



CBI exhumes remains of rape-murder victim to probe 12-year-old crime
page 8



25% FASTag lanes to accept all forms of payment for a month
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Omar Bashir, former Sudan President, gets two years for graft
page 12



Kohli's India has the edge in ODI series against West Indies
page 17

NEARBY



NIA yet to file chargesheet in Pulwama attack case

NEW DELHI
The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has not filed a chargesheet in the Pulwama terror incident, nine months after the attack took place, as none of the key suspects are alive. The two main suspects, Mudasir Ahmed Khan and Sajjad Bhat, were killed in an encounter with security forces in March and June, respectively.

NEWS ▶ PAGE 10

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Protests turn violent in West Bengal, Assam situation eases

Trains, buses torched over new citizenship law; Mamata appeals for calm

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA/GUWAHATI

The protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act took a violent turn in West Bengal on Saturday, while in parts of Nagaland schools and colleges were closed, markets were shut and vehicles remained largely off the road during a six-hour shutdown called by the Naga Students' Federation (NSF).

However, the situation eased in Assam.

As protesters torched railway stations and buses, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee appealed to people to shun violence.

Empty train coaches were set on fire at the Krishnapur and Lalgola stations in Murshidabad.



Raging fury: Vehicles set afire at Santragachi in Howrah district of West Bengal on Saturday. ■ PTI

In certain areas like Suti, protesters tried to uproot the rail track. According to reports, trains were set on fire at five locations in these two stations.

Assam, however, showed

signs of limping back to normalcy as the fight against the Act shifted to the Supreme Court.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10
'TARGETED AT MUSLIMS' ▶ PAGE 11

Meghalaya CM for entry permit

VIJAYITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma on Saturday said an ordinance passed by his government for mandatory registration of outsiders entering the State is awaiting the Governor's approval. He raised it at a meeting with Home Minister Amit Shah here on Friday.

Mr. Sangma said 63 people and eight policemen had been injured in protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

Modi has to apologise for destroying economy: Rahul

Congress rally targets government on a range of issues

SANDEEP PHUKAN
NEW DELHI

Amid a massive show of strength at the Congress's Bharat Bachao (Save India) Rally here on Saturday, all the members of the Gandhi family attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. Former party chief Rahul Gandhi said he was "not Rahul Savarkar to apologise for speaking the truth" and party president Sonia Gandhi asserted that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act would "shred the soul of India".

Ms. Sonia Gandhi also vowed to protect "democracy and the Constitution until the last breath".

Mr. Gandhi refused to apologise for his "Rape in India" comment and instead asked Mr. Modi to apologise



FULL HOUSE: Congress supporters at the rally on the Ramlila Grounds in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

for "single handedly destroying the economy, something that even India's enemies had not managed".

Party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra used the BJP's election slogan

"Modi makes it possible" to attack the government over onion prices, employment, and farmer suicides.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10
PRIYANKA'S PLEA ▶ PAGE 10

Against the Act



Many streams: Thousands joined a protest organised by various groups against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ R.V. MOORTHY (REPORTS ON PAGE 3)

Farooq's detention extended

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Jammu & Kashmir's Home Department on Saturday extended the detention of National Conference (NC) president and member of parliament Farooq Abdullah, 82, by another three months under the Public Safety Act (PSA).

The move "belies and betrays Union Home Minister Amit Shah's so-called return of normalcy narrative," the party said.

An official said a review meeting of the advisory board of the Home Department, also attended by Home Secretary Shaleen Kabra, took the decision.

NC MAY MOVE COURT ▶ PAGE 11

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BANDA (U.P.)

In a chilling reminder of the recent Unnao case, an 18-year-old girl was allegedly raped and set ablaze at a village in neighbouring Fatehpur district here on Saturday.

She is battling for life at a Kanpur hospital with 90%

local community health centre, from where she was referred to the Kanpur hospital.

On the complaint of the victim's father, an FIR has been registered against the accused and efforts are on to arrest him, the circle officer said.

The police officer said in

initial investigation, it has come out that the girl was "romantically involved" with the man and a panchayat was held between their families over the matter on Friday.

