a liberal manner by assessing the merit of the proposals, which we are receiving and there is no favouritism being done towards anybody," Lodha said.

Despite repeated attempts. the other Guardian Minister, Kesarkar, was unavailable for comment.

Waikar, the UBT Sena MLA

however, told The Indian Express "Almost every MLA from our party has written to the Guardian Ministers seeking funds for their constituencies. However, we are vet to get the funds and it has been more than six-sever months since we wrote those let ters. Surprisingly, those from the ruling side are getting approval for their funds within weeks of sending their letters. When we check with BMC officials, they say that unless the Guardian Ministers approve the request we can't disburse the money

public money." Congress's Varsha Gaikwad said, "I had written letters to Deepak Kesarkar between February and March last year, seeking BMC's funds for my constituency, Dharavi, for carrying out basic civic works. But till date, I am yet to receive a single rupee. Dharavi lacks basic necessities and it has been more than a vear since civic works were carried out here.'

This is sheer abuse of power and

SP's Abu Azmi said, "Besides writing letters, I met with Guardian Minister Lodha and requested him to give us the funds. Every time he meets me he says that I will get the funds, but in reality we are still waiting for the

#### • Killing in US, village grieves in India: He was kind... So distressing we deleted the video

day, but in a body bag.

A management graduate, Vivek was hammered to death, allegedly by a homeless drug addict, at a department store in Lithonia city, Georgia, where he worked part-time, on January 16. The assailant, identified as Julian Faulkner, 53, was arrested.

According to local media reports, Faulkner, who was given refuge at the store by the store employees, including Vivek, and given food and water got enraged when asked to leave. In Bhagwanpur, Vivek's fam-

ily members and others who knew him described him as an affable young man who would help others and harboured no ill feeling towards anyone. His family suspects his killing to be a hate crime. "We are anguished to learn

that no one came to the rescue

of my brother when the assailant was hitting him repeatedly like a wild animal. I believe the killing of my brother was a hate crime," said Vivek's sister, who did not want any of the family members named in the

**Detective Andre Campbell** from the Homicide Department of Lithonia, when contacted by The Indian Express, said, "An arrest was made the very same night, and the culprit is in custody." When asked about the allegations of hate crime made by the family members, he said "We are not allowed to release

any further details." Vivek was the second of three siblings, the sister being the eldest. The youngest brother, 22. said. "He called me a day before the incident on January 15. He said he had bought gifts for

us and had also spoken to our sister in New Zealand.

"I was the first to receive information about the brutal killing. One of his roommates called me and conveyed the news, followed by the disturbing CCTV footage of the incident. The video clip is so distressing that all of us who received it chose to delete it," the grieving brother said.

"Is there any rule that allows us to bring the assailant of my brother to India and prosecute him here," he asked.

Saini's co-workers were quoted by local news outlet, WSB-TV Atlanta, as saying that they allowed a homeless man, identified by police as Faulkner, into the store on January 15 evening. "He asked us for chips, and Coke. We gave him every-

thing, including water," said an

employee at the Chevron Food Mart, where Vivek worked.

"He asked if I could get a blanket, and I said we don't have blankets so I gave him a jacket," said the employee. "He was sitting here all the time and we never asked him to get out because we know that it's cold."

But on January 16 night, Saini told Faulkner it was time to go. Police were quoted as saying that as Saini was leaving for home, Faulkner attacked him. Vivek was hit with a hammer around 50 times on the head and face.

"We are deeply anguished by the terrifying, brutal, & heinous incident that led to the death of Indian national/student Mr Vivek Saini & condemn the attack in the strongest terms. It is understood that the US authorities have arrested the accused

& are investigating the case," said India's Consulate General in Atlanta on X

Vikek's body was brought home by a cousin who also stayed in Lithonia and cremated the same day. "I met Vivek on the morning of January 16. When I reached the spot, the police had taken away the body and the as-

sailant," said the cousin. Another family member said, "We regret sending him to the US. Initially, there was a plan for Vivek to join his sister in New Zealand, but he later changed his mind and pursued MBA at Alabama University in 2022."

After finishing class 10 at DAV Public School, Derabassi, Vivek completed senior secondary education at a private institute in Sector 34. Chandigarh. Then he did B.Tech in Computer Science from Chandigarh

University People

in Bhagwanpur fondly remember Vivek. "You will not find a single person in the entire village who will speak bad of him. He was a loving young man. Apart from excelling in studies, he would assist his family with agricultural work, said Sanjeev Kumar, a villager.

Vivek's father owns 25 acres of agricultural land. A distant relative said, "His parents were in the process of choosing a match for him.' Bhagwanpur

Charan Singh said the village has nearly 230 houses and 1,100 reg istered voters. "In recent times around a dozen people from our community have gone abroad to countries such as Canada, Australia, Dubai, and the UK for study and work purposes," he

### PROCEDURE AT DEVIANCE WITH PRINCIPLES OF NATURAL JUSTICE: COURT

# HC grants relief to two SAU students, sets aside expulsion over indiscipline

**MALAVIKA PRASAD** NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

NOTING THAT the procedure followed by South Asian University (SAU) to expel two students was "at deviance with the principles of natural justice", the Delhi High Court Tuesday set aside orders passed

by the varsity against two PhD

scholars over alleged acts of in-

discipline.

Petitioners Umesh Joshi and Bhim Raj had moved a petition challenging orders issued by the varsity on November 25, 2022 "expelling" them and "declaring them out of bounds with immediate effect". The action against the two was with respect to participating in a protest regarding stipends for students.

A single-judge bench of Justice C Hari Shankar observed

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** 

THIEVES IN Noida allegedly

broke into the home of a former

DGP-rank officer in the Uttar

Pradesh police, Vibhuti Narain

Rai, and stole a locker full of jew-

ellery, said officers Tuesday.

Police said an FIR has been regis-

tered based on his complaint and

the matter is being investigated.

General of UP Police, said that he

was in Singapore when the inci-

dent took place at his home in

Calypso Court in Jaypee

with my son on December 7.

2023, and returned on January

"I went to Singapore to be

Wishtown, Sector 128.

CBC 42101/13/0012/2324

Rai, a former Director

NOIDA, JANUARY 30

Thieves break into ex-UP

DGP's Noida home, steal

locker full of jewellery



In 2022, the SUA had expelled the two students for taking part in a protest regarding stipends for varsity scholars. Archive

that the facts of the case and issues involved were "largely identical" to those which were considered by the court in a plea moved by another SAU student, Apoorva Y K.

In that case, Justice Shankar had quashed two orders, observ-

29, 2024. My help, Santosh, lives

with me; he too had gone to his

village on December 7. Santosh

took away the locker. My daugh-

ter-in-law's jewellery was inside

IPC Section 380 (theft) has been

registered at Sector 126 police

station and a search is on to trace

and arrest the accused

Police said that an FIR under

it," added the former UP DGP.

complaint.

ing that the procedure adopted by the varsity to consider Apoorva's case was a "sham with a pre-determined intent to expel the student".

"It is clear that the procedure followed by the SAU in the present case is even more at deviance

justice and rules, regulations, bye laws governing SAU than the procedure which was followed by SAU in Apoorva YK (case)," Justice Shankar said Tuesday.

The court further said while in Apoorva's case, the university had at least issued a show-cause notice to her, no such notice was sent out before the expulsion decision was issued to Joshi and Raj. The court said the decision in Apoorva's case would apply in the present case as well. Raj, a Dalit PhD student, later

bagged a scholarship to pursue an MPhil in Law at Oxford University. Joshi, meanwhile, was supposed to submit his thesis by June, 2023, but was expelled before that, following which he approached the HC against the decision.

Justice Shankar said that as per the principle of "audi alteram

an opportunity of hearing before a decision against it is taken.

"It is fundamental to principles of natural justice, that before the decision to punish the student was taken, the student ought to have been given an opportunity to represent against the proposed decision. Taking a decision to expel the student first and thereafter, inviting the student to represent against the decision is as good as presenting the student with a fait accompli.... the HC said, after noting that following the expulsion, the varsity constituted a High-Powered Committee which is stated to have granted an opportunity of hearing to the petitioners.

After receiving recommendations from the committee, the varsity rejected representations made by petitioners against the expulsion orders.

WHAT POLICE PROBE FOUND

### Woman who 'duped' 5-star hotel had lone bank account, with Rs 41

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

TWO WEEKS ago, a 37-year-old had returned a day before I did and found that a few things woman was arrested for alhad been tampered with in legedly cheating a five-star hotel the house. He called me in in Aerocity. It was alleged that Singapore...," said Rai in his posing as a lawyer, the woman had cheated the hotel of Rs 5-7 "On coming back, I found lakh by staying on the premises that an attempt had been made around the New Year and not to break into a locker in my son's paying bills. She had also used room... it appears they were unthe spa and other facilities at the successful in breaking into it, and hotel, costing Rs 2.11 lakh.