An understanding on marriage was also reached, he said, adding that further probe was on.

Think Judiciary ??

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Civil Law (15 Ques.) (Marks..../15) Sec. 17, 182 Indian Contract Act CPC Rule, 8A Order I CPC Rule 89 CPC Order XXI Sec. 14, 35, 122 TPA Specific Relief Sec. 6 Article 16 (4), 20 (2), 32 Constitution HMA Sec. 19,14 Limitation Sec. 8, 18	Criminal Law (15 Ques.) (Marks..../15) CrPC Sec. 46, 92, 144, 190, 436 IPC Sec. 34, 52, 307, 382 IEA Sec. 20, 33, 47, 144 JJ Act. Sec. 15, 101
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- Rank 4 Ms. Vintee

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- Rank 15 Mr. Ajay Tiwari
- Rank 23 Mr. Alok Tiwari
- Rank 37 Mr. Krishan Singh Rathore

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- Rank 32 NIDHISH KUMAR MEENA

1 Selection DJS 2019

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'Data Protection Bill not in line with draft'

SONAM SAIGAL

MUMBAI
Retired Supreme Court judge, B.N. Srikrishna, who led the panel that produced the draft of the Personal Data Protection Bill, said it is a unique legislation and is in contrast to the recommendation that no data be processed without the consent of the person.

The Bill gives autonomy to the government.

"If this is passed in its current form, it should be challenged in the Supreme Court," he told *The Hindu*.

SAFEGUARDS LEFT OUT ▶ PAGE 11

Kejriwal gets Kishor's I-PAC on board

Political advocacy group to work for free, says AAP

JATIN ANAND
NIKHIL M. BABU

NEW DELHI
Political strategist Prashant Kishor's Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC), Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party convenor Arvind Kejriwal announced on Saturday, has been brought "on board" with elections to the State Assembly round the corner.

Party insiders privy to the development said senior AAP leaders – including its national spokespersons Raghav Chadha and Dilip Pandey – had been in touch with the Janata Dal (United) politician's political advocacy group "on and off" after the 2017 Punjab Assembly elections.

Sources said at least three meetings between Mr. Kishor, credited with having conceptualised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Chai pe Charcha' public outreach programme during the 2014 general election, and Mr. Kejriwal had taken place since the Punjab elections, two of them between August and early December this year.

'Structural vacuum'
AAP sources said the step was in reaction to a "structural vacuum" the party had felt after its performance in the Lok Sabha polls in which it failed to win any parliamentary seat in the Capital.

Currently engaged with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's cam-

paign for the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections, Mr. Kishor was also associated with the Assembly election campaigns of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in 2015, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh in 2017, the Congress in Uttar Pradesh the same year and most recently with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's campaign earlier this year.

"There is no question of hiring any company. They are working for free, there is no commercial arrangement," Mr. Chadha told *The Hindu*. The AAP spokesperson, however, refused to disclose if I-PAC will be associated with AAP only for the Assembly polls or beyond.

rakes by 2021-22.
"This is a huge success for the ICF that manufactured Train18, India's first semi-high speed train, in a record 18-month time in 2018. The indigenously built self-propelled train, launched as Vande Bharat Express between New Delhi and Varanasi by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in February, has been acknowledged as one of the most successful products of the Make in India campaign.

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10

ICF gets nod to make rakes of Vande Bharat Express

Target is to roll out 720 coaches by 2021-22, revised design approved by RDSO

S. VIJAY KUMAR

CHENNAI
Ending months of controversy over the move to import complete train sets by floating global tenders and the stiff resistance that followed from senior railway officials and political parties, the Ministry of Railways has accorded sanction to the Integral Coach Factory (ICF) here to roll out 45 rakes (720 coaches) of the Vande Bharat Express. In a communication to the General Manager on Saturday,

the Railway Board cleared the decks for the ICF to proceed with the procurement process immediately with the specifications issued by the Research Design and Standards Organisation.

SPECIAL

Fresh tenders will be floated to procure the propulsion system with revised guidelines on the design and eligibility criteria of suppliers. The ICF was told to ensure that there was no compromi-

ce on the Make in India policy. Confirming this to *The Hindu*, a senior railway official said the decision to approve manufacture of the rakes by the ICF was taken at a high-level meeting in New Delhi. The opinion of the General Managers of the Rail Coach Factory, Kapurthala, and the Modern Coach Factory, Raebareli, was also sought on their capability to make the train sets so that they could be included in the programme to roll out the 45

Timings

DELHI

SUNDAY, DEC. 15
RISE 07:06 SET 17:27
RISE 20:36 SET 09:49
MONDAY, DEC. 16
RISE 07:07 SET 17:27
RISE 21:41 SET 10:39
TUESDAY, DEC. 17
RISE 07:07 SET 17:27
RISE 22:45 SET 11:25

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	19	10
Safdarjung	19	10
Palam	19	10

Delhi Palam Today

20°C Shallow fog with cool morning is likely. The day will be pleasant with partly cloudy sky. Pollution level likely to improve.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

20°C A cold morning with shallow fog is likely. Pollution level will improve further.

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THE HINDU

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Air quality of Delhi-NCR
Delhi 163 Gurugram 108
Ghaziabad 179 Faridabad -
Noida 171 Greater Noida 123
Good Satisfactory Moderate Poor Very poor Severe
0-50 51-100 101-200
201-300 301-400 >401

AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) SOURCE: CPCB

DELHI TODAY

Dance: Bharatnatyam arangetram of Neaveena and Neelam, a disciple of Guru Bhavani at Triveni Auditorium, Triveni Kala Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, 10:30 a.m.

Music: IHC Morning Ragas will feature a Hindustani classical vocal concert by Jayateerth Mevundi of the Kirana at Amphitheatre, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 10:30 a.m.

Exhibition: "Family is Plural", an art show by artist Probit Gupta, curated by Shaheen Merali at Bikander House, Pandara Road, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: 92nd All India Annual Art Exhibition by AIFACS at All India Fine Arts & Crafts Society, 1, Rafi Marg, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

(Mail your listings for this column at cityeditor@thehindu.co.in)

If we don't migrate, we will starve to death here'

Sixteen of the workers who perished in the Anaj Mandi fire hailed from the villages of Haripur and Nariyar in north Bihar. **Amarnath Tewary** visits families of the deceased to find out what forces them to leave their homes in droves

On Saturday, December 7, when Parvin Khatun (26) spoke to her husband Mohammed Sadre Alam (28) over the phone, he was uncharacteristically happier than usual. He told her he would be visiting the family around month-end. Ms. Khatun, a mother of two sons, is eight months pregnant and both were excited about welcoming a third child into the family. "He said 'let me work for some more days to earn some more money and I'll be with you at the time of delivery', but..." she says before her voice tapers off and she starts wailing inconsolably. Nervous and puzzled, her children – Mohammed Hunja Ali (3) and one-year-old Mohd. Humdan – too start crying, as if on cue.

Sitting on a bare wooden cot with a pillow against a faded green wall under a thatch-and-tile-roofed mud house verandah, Ms. Khatun appears frail and pale. Because of her advanced pregnancy, she is unable to sit comfortably and often looks vacantly mid-sentence.

Sadre's mother lies in the courtyard on a broken cot, a tattered blanket covering her from head to toe. "She is suffering from brain tumour and has not taken anything for the last three days ever since she came to know of his demise," says the deceased's father, Mohd. Mansoor. "Sadre had spent ₹2 lakh on his mother's cancer treatment in Patna and was in heavy debt... now, it seems she too will not survive," he rues. Sadre's two elder brothers work as masons in Karnataka and Rajasthan; two of his three sisters are married. "He had promised to bear expenses of my last daughter's wedding but Allah willed something else," says the father of seven.