During investigation, though, the Delhi Police have found that the woman has only Rs 41 in her bank account. Officials have found only one bank account in her name and it has no money.

said police. The woman, Jhansi Rani

Samuel, hails from Andhra Pradesh and had come to Delhi alone to celebrate New Year. On Ianuary 13, she was about to leave the premises of Pullman Hotel when she was stopped by the staff after they found that she had given false information for the bills, police said.

According to police, they are yet to confirm if she is a lawyer or posed as one.

"She has been changing her statements. She also told one of the investigators that she is a doctor. She then said she has lived in New York. We don't know what to believe. We have asked local staff at her hometown to approach her family and provide us details of her job and parents/spouse," said an officer.

Samuel told police that she

was married a few years ago but has been divorced for a while now.

Police said Samuel stayed at the hotel for 15 days without paying bills and even manhandled staffers when they tried to stop her from leaving the premises. The hotel then called the police to "control" the situation.

Police found she used a fake identity card under the name Isha Dave, said officers.

The hotel staff also alleged that the accused used a bank's UPI app to show transactions which never took place. Police suspect she used a fake mobile application or forged the bills.

Samuel has been booked under sections of cheating, cheating by impersonation, and

#### CM's 'MLA poaching' claim: Delhi BJP files complaint

New Delhi: A BJP delegation on Tuesday filed a formal complaint against CM Arvind Kejriwal following his allegations last week that the "BIP was trying to poach AAP MLAs". AAP is yet to issue a response on the matter.

On Saturday, Kejriwal had alleged he was on the "brink of being arrested in the liquor policy case as part of a BIP conspiracy to topple the AAP government in Delhi", and that the "BJP was also attempting to contact AAP MLAs, urging them to switch sides in lieu of cash of up to Rs 25 crore". Terming the allegations frivo-

lous, the BJP delegation de-

manded legal action against Kejriwal, AAP minister Atishi, and MLAs Durgesh Pathak and Dilip Pandey. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said, "... this time we have decided that we will expose his lies; that is why we have submitted a complaint to the police commissioner." ENS



RECRUITMENT NOTICE Online applications are invited for the online Computer Based Test (CBT) 2024 for the recruitment of Nursing Officer at Level-07 in the Pay Matrix (Rs. 44900-142400). Name of

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Vertical reservation shall be applicable as per prevailing rules of Government of Uttar Pradesh. Horizontal reservation shall be applicable as per prevailing Government rules.

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SKYWATCH

Very Poor

Very Poor

Very Poor 0-50 Good 51-100 Satisfactory 101-200 Moderate 201-300 Poor 301-400 Very Poor

FORECAST: January 3 Generally cloudy sky. Light

### **MCD** extends date to geotag

New Delhi: The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has extended the last date of geotagging of properties till February 29. On December 5, MCD had announced that residents of the national capital will have to compulsorily geotag their properties if they wish to apply for tax exemptions. It had earlier announced that all 1.5 million property owners will have to geotag their assets by

### Delhi to get 5th old age home in

New Delhi: Destitute senior Currently, the city's four old-age homes accommodate around 505 elderly

#### Kalkaji stage collapse: Two organisers held

New Delhi: Police Tuesday arrested two event organisers for their "negligence", which led to the death of a 45-year-old woman after a makeshift stage at a jagran collapsed in Southeast Delhi's Kalkaji Mandir on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday. The two organisers - Satish Kumar (38) and Anuj Mittal (48) — have been arrested, said DCP (Southeast) Raiesh Deo

#### **BRIEFLY** –

# properties

January 31.

# Paschim Vihar

citizens in the Capital will soon have another roof over their heads as the construction of a fifth old age home in West Delhi's Paschim Vihar is almost complete and will soon be operational. CM Arvind Kejriwal has granted formal approval to the old age home, named 'Savitribai Phule Senior Citizen Home', and the file has been sent to the Lieutenant Governor for notification.

### **MOST POLLUTED JANUARY SINCE 2018**

# Delhi's January weather report card: Unusually cold and highly polluted

**MALLICA JOSHI** 

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

UNUSUALLY COLD and polluted - this is what January was for Delhiites this year. According to data on the national capital's air quality, this January has been the most polluted since 2018, with an average Air Quality Index (AQI) of around 354.

The city has also seen the coldest January days in at least 13 years, where the average maximum temperature was 17.7 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperature, meanwhile, was the second lowest in as many years, with an average morning temperature of 6.2 degrees Celsius.

According to the AQI data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), before this year, the January of 2021 was the most polluted since 2018, with an average AQI of 324. This January has been significantly more polluted than the previous years (see box).

The city saw a total of three severely polluted days, with the highest AQI - 447 - being recorded on January 14. The number of very poor days was 26 while only one poor air qual-

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** 

THE DELHI High Court Tuesday

issued notice on a plea highlight-

ing problems related to "new age"

cyber crimes, such as "digital ar-

rest" scams and "forging of court

orders" including those of the

Supreme Court as well as FIRs and

arrest warrants, to extort "settle-

Chief Justice Manmohan and

Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh

Arora sought the stand of the re-

spondents — the Centre, and RBI

among others — in the matter,

and kept the next hearing on

A division bench of Acting

ment money" from people.

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

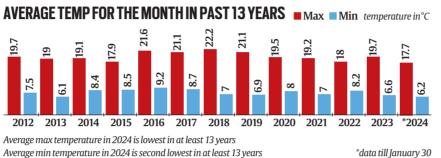
'New age' cyber crimes: HC

seeks Centre, RBI stand on PIL



**JAN OVER 7 YEARS** 2021 2022

**AQILEVELS FOR** 



ity day was recorded.

According to CPCB's parameters, AQI between zero and 50 is considered "good", 51 and 100 "satisfactory", 101 and 200 "moderate", 201 and 300 "poor", 301 and 400 "very poor", and

March 19. The public interest lit-

igation (PIL) has sought direc-

tions to the authorities to frame

guidelines for better coordina-

tion between the agencies and

"swifter investigation" of cyber-

crimes. The petitioners' advo-

cates Akshya and Urvashi Bhatia

have sought that the authorities

in whose names the scams are

being run should conduct an

"awareness campaign". It has

also sought directions for simpli-

fication of procedures to file

complaints against cyber crimes.

HC had observed that cyber-

crime is a "genuine problem"

and that the "whole policing sys-

tem has to be reformed...

In the previous hearing, the

401 and 500 "severe". It is not a coincidence that

pollution has been high in a month where temperatures have been low. According to experts, there is a direct relationship between the two, because

colder days have a tendency to be more polluted.

"This is because with a dip in temperature, the mixing height drops. Mixing height can be described as the height above the surface of the earth, where pollutants, such as particulate mat-ter, can be dispersed. Higher mixing height means the concentration of pollutants in air decreases since there is more space for dispersion," a senior official of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The second reason for the high AQI is lack of rain. The city has not experienced a single day with recorded rain, with only a few parts of the city seeing traces.

This is the second consecutive month that Delhi has had a 100% rain deficit. The city usually receives around 8 mm of rain in December and around 20 mm in January. "Delhi, alongside the rest of north and northwest India, has been under a long dry spell with many parts of the country still waiting for snow. Wind speed has also been low, even as fog has persisted for long hours. The meteorological conditions have been very unfavourable for dispersion of pollutants," a Delhi environment department official said.

Tuesday's AQI was recorded as 357 (very poor); not much improvement is expected on Wednesday either. Although, light rain on Wednesday night and Thursday is likely to bring an improvement in air quality.



of raw material, say officials. Archive

## Delhi airport's key runway to remain closed until Feb 2

**UPASIKA SINGHAL** 

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

DELHI AIRPORT'S second runway - runway 28/10 - will remain closed till February 2, officials said. Under renovation since

September last year, the runway was due to be reopened on December 15. After a series of postponements, it was supposed to open on January 30.

However, DIAL said that several hurdles came in the way of finishing the project on time. Sources said the airport had a compressed timeline to finish the project after the G-20 Summit in September and before Low Visibility Procedure kicked in on December 15.

However, due to pollution concerns, the Delhi government implemented the GRAP-IV norms which disrupted the raw material supply chain for civil works, The Indian Express had reported earlier this month. There was also a delay in supply of runway lights due to supply chain complexities. Additionally, National Highways Authority of India's (NHAI) cranes operating on the Dwarka Expressway on the Gurgaon side of Runway 3 (29R11L) presented a risk to lowflying aircrafts, especially in lowvisibility conditions, said sources.

This caused further delays because even as take-offs could still take place in low-visibility conditions, it was near impossible to land due to the danger the cranes presented, the sources added.

According to DIAL sources. the cranes were removed a few days after the airport authority sent a letter to the NHAI reprimanding its actions that "compelled Delhi airport to downgrade runway 3 from CAT III compliant to CAT I compliant". The Delhi airport has four

#### Dense fog impacts visibility, flight ops

On Tuesday morning, dense fog descended upon Delhi's Palam and Safdarjung stations, severely impacting visibility and disrupting flight operations.

At 5.30 am, visibility plummeted to a mere 50 meters, caus ing significant delays and cancel lations. Two flights were diverted to Jaipur between 2.30 am and 5.30 am, airport authorities said.