Mohd. Sadre Alam's story of ex-

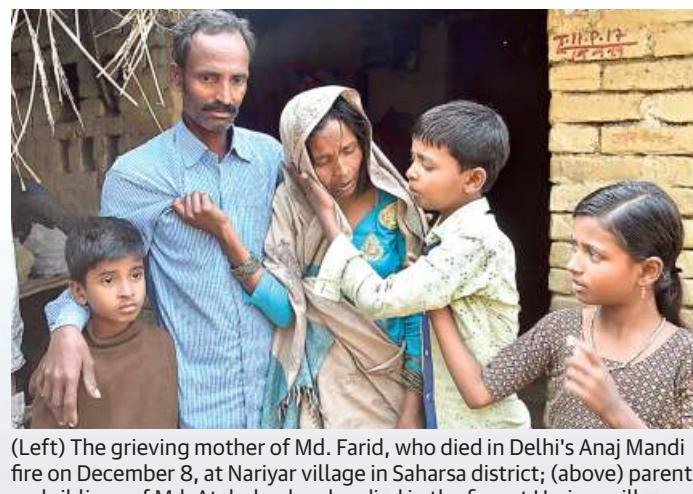


treme poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, forced migration for a living, meagre income and eventually death is the same as that of eight other young men of this village. Nine bodies of those who perished in the Anaj Mandi fire arrived on Wednesday in Haripur village under Singhia block of Samastipur district, while three others who were injured are still being treated at different hospitals in Delhi. "Not less than 50 men from this village are in the tailoring business in Delhi's Anaj Mandi area," says Mohd. Ashiq Elahi, whose two sons, Mohd. Iman and Mohd. Babur, are fortunate to have survived. "Allah ka lakkha shukr hai dono sahi salamat hain (I thank the Almighty that they are both fine)," he says, raising both hands to the sky. Mr. Elahi, along with a group of villagers, is sitting on plastic chairs near the village mosque waiting and tracking the movement of bodies of the dead on their way to the village from Delhi in ambulances. The village has 700 households. "There are 300 Muslim households... the rest are Hindus," he says. The village has one primary school and one madrasa, one Primary Health Centre and the

nearest police station is 10 km away at Singha.

Mohd Ulfat, 46, of the same village, has lost two of his children, Mohd. Sajid (22) and Mohd. Wajid (18). His third son, Mohd. Wajid, jumped from the third floor of the gutted building to escape and has broken his legs. "He is in hospital in Delhi," says Mr. Ulfat, a father of five. "Sajid and Wajid were the breadwinners for the family. They were working there for the past four years... everything is lost now," he says. Like others from the village working there in the bag stitching factory, they were earning ₹5,000-₹6,000 a month, he adds.

Similar is the pain of Mohd Farooq, 45, who lost his eldest son Mohd. Naushad, 23, in the inferno. The youngest of his nine children is four years old. In the courtyard, Naushad's sister Nazni Khatun is in shock and lying with a saline drip inserted in her hand. A group of village women have surrounded her. "I spoke to him on December 7 at 8.30 p.m. and he was all happy, but hours later I came to know about the tragedy from a relative... I tried Naushad's phone a hundred times but there was no response to my calls," says



(Left) The grieving mother of Md. Farid, who died in Delhi's Anaj Mandi fire on December 8, at Nariyar village in Saharsa district; (above) parents and siblings of Md. Atabul, who also died in the fire, at Haripur village in Samastipur district. ■ RANJEET KUMAR

the heartbroken father, who was a vegetable loader on trucks in Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh. "I suffer from a number of diseases... now who will look after such a big family?" he says.

Like them, Mohd. Hassan has lost his third son Mohd. Ataul (18); Mohd. Moti has lost his son Mohd. Samiullah alias Chotu (20); Mohd. Mosim's son Mohd. Sajid (21), Mohd. Mehrab's younger brother Mohd. Guddu (20) and Mohd. Razzak's son Mohd. Akbar (19) too have lost their lives in the Delhi fire. The entire village sports a grim look. Stark poverty stares every bylane and home of Haripur village in the face.

A village in mourning

Almost 70 km away from Haripur village is village Nariyar in neighbouring Saharsa district. Seven people from this village have died while three were injured. Four days after the tragedy, villagers were busy digging mass graves on the outskirts of the village with the bodies expected to arrive by late evening.

"This graveyard is encroached with no boundary wall. Please ask Chief Minister Nitish Kumar to fortify the graveyard and ensure it is encroachment-free... we'll bury our boys on our own," says Mohd. Shakim, taking a break with Mohd. Shagir and Mohd. Mohsin before they would start digging

again.

In the village, Bibi Kamrun Nisha, mother of Mohd. Farid Alam (22), is wailing outside her thatched one-room hut. Her mother and a daughter try to console her as her husband Mohd.

Alim alias Bhola has gone to Delhi to bring back the body of their son, the only earning member of the family. Her family appears to be among the poorest of the poor in the village – the hut has no cot, no vessel, no almirah and no foodstuff to eat. The mud oven seemed dried up for long.

"She has not eaten anything for the last four days... she faints often," says Farid's grandmother. The deceased's 12-year-old younger brother Mohd. Nazir looks distraught and lost.

Similarly, two cousins from a family – Mohd. Sanjaar Alam (19) and Mohd. Rashid Alam (19) – too have lost their lives in the Delhi fire and their wailing mothers in adjacent houses are lying on the ground on a faded blue plastic sheet with tarpaulin overhead, surrounded by village women trying to console them.

"Our whole world came crashing in a moment. I do not know how we'll survive now," says Sanjaar's elder brother Azhar Alam. Mohd. Faisal (24), Mohd. Gyas (18) and Mohd. Sajmuddin (54) too have died in the blaze and their family members were waiting for

the bodies to arrive on the fourth day after the tragedy.

Flood-hit region

Every day hundreds of people from these flood-prone areas of north Bihar districts Saharsa, Samastipur, Sitamarhi, Purnea, Madhepura, Katihar, Madhubani and Darbhanga migrate in hordes every day to eke out a living for them and their family. They are forced to leave their children, old parents and wives at home waiting for their monthly remittance to come," says Shreekanth, director of the Patna-based Jagiyan Ram Institute of Parliamentary Studies and Political Research.

According to an estimate, around 45 lakh youths migrate from Bihar every year to make a living. The exodus is exemplified by scenes at platform no. 2 of the Saharsa railway station any given morning. The Jan Sewa Express, train no. 15209, leaves from here at 8.45 a.m. every day for Amritsar in Punjab. It is locally known as the "Palayan Express" or migration train. Every day, passengers are crammed cheek by jowl in all 22 general compartments of this express train with a fare of ₹335 from Saharsa to Amritsar.

"Most of the passengers reach the platform a day before to board the train and get a seat in the compartment," says Mohd. Shakim from Nariyar village. Many relatives of those killed in the Delhi fire too caught this train on December 8 to reach Delhi to bring back bodies of their kith and kin, he says.

"It doesn't matter if death awaits us in the cities... if we don't migrate, we will starve to death here. We have no option but to catch this train to eke out a living for ourselves and our families," says Mohd. Shagir from Nariyar village, before he goes back to digging the graves again.

A towering problem

Millennium City has hundreds of high-rises that measure well over 100 metres, but the city's fire dept. has just one 42-metre hydraulic lift to tackle a tragedy

ASHOK KUMAR

GURUGRAM

Measuring 175 metres, Ireo Victor Valley, a residential project in Sector 67, is the tallest building in Millennium City that has been granted a No Objection Certificate (NOC) by the Gurugram Fire Department. But it may soon lose its record to Raheja Revanta, an upcoming 61-floor residential project in Sector 78, or M3M's Trump Towers, a residential project in Sector 65 off Golf Course Extension.

Besides these projects, there are a hundreds of buildings across the city measuring over 100 metres.

The Gurugram Fire Department seems ill-equipped to deal with any major tragedy as it has just a single hydraulic lift, measuring just 42 metres; 30-odd fire tenders and a staff strength of 200, including some outsourced.