The dense fog resulted in the delay of 82 flights and cancellation of five at arrivals, noted Flightradar24. Departures were also significantly affected, with 222 flights delayed and nine cancellations reported.

Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) posted on X saying, "While landings and takeoffs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not CAT III com-

pliant may get affected." However, complaints against delays and cancellations have significantly dropped after January 14 and 15, when the airport reported 1,762 delayed flights and 288 cancelled flights

across two days, officials said. According to DIAL sources this could be because the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) levied fines on Air India and SpiceJet airlines for not rostering trained pilots dur-

ing heavy fog hours. It then issued a directive to airlines that all CAT III trained pilots must be rostered during fog conditions, especially during

fog is at its heaviest.

### **SEDITION CASE**

### Decide Sharjeel Imam's bail plea in February, HC tells trial court

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

THE DELHI High Court on Tuesday directed the trial court to decide by next month Sharjeel Imam's bail plea relating to the 2020 riots case involving allega tions of sedition.

Imam, who was booked in 2020 under sections of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and sedition among other offences, had moved the trial court last year seeking statutory bail for completing half of the maximum sentence of seven years for the offences allegedly committed by him. Imam's plea before the trial court is next listed on February 7.

A division bench of Justice Suresh Kumar Kait and Justice Manoj Jain said, "...We direct the trial court to decide the applica-



**Imam was** booked in **2022.** File

tion within 10 days from the next date of hearing (in the trial court). The bench said in case Imam is

denied bail by the trial court, he has the right to file an appeal on the grounds already mentioned in his appeal before the HC or on any other ground. Appearing for Imam, advocate Talib Mustafa submitted before the bench that out of "43 witnesses, 22 have been examined". He submitted that "four years out of a maximum sentence of seven years, if convicted," had been served by Imam, which is "over half of the sentence".

The HC was informed that although the trial court had reserved the order in September last year, the then presiding officer had been transferred and the matter was now before a new presiding officer.

Imam was booked for sedition for allegedly making inflammatory speeches at AMU and Jamia Millia Islamia with respect to the Citizenship Amendment Act. Later, Section 13 of the UAPA was invoked against him. He has been in judicial custody since

January 28, 2020. Imam had sought bail before the trial court under CrPC Section 436A. The provision says a person can be released if they have spent more than half of the maximum sentence prescribed for the offence. He argued he is entitled to be released on statutory bail as per CrPC Section 436A as he had undergone over half (four years) of the maximum 7-year punishment under UAPA Section 13.

### REMEMBERING THE MARTYRS

 $Shots \ being \ fired \ from \ a \ cannon \ to \ mark \ Martyrs \ Day, at \ Connaught \ Place \ in \ New \ Delhi \ on$ Tuesday. Praveen Khanna

#### **IN GREATER NOIDA**

## Secret meth lab running from house busted, 4 held

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

LAST YEAR, four men rented a "luxurious and lonely private" house at Alestonia Estate in Greater Noida's Chaii-3 and set about "cooking". The fact that the area was isolated meant no one got a whiff of what they were up to. Until this month. when police arrested them and

busted their "secret meth lab". The four men — Eze Uchenna James (49), Alitumolfedi Shedrack (28), Ezelbe Emeka Chibuzo from Nigeria, and Ivo Osita from Kenya were arrested for allegedly manufacturing and supplying

fine-quality Methamphetamine, senior officers said. DCP(Dwarka) Ankit Kumar said raw material amounting to 20.5 kg, including 1 kg of pseudoephedrine, was recovered. Describing the 'lab', officers said it had three rooms filled with gas cylinders and other cooking items. Sophisticated equipment, including a heating mantle machine and high-quality face masks, was also recovered.

According to police, it was a tip-off on November 27 last year, received by the Dwarka unit's anti-narcotics cell, that alerted them about Uchenna's involvement in a drug syndicate. Accordingly, a trap was laid and he was arrested; almost 70 grams of



The men had rented a house to run their ops: Police. Express

fine-quality Methamphetamine was also recovered.

Officers said Uchenna had

been previously arrested in a commercial drug case by the Narcotics Control Bureau of Punjab and had been convicted for 10 years by a court. He was later granted bail by

the Punjab and Haryana HC. Said the DCP. "During investigation, we found that Shedrack, an accomplice of Uchenna, was... the one who supplied Methamphetamine to the latter to sell in the market." He was arrested on January 11; police recovered 100 grams of the drug from him. "He had been previously arrested in a commercial drug case by the Punjab NCB and had been convicted for 10 years... He was out on bail." added the DCP. Chibuzo and Osita were later arrested.

An officer said, "They used to make the drug late at night... We are trying to trace their bank transactions to ascertain how much money they have made so far... We have sent their phones for forensics to trace numbers of

those they supplied the drug to.' Officers said the drugs were to be distributed by the accused to their potential customers, mostly in Delhi-NCR. "If a high-profile customer was involved, they used to directly supply the drug to them or they had several middlemen to do the job," said an officer.

In May last year, police had busted two meth labs operating in a similar fashion in

### PROJECT PLANNED NEAR UPCOMING NOIDA AIRPORT IN JEWAR

## Boney Kapoor-backed firm beats T-Series, Akshay to win bid for Film City

**DHEERAJ MISHRA** NOIDA, JANUARY 30

A FIRM backed by producer Boney Kapoor along with construction giant Bhutani Group have won the bid for the development of International Film City near the upcoming Noida Airport in Jewar, leaving behind a company backed by actor Akshay Kumar and production

company T-Series. Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA) on Tuesday said out of the four shortlisted companies for the final round, Bayview Projects LLP has been selected as the winner on the basis of highest gross revenue share to the authority. YEIDA said that the company

will provide it with 18% gross revenue share, which was the highest offer in the financial bid among the four companies.

Boney Kapoor is one of the designated partners of Bayview Projects LLP, which had submitted the bid along with the consortium of two other firms -Parmesh Construction Company Limited (Bhutani Group) and Noida Cyberpark Private Limited.

Besides, a company backed by Kumar - Supersonic Technobuild Private Limited, 04 Lions Films Private Limited (KC Bokadia), and Super Cassettes Industries Private Limited (T-Series) were among the finalists for the project.

However. Supersonic Technobuild could offer a gross revenue share of only 10.80% while T-series offered 5.27% and 04 Lions Films offered 15.12% to the authority.

Officials said that now the financial bid will be presented before the committee of secretaries following which it will be sent to the UP cabinet for final approval. After this, the Letter of Award will be issued to the highest bidder. The Film City will come up in

YEIDA's Sector-21, which is beside the Yamuna Expressway and around 4 km from the upcoming Noida International Airport in Iewar. Under the Phase-1 of the project, a total of 230 acres will be developed, which will include 75



Out of the 4 shortlisted firms for the final round, Bayview Projects LLP, has been selected as the winner on the basis of highest gross revenue share to the authority: YEIDA. Express

acres (33%) of commercial and 155 acres (67%) of industrial area. The estimated project cost is Rs 1,510 crore and the construction

period has been set at three years. A total of 1.000 acres have been identified for the complete project, out of which 220 acres is

#### WHAT THE FILM **CITY WILL HAVE**

Filming facilities. including those for dubbing, editing, VFX, and hosting film festivals and premieres

Film institute

Amusement park/family recreation centre

■ Hotels and restaurants

■ Shopping mall

■ Serviced residences ■ Commercial offices

#### for commercial use while 780 acres is for industrial use. In a meeting held at the higher

level in Lucknow in August 2023, it was decided that the Film City will be developed in a phased manner instead of the entire 1,000-acre area being developed in one go. Besides, the concession period, i.e lease of the land, has been increased to 90 years. Earlier, it was 60 years with an option to renew it for another 30 years.

The project is set to have filming facilities, studios, a film institute, an amusement park/family recreation centre, hotels and restaurants, retail shops, a shopping mall, serviced residences and commercial offices besides other filming and supporting assets. The Film City will also have facilities for music production, dubbing editing, VFX and special effects, film festival and premiere arenas

On September 29, 2023, the authority had issued a global etender for the third time to de velop the Film City on Design Build, Finance, Operate and Transfer (DBFOT) basis.

The first global tender for the Film City was floated in November, 2021. But due to no response from the bidders, the authority issued a second tender in October, 2022.

The deadline for this was extended up to February 14, 2023 followed by February 28, 2023 and then again to March 31 2023, but no bid was received.

### **DELHI CONFIDENTIAL**



### ATTIRE, SATIRE

ACTOR-TURNED-POLITICIAN AND BJP's Gorakhpur MP Ravi Kishan found himself in a tricky situation on Sunday. Commenting on the actor at a public gathering in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath said that when Kishan was well-dressed on screen "he looked like a hero to the people, but what will happen if he acts in tattered clothes?" This triggered a roar of laughter from the audience. The actor too was seen laughing with Adityanath, who then went on to praise him for entertaining the audience with his speeches and for working hard for the development of Gorakhpur in coordination with the MLAs. The CM then quipped that he had advised the MP to act alone in movies and not take any MLA with him.