It has just 46 regular staff members, including 15 leading firemen, eight firemen and 12 drivers. It also has 159 outsourced staff members, including 92 firemen, 54 drivers and one fire consultant. The district has six fire stations and 38 fire vehicles, including 14 water bowlers, one water tender, four foam tenders, five small tenders and three rescue tenders. It also has seven water mist motorcycles to deal with small fires and reach congested areas. It also has 80 fire proximity suits.

Assistant Divisional Fire Officer, I.S. Kashyap, with several decades of service under his belt, maintained that the department was prepared well enough that it would not throw up its hands

when faced with a major incident, "kam se kam kisi bhi paristhitii main hum poori tarah haath nahi uthayenge".

The officer recalled a four-month-old incident when a fire broke out in a flat on the 17th floor of a building in Sector 31 and they had to seek help from DLF's fire station, which has a 90-metre-long hydraulic lift, to evacuate people. The building's fire system was fortunately operational and no deaths were reported, he added.

Besides DLF, Maruti Suzuki India Limited, Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India Limited, two Air Force stations and Haldhiram, a popular snacks and sweets brand, also own a couple of fire tenders and staff each, and work in cooperation with the Gurugram Fire Department in case of any major incidents.

Rule violations

Though the fire official does not see much of a challenge in terms of fire-fighting in New Gurugram, which is dotted mostly with group housing societies that largely adhere to fire safety norms and are built as per approved building plans, single staircases in several societies and the locking of doors to the terrace remain two major concerns.

As per the Haryana Fire Service Act, all residential multi-storey buildings must have two staircases to allow alternative exit to the residents in the event of a fire, but the buildings, with plans approved by the Department of Town and Country Planning, have only one.

"The matter came to light in 2017 when we rejected

NOC to a few group housing societies for not having two staircases. Since the buildings were constructed with

approved building plans, they were given provisional certificates following the intervention of the Chief Minister. But it has now been made mandatory for all buildings constructed after February 2014 to have two staircases and a Fire Department official is appointed to the committee to approve the building plans," said Mr. Kashyap, adding that not many group housing societies now have single staircases. The minimum width of the staircase should be 1,200 mm.

Biggest challenge

In 1979, when he was a young fireman, Mr. Kashyap recalled attending to a fire in the middle of the night and almost single-handedly dousing an inferno in a shop.

When the shop owner came to him the next day offering ₹100 as reward, the officer found that a portion of the establishment was filled with crackers and he actually had a narrow escape.

Mr. Kashyap said that such illegal hoarding of inflammable material was the biggest challenge to firefighting, even bigger than unauthorised colonies and the crowded markets.

Dundahera on the Old Delhi-Gurugram Road is a major area where illegal hoarding is a problem, said Mr. Kashyap.

Though a residential area, garment units run illegally from the basements of several houses, posing a serious threat. Last year, four persons were injured when a boiler exploded in the base-ment of a building next to the local police station.

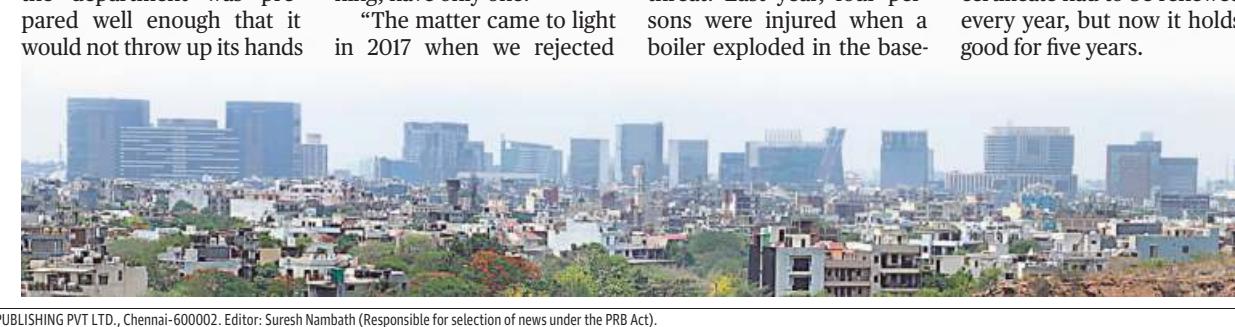
Ticking bomb Sadar Bazar – one of the oldest market areas housing grocery, stationery, sweets and garments shops – is a "ticking bomb", added Mr. Kashyap.