#### Quota Quandary

TWO DAYS after the University Grants Commission's draft guidelines on implementing reservation in higher education went viral on social media and caused an outcry, the document was taken down from UGC's official website. Although there's no official word on whether the draft has been with drawn, sources said it has been taken down since the deadline for public feedback ended Monday. The draft had led to an uproar over its chapter on dereserving reserved job positions in universities in exceptional cases. The government and the UGC later clarified that no quota posts in higher education would be opened to candidates from general category.

#### Chandigarh University Chancellor Satnam Sandhu nominated to RS

Mohali: President Droupadi Chandigarh University Chancellor Satnam Singh Sandhu for the Rajya Sabha

Sandhu, who started his career as a reporter with vernacular news daily, entered the education sector in the 2000s and opened an engineering college named Chandigarh Group of Colleges in Landran on the outskirts of Mohali in 2001 and founded Chandigarh University in 2012.

The son of a farmer, Sandhu struggled to attain education but became one of India's leading educationists, a Union Home Ministry notification said. He is actively involved in large-scale community efforts to improve health and wellness.

## 'Neighbours need each other': EAM amid strained ties with Maldives

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** MUMBAI, JANUARY 30

AMID THE recent tension between India and the Maldives, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday said "at the end of the day, neighbours need

Speaking at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Mumbai on 'India's role in the global stage' and on his recently published book - Why Bharat Matters - Jaishankar said, "Every country has problems in the neighbourhood... eventually they reach an understanding... It is in the nature of politics that we take strong stands, but diplomacy works differently."

To a question on the 'India Out' campaign in the Maldives, Jaishankar urged the audience to "trust" Indian diplomacy.

On the crisis in the Red Sea, the minister said that the Indian Navy has deployed 10 ships in that region. Sharing how INS



Foreign Minister S Jaishankar at IIM Mumbai, Tuesday. Express

Visakhapatnam extinguished a fire onboard a commercial oil tanker, the Union minister added that the Indian Navy rescued Pakistani and Iranian fishermen. "We will not be considered a responsible country when bad things are happening in the surrounding country and we say I have got nothing to do with this," he said.

Jaishankar spoke about how his new book connects various diplomacy lessons with the Ramayana and urged the youth to take an interest in foreign policy. "In today's globalised world, foreign policy matters to all of you,"

When a student asked how an MBA-degree holder can really matter when it comes to foreign policy, Jaishankar said, "A large part of how the international economy will work is on how you build connections, businesses, logistics and supply chain management — how they work in real life, which is the

He also spoke about how the perception of India in the world is based on their experiences. Sharing how Indians heading global tech giants, banks etc will make the world think about it, he said, "Branding of the country is really important in geopolitics and

Talking about the Israel-Gaza situation, the minister said, "What happened on October 7 was a terrorist attack (by Hamas against Israel). As a country which has experienced so much terrorism, it is important that we recognise and accept it." Adding that there are various aspects to this crisis and a viable solution should be found, Jaishankar also acknowledged the civilian casualties and said, "There has to be a sustainable humanitarian corridor."

Speaking about the common victim bonding among colonised countries in the global south, he said that India is looked at as one of these countries that shows strong development.

#### Two killed in heavy firing in **Imphal West**

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** IMPHAL, JANUARY 30

AT LEAST two persons from the Meitei community were killed and three injured on Tuesday in heavy firing in the Kadangband and Koutruk areas of Manipur's Imphal West district, close to the border with the Kuki-Zomi dominated Kangokpi district.

Sources said the gunfight started around 2.30 pm and lasted several hours.

The two deceased were identified as 25-year-old Meishnam Khaba from Bishnupur district, and 33-year-old Nongthombam Michael from Imphal East district. Of the three injured, one is reportedly BIP's former Manipur youth president Barish Sharma.

#### PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MALE. JANUARY 30

Muizzu should

apologise to India,

opposition party

PM Modi: Maldives

GASUIM IBRAHIM, leader of the opposition Jumhoori Party, has urged Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu to formally apologise to India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and seek "diplomatic reconciliation" to mend bilateral relations.

Ibrahim's demand referred to remarks by Muizzu – regarded as pro-China – earlier in the month referring to India as a bully without naming the country.

Amid a diplomatic row with India that erupted after derogatory social media posts by three of his ministers against Prime Minister Modi, President Muizzu on his return home after a fiveday high-profile state visit to China on January 13 said, "We may be small but this doesn't give them the licence to bully us."

Incidentally, the demand comes a day after the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) on Monday said it plans to submit a motion to impeach Muizzu.

Muizzu, 45, defeated Indiafriendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held last September.

Gasuim, while speaking with media after a meeting of the Jumhoori Party (JP), called on President Muizzu to formally apologise to India and Prime Minister Modi for the recent controversial remarks made during an interview, the Voice Of Maldives portal said.

Expressing concern over the comments, Gasuim urged President Muizzu to seek forgiveness from India for the indirect attacks made in the inter-

view, the digital platform said. Gasuim attributed those unwarranted remarks to former President Abdulla Yameen, who initiated the "India Out" cam-

#### **IMPEACHMENT RULES: GOVT MOVES COURT**

Male: Even as the main opposition announced its plan to impeach Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, the government has approached the Supreme Court over the reamendment to Parliament's standing orders which makes the process of impeachment easier, according to media reports.

The Attorney General's Office filed the case on Sunday, the same day when clashes broke out in the House between pro-government MPs and opposition lawmakers following differences over the approval of four members of cabinet.

The main opposition MDP, which holds a majority in Parliament, amended Parliament's standing orders so that vacated seats aren't counted when determining the total number of MPs.

Parliament currently requires 54 votes to impeach President Muizzu, instead of the previous 58, as, according to the amendment, the total number of MPs is now 80, instead of 87.

paign leading to tensions between Maldives and India, and pointed out that former President Ibrahim Solih, who was the president at that time, "de layed in opposing the campaign' After his return from China

Muizzu also suggested reducing dependence on India in various areas, including medical services and medicines. Gasuim said Muizzu proposed ending the import of general medicines from India and exploring alternatives from Europe, America, or countries of origin for the medicine.

### Capital, tech boost from US can help India achieve goal of developed nation: Rajnath

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

THE "CAPITAL and technological know-how" from the US can help India to achieve its goal of becoming a developed country by 2047 and investments here can give American companies high returns and an avenue of de-risking, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday.

He was addressing a conference on 'Strengthening Indo-US Relationship in Amrit Kaal -Atmanirbhar Bharat' organised by Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC) here

The minister said the government has laid the groundwork for a strong and self-reliant new India, and the American investments can play a vital role in realising



Rajnath Singh at IACC meet in New Delhi, Tuesday. PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Viksit Bharat'.

Calling it a win-win situation for both the countries, he noted that India's fast-growing economy, its demographic dividend, skilled workforce and huge domestic market guarantee high returns to American companies.

He said to deal with the challenges faced by the rules-based to de-risk by investing in India. The conference was attended by US Ambassador to India Eric

international order and maintain

strategic autonomy, it will be nec-

essary for American businesses

Garcetti and representatives of IACC, and was aimed at exploring ways to enhance bilateral trade, investments and collaboration in the context of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, which emphasises promoting domestic manu-Calling India and the US "natu-

ral partners", Singh said "we must move forward together in both business and strategic sectors amidst the current global geopolitical scenario". "India and the US support a free, open and rulesbased international order. Due to this, there is a lot of alignment in our strategic interests," he said.

## UCWL: Pioneering efforts for **ADVERTORIAL** building a sustainable tomorrow

DAIPUR Cement Works Ltd. (UCWL) is a part of JK Organisation, which embodies a perfect blend of a rich legacy of over 100 years and a modern work culture. JK Organisation is contributing to national growth with its presence in the sectors - tyre, paper, cement, automotive transmission system, agri-genetics, dairy products and education, etc. It has been in the cement business for over four decades and distinguishes itself based on its innovative practices and initiatives aimed at customer satisfaction.

The well-known brand continues to push the boundaries and tap the immense potential for development in the country's infrastructure and construction sectors while continuing to be a resilient performer despite the constantly evolving challenges of the cement sector.

The Company has integrated cement manufacturing unit with an installed cement production capacity of 2.2 million tons per annum(MTPA) and with the ongoing expansion plan, it will ramp up to 4.7 million tons per annum (MTPA). UCWL manufactures world-class cement under the brand name - Platinum Heavy Duty Cement, which is made using the latest superior PSD Technology & Platinum Supremo cement which is known as a roof specialist. It provides several benefits to consumers, including 10% more volume, high initial strength, superior workability and fast setting. Furthermore, UCWL has a strong network of about 650 cement dealers spread in the states of Rajasthan,

Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. UCWL upholds the highest levels of system standards such as ISO Certification for Environment (14001), Occupational Health and Safety (45001), Energy (50001) and Quality Management (9001) Systems. Going beyond the general industry practice, the Company has also inventoried its carbon and water footprint as per ISO 14064-1 and ISO 14046.

Led by the Integrated Sustainable Development Policy for its system structures, UCWL has ingrained "Sustainable Development" as one of the key ethos of its daily business activities. The Company's working principles have been aligned to contribute to the Nation's commitment to meet the United Nations – Sustainable Development Goals (UN-SDGs).

Some of the key sustainability initiatives of



Aggressively pushing for green energy, UCWL has attained 48% total renewable energy consumption of total electrical energy requirement in FY 22-23.

Mr. Shrivats Singhania Director and CEO, Udaipur Cement Works Limited

#### the Company have been highlighted below. Product decarbonization and

reducing carbon footprint The transportation of raw materials and finished goods and cement production, are the main sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions resulting from UCWL's activities. Hence, its primary focus is to produce goods with minimal carbon footprint. Differentiating the Company's offering with low-carbon products is a major pillar of its decarbonization roadmap. Its climate change opportunities assessment has highlighted products and services as the most significant opportunity. The Company's cement product portfolio includes low-clinker content products, prepared using materials like flyash, slag, limestone, chemical gypsum and pozzolana. These products reduce carbon footprint and minimize energy and raw material consumption in cement manufacturing. The Company has a product- mix of 73% blended cement against total cement pro-



To understand its emissions and develop effective mitigation strategies, the Company conducts comprehensive assessments based on the recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclo-

By addressing prioritized areas, the Company aims to proactively reduce its environmental impact and contribute to a sustainable and resilient future.

The installation of a 6-kilometer-long Over the Land Belt Conveyor (OLBC) helps offset the car-

bon footprint by

reducing the us-

age of natural fuel and replacing the local transportation (Dumper movement). The Company's plant has implemented on-site solar power facilities for captive use to reduce carbon impact. With trees being known for their effective GHG emissions reduction, the organisation has distributed free trees and plants along with tree guards in nearby residences, schools, and villages under its plantation drive. Udaipur Cement Works aligns its goals

and commitments with the pledges made

by the country at COP26 in 2021 and actively participates in the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and Voluntary Carbon Standards (VCS), now Verra program, registered under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). **Climate change** 

The Company embraces a resource

utilization philosophy focused on maximizing efficiency - getting more out of less. UCWL has minimized energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions through improved processes

and fuel usage. It

has a commit-

ment to achieving

**UDAIPUR CEMENT WORKS LIMITED** 

zero waste to landfill, zero effluent discharge, and reduced water usage, which aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals while encompassing the promotion of labour rights, human rights, and fighting corruption. To combat climate change, the Company is transitioning to alternative fuels and raw materials. It is also implementing solar and waste heat recovery systems (WHRS). UCWL has a 6 MW Waste Heat Recovery Power Plant and 15.5 MW Solar Power Plants (incl. Floating Solar). Through co-processing, the Company utilizes various industrial wastes as direct replacements for virgin raw materials, minimizing environmental risks. 27% of its sourced raw materials (Flyash, Gypsum, and Slag) are industrial waste materials and effectively replace the need for an equivalent amount of virgin natural resources in cement production.

#### **Circular economy**

The Company is committed to the principles of the circular economy by minimizing, reusing, recycling, and recovering materials and energy. It has taken initiatives to conserve natural resources, reduce CO2 emissions, and effectively manage waste. All hazardous waste generated from auxiliary processes, such as used oil and grease, are recycled by recyclers approved by the Central and State Pollution Control Boards. Furthermore, the Company has also obtained authorization to co-process the waste and byproducts of other industries to minimize potentially unscientific disposal. Solid organic waste is transformed into compost and vermicompost, which are high in nutrients and utilized in horticulture as manure. Domestic wastewater is treated in the Company's Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs), and the treated water is utilized for plantation and greenbelt creation.

#### **Water positivity**

Being a resource-responsible corporate, the Company has done considerable work in water conservation and stands almost 3.6 times water positive, wherein it has saved about 4.11 lakh tons of virgin natural resources by replacing them with other industrial wastederived raw materials in the process.

#### **Corporate Social Responsibility** and strengthening engagement with customers and supply chain

UCWL proactively invests in nurturing its social and relationship capital, which is deeply ingrained in the way it conducts its business by fostering trust and goodwill and

creating opportunities for all stakeholders. The Company's approach to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is based on designing and delivering stakeholder-specific need-based projects, tracking of impact through project-based key performance indicators (KPIs) and partnering with likeminded organizations for resource leveraging and knowledge sharing.



Alongside prioritizing product quality, customer satisfaction and innovation, **UCWL** emphasizes sustainable growth and a developmental framework for creating a better tomorrow.

Mr. Naveen Sharma Whole Time Director, Udaipur Cement Works Limited.

With a total of over 70,000 CSR beneficiaries, UCWL's CSR projects are creating opportunities, promoting sustainable development, and uplifting the quality of life for individuals and families through multiple projects in the thematic areas of Education, Health and Sanitation, Livelihoods and Skilling, Rural Infrastructure Development and Environmental Conservations.

#### Strong ethical and responsible governance

UCWL governance performance is grounded in an effective board composition, transparent ownership structure and a commitment to regulatory disclosures. The comprehensive code of conduct policy extends to suppliers, reinforcing ethical practices throughout the supply chain. Additionally, the Company has robust policies addressing biodiversity, sustainable sourcing, water management, climate impact management and a host of other issues related to ESG and Sustainability.

# GOVT & POLITICS



PK predicts less than 20 seats for JDU in Assembly polls next year

**SANTOSH SINGH** PATNA, JANUARY 30

REACTING TO the latest powershift in Bihar, poll strategist Prashant Kishor, who previously planned CM Nitish Kumar's election campaign, Tuesday predicted that Kumar's JD(U) won't be able to win more than 20 seats in the next Assembly election as people in the state were "full of anger".

He said Kumar's decision to side with the BJP was driven by fear that JD(U)'s tally of seats won't cross five if it remained in Mahagathbandhan with the Congress, Left parties and RID.

"Today, I am making another prediction — if his party is not reduced to less than 20 seats in 2025 polls in any alliance, I will quit politics," Kishor, colloquially known as PK, told reporters during his padyatra in Begusarai.

Kishor, who heads the Jan Suraj campaign, was Kumar's strategist

Mahagathbandhan won 178 seats in the 243-seat House. In 2018, he joined JD(U) and became its vicepresident only to be expelled shortly after he criticised the party's decision to back the Citizenship Amendment Act.

Commenting on the JD(U) chief's U-turn, Kishor said it had angered the people of Bihar who would "avenge it".

"If there is one leader against whom people are full of anger, it is Nitish Kumar... Nitish Kumar might well be thinking that he was very smart, but the truth remains that he was full of guile. He had been trying to befool the 13 crore people of Bihar who would avenge this in the next Assembly elections," he said

Asked to comment on remarks, JD(U) spokesperson Neeraj Kumar told The Indian Express: "We can understand his desperation after we came back to NDA. Let him first prove himself in politics."



# Rahul breaks silence, says Nitish went to BJP as he was against caste survey

PURNEA, JANUARY 30

ON THE second day of his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Bihar, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi broke his silence on JD(U) supremo Nitish Kumar, saying that his return to the BJP-led NDA was prompted by the fact that he did not want to carry out a caste survey. Claiming that as allies, they had forced the Chief Minister's hand, Rahul said "we don't need Nitish Kumar".

Two days after Nitish's U-

turn to the NDA on Sunday dealt a body blow to the Opposition's INDIA alliance, Rahul said at the Mahagathbandhan mega rally here in Bihar: "Hum aapko samjhaate hain Nitishji kahan fanse (I will explain to you how Nitishji got trapped). We told him that you have to do a caste survey, we can't let you off on that. He was forced to do the caste survey. Then he came under pressure from the other side because the BJP did not want a caste count. Nitishji beech mein fans gaye (Nitishji got caught in the middle). Then the BIP showed him a way and he went there. This (a caste census) is our responsibility, and we will im-

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** 

SIGNALLING THE widening rift

with INDIA bloc partners -

Congress and CPI(M) — West

Bengal CM on Tuesday urged

people to unite under her party,

the TMC, banner to defeat what

she called the Congress-CPI(M)-

tra in Chopra and Islampur, days

after Congress leader Rahul

Gandhi's yatra passed through

the same towns of West Bengal,

said: "It is the TMC that is fight-

ing for the rights of the people of

Banerjee, who held a padya-

BJP nexus in the state.

KOLKATA, JANUARY 30



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Purnea, Bihar. Partha Paul

The Congress leader added that it was clear now that, apply a little pressure, and "Nitish makes a U-turn". The caste survey confirmed the Yadavs as the largest single group in Bihar, and EBCs as the largest social constituency, in what was seen as a boost to both the RJD and JD(U)'s political planks. The Congress, RJD and Left

put up a show of strength at

As Mamata intensifies attack on

Congress, Adhir fires fresh salvo

Mamata Banerjee in South

the state. We must unite to de-

feat the Congress-CPI(M)-BJP

Banerjee's remarks against

Dinajpur on Tuesday. PTI

nexus in Bengal.'

Purnea, which was held as part of Rahul's Yatra.

While Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge was expected to attend, he could not make it in time and a recorded speech of his was played. Apart from Rahul, the Congress leaders present included former Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel, Kanhaiya Kumar, Imran Pratapgarhi, as well as state unit

day when West Bengal Congress

chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury

fired a fresh salvo at the TMC ac-

cusing it of "creating hurdles" in

the Yatra's way in Bengal and

vowing to continue raising cor-

West Bengal on Wednesday via

Malda. "If there is theft in West

Bengal, shall I say it is not hap-

pening?... Can't we call people

involved in corruption corrupt,"

Chowdhury, who has been ac-

cused by the TMC of straining

the ties between the two parties.

mediapersons

Rahul's Yatra is set to reenter

Bihar, was among the seniormost names. "Every day, our Constitution Jairam Ramesh, is being attacked. We have to stay together and fight against

#### Nitish-BJP govt to seek trust vote on Feb 10

leaders Akhilesh Singh, Tariq

Anwar, Shakeel Ahmed and

Dipankar Bhattacharya, whose

party has a good presence in

Among the Left leaders, CPI

general secretary

Ranjita Ranjan.

this," he said.

Patna: The new NDA government in Bihar led by CM Nitish Kumar will seek a trust vote in the assembly on February 10, according to a notification issued on Tuesday.

The government will seek the trust vote on the first day of the Budget session after the customary address by Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar to both Houses of the legislature. the notification said.

Kumar took oath as chief minister of Bihar for a record ninth time on Sunday after a dramatic volte-face, ditching the IN-DIA grouping, and forming the new government with BJP. PTI

#### As ED questions Tejashwi, top **RJD** leaders skip Cong rally

**SANTOSH SINGH** PATNA, JANUARY 30

FORMER BIHAR deputy Chief Minister and RJD leader

Tejashwi Yadav appeared before the Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday for questioning in connection with the central agency's money laundering probe into the alleged land-for-

Tejashwi arrived at the ED office in Patna on Tuesday morning, a day after his father, former CM Lalu Prasad, was questioned for over nine hours in connection with the same case.

The RJD said the case was part of the Centre's "sustained political vendetta" against Opposition parties, and also questioned the timing of the ED's move, as it came amid Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's yatra, which is currently in its Bihar leg.

Top RJD leaders decided to stay put in Patna in view of the ED's questioning of Lalu and Tejashwi, and skipped Rahul's rally in Purnia. At the rally, the RID was represented by its MP Ashfaq Karim.

RJD's Rajya Sabha MPs Misa Bharati and Manoj Kumar Jha, as well as its former ministers Sameer Kumar Mahaseth and Ramanand Yadav, were at the ED office amid Tejashwi's questioning. They were also joined there by several RJD workers. "The ED's questioning is nothing but an act of political vendetta. There has been a lack of transparency in the ED's questioning method, as we are not getting information on the duration of questioning. But one can see the overwhelming public reaction against it. The NDA government has started the political vendetta onslaught, and someone will end it," Jha told reporters.

### SP blindsides Cong, names 16 candidates for Lok Sabha polls

#### FIRST LIST, SECOND SURPRISE

**DIMPLE YADAV MAINPURI** 

Akhilesh Yadav's wife, she won the bypoll from here in 2022 after the death of party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav.

**AKSHAY YADAV** 

Son of the SP chief's uncle and RS MP Ram Gopal Yadav.

**DHARMENDRA YADAV** 

A cousin of Akhilesh's, he lost Azamgarh in 2022.

**ANU TANDON** 

UNNAO

Former Congress MP from Unnao.

**RAJA RAM PAL** AKBARPUR

A former BSP MP.

**LALJI VERMA** AMBEDKAR NAGAR

A top Kurmi leader who

left BSP for SP in 2022.

Gorakhpur (Bhojpuri actor Kaajal Nishad); Banda

(Shivshankar Singh Patel); Farukhabad (Naval Kishore Shakya); **Kheri** (Utkarsh Verma); Faizabad (Awadhesh Prasad), Basti (Ram Prasad Chaudhary); Etah (Devesh Shakya); Sambhal (Shafigur Rahman Barq); Lucknow (Ravidas Mehrotra): **Dhaurahra** (Anand Bhadauriya)

#### Cong leader says 'cheated', SP leader responds: 'No one was kept in dark'

**ASAD REHMAN** & LALMANI VERMA

LUCKNOW, NEW DELHI, JAN 30

THREE DAYS after the Samajwadi Party (SP) announced that it had allotted 11 seats in Uttar Pradesh to the Congress for the Lok Sabha elections, the Akhilesh Yadav-led party on Tuesday announced candidates for 16 Lok Sabha seats, taking the Congress by surprise. With this, the SP became the first major political party to announce candidates for the parliamentary elections.

Many state Congress leaders said this was the SP's "pressure tactic" to get their party to agree to its seat-sharing offer and that the announcement made without informing their leadership had blindsided it. While SP leaders insist that Akhilesh has already "finalised" seat-sharing, the Congress claims talks are still

Responding to the SP move, a senior Congress leader said, "At least four of these seats were supposed to go to us and the SP has blindsided us by announcing candidates without keeping

Corruption perceptions index:

India at 93 among 180 countries

us in the loop. The SP doesn't seem interested in defeating the BJP. Our central leadership will decide what will be done next. The Congress functionary

said Kheri, Ayodhya, Lucknow

and Farukhabad for which the SF announced candidates were supposed to go to his party. "You should ask the SP leadership why they have cheated us like this," said the leader. "I would not like to comment on the decision of the SP to announce seats. It is up to the cen-

tral leadership to comment on it," AICC general secretary Avinash Pande, the UP in-charge, told The Indian Express. Defending his party's deci-

sion, SP national spokesperson Rajendra Choudhary said that "no one has been kept in the He said, "The announcement

has been done because the party's candidates will need time to prepare for the elections." Former SP MLC and na tional spokesperson Udaiveer Singh told, "Seat-sharing talks with the Congress are still ongoing and if they can give us candidates who can win seats in the state, we will give it to them."

#### **ROW OVER CHANDIGARH MAYORAL ELECTION**

## Opp slams BJP win: 'Imagine what they can do for LS polls'

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

**OPPOSITION** parties on Tuesday attacked the BJP over the controversial Chandigarh mayoral election results and expressed apprehension that the party may go to any extent to win the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Alleging brazen misuse of electoral machinery at the behest of the BJP in the Chandigarh mayoral polls, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said it will further erode the confidence of people in free and fair elections. "As I said vesterday, 2024 is the last chance for us to save democracy. If we do not come together to save it from the BJP, our future generations shall repent. On Gandhi-ii's Martvrs' Dav. Godse worshipper BJP has murdered democracy and all ethos of the Constitution," Kharge said.

Senior Congress leader Rahul



'Godse worshipper **BJP** murdered democracy': Cong's Kharge

Gandhi said it was beyond imagination what the BJP, "which can kill democracy in front of the whole world in the mayor elections", will do to remain in power in Delhi (Lok Sabha elections). "Years ago, on this day, Godse assassinated Gandhi-ji and today Godseists sacrificed his ideals and constitutional values," Rahul said

CPI general secretary D Raia said "BJP's lust for power" was most evident in Chandigarh. He said rejecting eight votes of councillors belonging to the INDIA bloc shows their desperation. "People should see that if BJP can stoop this low for a mayorship, what extent can they go to in Parliament elections," Raja said.

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav said the manner in which the BJP "misused its power and rigged the elections to win by putting pressure on the officials despite not having majority in the Chandigarh mayor elections, the Election Commission and the Supreme Court should immediately take cognizance of the same, should cancel these results, conduct elections under their supervision, declare rational results and take punitive action against those guilty of this

> democratic crime". "The BJP is swallowing democracy. Such brutality of power will prove to be very dan-

gerous for the country," he said. Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi and TMC MP and national spokesperson Saket Gokhale also condemnded what they described as the manipulated of the Chandigarh mayor

### Foreign Secy calls on Bhutan King, PM; talks on boosting 'unique ties'

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

FOREIGN SECRETARY Vinay Mohan Kwatra on Tuesday called on Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and discussed ways to further deepen the "unique ties of friendship" between the two nations. Kwatra is on a three-day trip

since Monday, in the first highlevel visit from India after the formation of a new government under People's Democratic Party (PDP) leader Tshering Tobgay.

"An honour to receive the audience from His Majesty the King of Bhutan and benefit from his guidance on ways to further deepen the India-Bhutan unique

ties of friendship," he posted on X. On Monday, Kwatra called on PM Tobgay at his office. During the meeting, they discussed various areas of cooperation between Bhutan and India



Foreign Secy Vinay Mohan Kwatra with Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, X/@Indiainbhutan

Tobgay also hosted a dinner for the Foreign Secretary and his delegation at his residence.

Kwatra's visit comes against the backdrop of China and Bhutan looking at an expeditious resolution of their festering boundary row that could have implications for India's security interests.

### **EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE** NEW DELHI, JANUARY 30

INDIA ranked 93 out of 180 countries on the corruption perceptions index (CPI) for 2023, according to the latest report released Transparency

The index, which lists countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, ranked Denmark at the top, followed by Finland, New Zealand and

International.

The index uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean. In 2023, India's overall score was 39 while in 2022, it was 40. India's rank in 2022 was 85. In the Asian region, Singapore ranked at the top, scoring 83 and occupying the fifth slot.

"India (39) shows score fluctuations small enough that no firm conclusions can be drawn on any significant change. However, ahead of the elections.

'... [A]head of elections, India sees further narrowing of civic space, including through the passage of a (telecom) Bill that could be a 'grave threat' to fundamental rights..." REPORT BY TRANSPARENCY

INTERNATIONAL

India sees further narrowing of civic space, including through the passage of a (telecommunication) Bill that could be a 'grave threat' to fundamental rights," the report said.

While western Europe and the European Union remained the top-scoring regions, its regional average score dropped to 65 this year, as checks and balances weakened and political integrity eroded, the report

In South Asia, both Pakistan (rank 133) and Sri Lanka (rank 115) are grappling with their re-

spective debt burdens and ensu ing political instability, it said. "However the two countries

have strong judicial oversight which is helping to keep the gov ernment in check. The Supreme Court of Pakistan strengthened citizens' right to information by expanding this right under Article 19A of its Constitution to previously restricted institu-

Noting that China (rank 76) has made headlines with its aggressive anti-corruption crack down by punishing more than 3.7 million public officials for graft over the last decade, the report said the country's heavy reliance on punishment rather than institutional checks on power raises doubts over the long-term effectiveness of such anti-corruption measures.

The bottom of the index included Myanmar (162) Afghanistan (162) and North Korea (172). At rank 180 was Somalia with the lowest score

### Tamil star 'Thalapathy' Vijay set to launch party, eye on 2026 TN Assembly polls leader Edappadi Palaniswami to

ARUN JANARDHANAN CHENNAI, JANUARY 30

TAMIL FILM superstar Vijay is poised to take the plunge into politics, becoming the latest addition to Tamil Nadu's cinemapolitics landscape, sources indicated on Tuesday. The actor plans to register his yet-unnamed political party in New Delhi in the

first week of February. Sources close to the actor said the party's registration was imminent, setting the stage for Vijay's potential debut in the 2026 Assembly polls, rather than  $contesting \, the \, coming \, Lok \, Sabha$ 

elections. Sources said the actor's registered fan group Vijay Makkal Iyakkam, which engages in many social welfare activities, is being converted into a fullfledged political party. The reach of the party, according to people close to the actor, is expected to extend beyond Tamil Nadu given his strong and organised fan base in Kerala and Karnataka.

Insiders said the party's formation was in a phase of meticulous preparation at the moment. "More administrative work is happening now, collecting Aadhar cards, voter IDs, and affidavits from over 100 people declaring they are not associated

with any other political outfits, to be submitted to the Election Commission in Delhi sometime around next week," said a source close to the actor.

In the Tamil film industry, Vijay, popularly referred to by his Thalapathy (Commander), is often regarded as second only to Rajinikanth in terms of his mass appeal and has long been perceived as a shy figure, an image at odds with his on-screen action-hero persona. His imminent foray into politics is a significant departure from his characteristic reticence, signalling a new chapter in his career. Vijay will join a long list of



Superstar Vijay. Instagram/@actorVijay

actor-turned-politicians in Tamil Nadu that includes M G Ramachandran, known as MGR, Sivaji Ganesan, Javalalithaa, the late Captain Viiavakanth, and Kamal Haasan.



VIJAY, AS popular as film stars of the stature of MGR or Rajinikanth, commands a fandom much above Kamal Hassan's or even the late Captain Vijayakanth's. Many politicians, thus, are cautious of his foray into politics, although others anticipate it to boost alternative voices in the state.

The 49-year-old actor is notably younger than the average politician in the state. He will be among a group of young politicians such as DMK's Udhayanidhi Stalin (46) and state BJP president K Annamalai (38). In this group, film directorturned-aggressive Tamil nationalist Seeman, the 57-year-old leader of the Naam Tamilar Katchi, is the eldest.

Viiav's decision to enter politics has always been linked to his ambitious father and film director S A Chandrasekhar. A direct indication of his plans first surfaced last June, many months after he distanced himself from his

father, when he attended a student rally in Chennai. There, he urged school students to ask their parents not to accept cash for votes from politicians and to educate themselves about leaders such as BR Ambedkar, Perivar EV Ramasamy, and K Kamaraj, sparking broad discussion. Given that he is younger and

as popular as film stars of the stature of MGR or Rajinikanth, and commands a fandom much above Kamal Hassan or even the late Captain Vijayakanth, top politicians have been cautious in responding to rumours about his political entry when the reports surfaced. Figures from AIADMK Udhayanidhi to Annamalai have seemingly welcomed his move. Seeman even anticipated Vijay's entry as a boost to alternative voices in state politics. Rajinikanth's political entry was aborted by the star himself

three years ago. In comparison Vijay is on comparatively safer ground, buoyed by fans from diverse age groups, unlike the older demographic of Rajinikanth's fan base. Vijay's strong Tamil identity also distinguishes him as Rajinikanth's Marathi roots and links with BJP-RSS have been points of contention in TN, where Dravidian politics is dominant.

#### BRIEFLY —

### **NEW DELHI**

#### Army dismisses soldier for desertion

New Delhi: The Army has dismissed from service a soldier for initiating a disinformation campaign on social media platforms against the Army and also for unauthorised absence from the Army Signal Training Centre at Jabalpur, officials said Tuesday. Signalman Harendra Kumar Yadav was found guilty and sentenced to 89 days of rigorous imprisonment and dismissal from service, effective 3 January 2024. As per officials, Yadav's actions involved filming training activities and portraying them falsely as mistreatment. He was designated as a deserter in March 2023. "He filmed training activities secretly and misrepresented them as punishment and ill-treatment being meted out to soldiers. He also deserted himself and did not rejoin the service," an official said. ENS

#### Gujarat man detained for bomb hoax

Panaji: A 38-year-old passenger, travelling from Goa to Ahmedabad, was detained by Goa police for allegedly causing panic at the Manohar International Airport in Mopa after he claimed that he was carrying a bomb during the security check on Monday, police said. Officials said the claim was found to be a 'hoax'. Police said Vimal Prajapati (38) was to take the Spicejet flight when he told the staff at the checkin counter that he was carrying a bomb. "CISF officials and the Bomb **Detection Disposal Squad** (BDDS) cordoned off the area and carried out an anti-sabotage check but no suspicious item was found. The accused person was detained for questioning and an FIR was lodged,'

#### **KARNATAKA**

#### Assistant loco pilot arrested for stealing

said a police officer. **ENS** 

Bengaluru: Railway Police sistant loco pilot for allegedly stealing valuables of passengers at night. The accused has been identified as Pudi Swaraj, a resident of Sakleshpur in Hassan district. Police have recovered goods worth Rs 3.3 lakh that includes laptops, gold ornaments, mobile phones and others. A police officer said on January 25, Swaraj was caught red-handed with some stolen items at Sakleshpur railway station. Swaraj confessed to the crime and when police searched his house, they found more stolen items.

#### **MAHARASHTRA** CBI files closure report in case against ex-cop

Mumbai: More than two years after an extortion case was registered against former Mumbai police commissioner Parambir Singh and four others, the CBI on Tuesday submitted a closure report in the court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate in Thane. The agency informed the court that facts and circumstances do not substantiate the allegations by the complainant. According to police, the case was registered on July 23, 2021, on the complaint of real estate businessman Sharad Agarwal. He alleged that Singh, along with others namely Sanjay Punamiya, Sunil Jain, Manoj Ghotkar and DCP Parag Manere, extorted money and possessions by threatening to lodge a false case under MCOCA against

his uncle Shyam Sundar

Agarwal.

#### **GYANVAPI CASE**

### Mosque panel on ASI report: Will submit objections after getting historians' views

LUCKNOW, JANUARY 30

REACTING SHARPLY to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) report on the Gyanvapi mosque complex, the Anjuman Intezamia Masajid committee, which runs the mosque in Varanasi, has said they are studying the report and would submit objections to it in court after get ting opinions from historians.

S M Yasin, joint secretary, Anjuman Intezamia Masajid Committee, said on Tuesday, "We have sent copies of the ASI report to five historians, including some non-Muslim ones. We will wait for their opinion and we have started having conversations with Buddhists here in Varanasi. They also claim that a lot of signs and objects found at the mosque belong to their faith. We have also sent copies (of the report) to our lawyers and after we have received opinion from the historians, we will sit with them and draft our objections to the report."

The ASI, tasked by the Varanasi district court to ascertain whether



The ASI report was made public on Thursday. File

the mosque was "constructed over a pre-existing structure of a Hindu temple", has concluded that a temple "appears to have been destroyed in the 17th century, during the reign of Aurangzeb and part of it... modified and reused in the existing structure". The ASI report — which has four volumes — was made public on Thursday after copies of it were handed over to the Hindu and Muslim litigants by the court.

Asked about the ASI report concluding that the mosque was built over a pre-existing temple, Yasin said, "They are saying this. We say it is wrong and the remains found there are actually of

#### HC to hear plea challenging suit maintainability on February 22

Prayagraj: The Allahabad High Court on Tuesday fixed February 22 for hearing a plea regarding maintainability of a suit seeking removal of Shahi Idgah mosque in Mathura, which it claims has been built

on 13.37 acre land of Katra Keshav Deo temple. While passing the order, Justice Mayank Kumar Jain said objections to the plea challenging maintainability of the suit have to be filed before Feb 22. PTI

the mosque. Can they do a scientific evaluation from photographs? They didn't collect any samples and get them tested at a laboratory. How can they reach a conclusion based on photographs?"

"We have got historical books which state that the mosque was built in the 15th century before Humayun's reign. The document/book is in Persian, which states that Sheikh Suleimani Mohaddis had got this (Gyanvapi) mosque built on an empty plot of land. It seems that there may have been some Buddhist structure there. The whole of Varanasi was a major centre for Buddhists till the Shankaracharya arrived in Varanasi. Sheikh Suleimani Mohaddis, who hailed from Jaunpur and was a wealthy man, had built two mosques – one in Varanasi and one in Jaunpur which is still there," added Yasin.

He claimed that it was Emperor Akbar, who expanded the mosque under the philosophy of Din-e-ilahai, and then, in the third phase, it was Aurangzeb who expanded the mosque. "We also have an issue with the ASI report quoting from the book Maasir-i-Alamgiri. They (ASI) have used a translation of the book, but where is the original. We want the original book to be quoted and not a translation." he said.

#### Centre: 718 snow leopards in India; two-thirds of them in Ladakh

New Delhi: India has an estimated

support of all snow leopard range states and two conservation partners — the Nature Conservation India – between 2019 and 2023.

Bhupender Yadav released the report during the National Board for Wildlife meeting Tuesday. PTI

# 15 PFI workers get death for 2021 Kerala **BJP leader's murder**

**SHAJU PHILIP** 

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM JANUARY 30

AN ADDITIONAL district sessions court in Kerala's Alappuzha on Tuesday sentenced 15 people to death in connection with the murder of a BJP leader in 2021.

Ranjith Sreenivasan (45), who was the state secretary of the BJP's OBC morcha, was hacked to death in front of his wife, mother and child in Alappuzha town on December 19, 2021.

All those convicted in the case were members of the nowbanned Popular Front of India (PFI) or its political wing, Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI). Sreenivasan was murdered hours after SDPI state secretary KSShan was killed in Alappuzha, by a gang of people allegedly from the RSS, on the night of December 18.

"Our loss is irreparable. However, the court verdict gives relief. This cannot be seen as a murder. It is a rarest of rare case. They encroached into our house and brutally hacked my husband in front of us. His face was disfigured." Sreenivasan's wife Lisha said after the sentence was announced. **Additional District Session** 

Court-I Judge Sreedevi V G delivered the sentence, a week after finding the 15 people guilty. They are Naisam (42), Ajmal (28), Anoop (36), Muhammed Aslam (32), Abdul Kalam alias Salam



Police escort the convicts after they were awarded death sentence by a Sessions Court in Alappuzha on Tuesday. PTI

(35), Abdul Kalam (43), Safarudheen (25), Manshad (33), Jaseeb Raja alias Akku (34), Navas (49), Shameer (37), Naseer (50), Sakeer Hussain (36), Poovathingal Shaji (47), and Shernas Ashraf (38).

They had been charged with offences under IPC sections 120B (criminal conspiracy to commit an offence punishable with death), 143 (unlawful assembly), 147 (rioting), 148 (rioting while armed with a deadly weapon), and 302 (murder) read with section 149 (offence committed by any member of an unlawful assembly in prosecution of the common object of that assembly).

The prosecution had told the court that the PFI-SDPI workers prepared a hit list and Sreenivasan, who was also a lawyer in Alappuzha, was at the top of that

list. The hit list was found in a mobile phone seized from Anoop, the third accused in the case.

Most of those found guilty were from Alappuzha's Mannamchery panchayat which is where Shan, the SDPI leader killed hours before Sreenivasan, hailed from. As many as 11 RSS men were charged in the Shan murder case, and the trial is yet to begin.

Reacting to the death senhanded out in Sreenivasan's murder case, BIF leader and Union Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan said in a social media post, "Grateful to the judiciary for delivering justice to the family of Ranjith Sreenivasan, who was brutally killed by PFI terrorists."

### Kashmir sarpanches call for panchayat polls at the earliest

**NAVEEDIQBAL** 

SRINAGAR, JANUARY 30

WITH THE tenure of panchayats in Jammu and Kashmir coming to an end earlier this month, and no announcement on fresh elections, sarpanches of several villages have raised concerns on the "vacuum" that could be created by a lack of local elected leadership that residents find approachable.

Calling for panchayat polls at the earliest, sarpanches of several villages told The Indian Express that a system had evolved in which panchayats were performing efficiently to deal with local issues. "I was able to get a lot of work

done with the funds we were getting. We prioritised flood control in our area that had been pending for a long time. We also put new transformers in place," said Qayoom Mir, who was sarpanch of Pohu in South Kashmir.

Even now, after the five-year tenure of 4,892 elected panchayats ended on January 9, people come to his residence with their issues, he said, pointing out that panchayats were able to provide the most focused attention to grassroots concerns. "If there were no panchayats over the last five years, people would have been protesting against lack of representation," the 50-year-old said.

Sarpanches had access to

funds of Rs 23.30 lakh annually, apart from funds for centrally sponsored schemes and capital expenditure for different works. They worked with different departments to prioritise villagelevel work and rural infrastructure.

With District Development Councils (DDCs) being the sole tier of elected governance now left in J&K, the vacuum of grassroots democracy has come into greater focus. In November last year, the term of urban local bodies, including two municipal corporations, 19 municipal councils and 57 municipal committees had ended.

According to sources, elections to urban local bodies and panchayats are unlikely before the LS polls. Further, elections to the J&K Assembly need not be held along with the LS polls, sources said, citing the deadline of September 2024 given by the SC while delivering its judgement on the constitutional validity of the I&K Reorganisation Act, 2019.

On January 10, the J&K administration appointed BDOs as administrators to run the affairs of panchayat halqas (area comprising a village or villages) under their jurisdiction for six months. Officials of the Rural Development Department will overtake work under centrally sponsored schemes until fresh elections are announced.

**FULL REPORT ON** www.indianexpress.com

#### 718 snow leopards with Ladakh reporting the maximum number (477) of these cats, the Union Foundation, Mysuru, and WWF-**Environment Ministry said on** Tuesday. The Wildlife Institute of Environment Minister

(वक्ता: असद रहमानी)

पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन विभाग, उत्तर प्रदेश

India carried out the first-ever 'Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India' with the



(वक्ता : टोबी सिंक्लेयर)

दिनांक : 31 जनवरी, 2024 | समय : पूर्वाह्न 11:30 बजे | स्थान : सूरजपुर वेटलैंड, ग्रेटर नोएडा, गौतमबुद्ध नगर

प्रमुख आकर्षण

• बर्ड वाचिंग, बर्ड काउंट, रंगोली प्रतियोगिता<mark>, वाद-विवाद प्रतियोगिता, पेंटिंग मेकिंग</mark>, फोटोग्राफी प्रतियोगिता तथा प्रदर्शनी

उत्कृष्ट प्रदर्शन करने वाले प्रतिभागियों के लिए पुरस्कार

(वक्ता : रूपक डे)

🔣 सूचना एवं जनसम्पर्क विभाग, उत्तर प्रदेश

### Top court acquits man accused under SC/ST Act for molesting maid

New Delhi: The Supreme Court has acquitted a man of charges of outraging the modesty of a woman under section 3(1)(xi) of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, pointing out that the alleged offence was not committed for reasons of caste.

A three-judge bench presided by Justice BR Gavai said "the language of Section 3(1)(x) of the SC/ST Act...provides that the offence must be committed upon a person belonging to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes with the intention that it was being done on the ground of caste".

Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Sandeep Mehta set aside trial court order convicting the accused as well as the Chhattisgarh High Court order upholding his conviction under SC/ST Act.

The trial court convicted him in September 2022 for offences punishable under Sections 451 (House-trespass in order to commit offence punishable with imprisonment), 354 (Assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) of the IPC and Section 3(1)(xi) of the SC/ST Act. On appeal, the HC upheld the conviction under the SC&ST Act and acquitted him of offences under the IPC.

The bench also comprising

भारत हेवी इलेक्ट्रिकल्स लिमिटेड Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited

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