The market, located near Civil Lines, has narrow lanes and low-lying tangled electric wires, which makes it nearly impossible for fire tenders to reach the site of fire.

The market is not only haphazardly developed, but the basements of the shops are stuffed with highly inflammable material such as clothes, ghee, oil, cooking gas cylinders, stationery and furniture, he added.

Mr. Kashyap recalled how during an inspection to a Sadar Bazar shop for fire NOC, he found one basement stuffed with two dozen cooking gas cylinders, match boxes and a large number of *bidi*s. Since there is ambiguity in law over the need for fire NOC for buildings less than 15 metres in height, the shops in Sadar Bazar do not have fire NOCs. The officer said that making trade licences mandatory for shopkeepers in Sadar Bazar could bring them under the ambit of the Fire Department. The department has written to the government seeking clarity on law for buildings below 15 metres in height.

As a pre-emptive measure, the department has launched a survey to identify buildings that have not procured or renewed fire NOCs. Earlier, the certificate had to be renewed every year, but now it holds good for five years.



Thousands turn out to reclaim their India

At Jantar Mantar, students, activists and members of the civil society demand rollback of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act

SHINJINI GHOSH

NEW DELHI

Thousands of people took to the streets on Saturday and demonstrated against the recently passed Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

A protest meet held at Jantar Mantar saw a massive turnout with students, activists and members of the civil society demanding the withdrawal of the Act, which mandates protection of non-Muslims who fled to India to escape religious persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan.

Raising questions on the provisions of the Act, Yasmine Khan, a primary school teacher from Chandni Chowk, said, "India is my country. I was born here and will hopefully die here. I will not provide any document to prove my nationality. I am as Indian as any other citizen of this nation."

G India is my country. I was born here and will hopefully die here. I will not provide any document to prove my nationality. I am as Indian as any other citizen of this nation

YASMIN KHAN
Primary school teacher
from Chandni Chowk

reject the Communal Arbitrary Betrayal (CAB).

"Until now we had seen two kinds of critiques, one from the Northeast and the other the legitimate anxiety of the Muslim community. However, today's protest is a reflection of how those who are not directly affected by it have come out in large numbers to raise their voices. This shows that what the government is doing is not right," said Yogendra Yadav, national president of Swaraj India.

For 19-year-old Aanchal Goyal, being a part of the protest was important to uphold constitutional principles. "India is a secular country and the government is only a representative of the people. How can they implement something which is against the very same people?" said the second-year student of Khalsa College.

Bedashree, who hails from Assam and works in a publishing house here, said, "People who have been residing in this country for such a long time do not deserve this. It seems we have completely forgotten about what human rights are all about in this country."

Speaking at the event, activist Harsh Mandar said, "The country does not belong to one person only) and 'We, the people of India,'



Protesters at Jantar Mantar; and in front of Assam Bhawan on Saturday.

■ R.V. MOORTHY,
SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

said, "The Indian Muslim population here is Indian by choice. If someone is questioning them, that shows how the government has failed to understand the core of the country's soul."

Social activist Nikhil Dey said the Act is not just an unjust one but is an assault on the basic structure of the Constitution.

Sadar Bazar resident Sitara summed it up in a line. "Hindustan hum sabka hain (India includes all of us) and it will remain so."



At Bharat Bachao rally, tips from workers for Congress to improve

+ There should be more meetings at the ground level and at regular intervals'

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

As thousands of Congress supporters gathered at Ramlila Maidan for 'Bharat Bachao Rally' amid Rajasthani folk dance and artistes performing traditional instruments from Himachal Pradesh, party loyalists said that the Congress needed to strengthen itself.

While some said that leaders other than the Gandhi family should head the party, others vehemently opposed it. Congress supporters also said that the country should be saved from inflation and unemployment.

There were multiple over 25-foot-high cut-outs of Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi besides ones of party president Sonia Gandhi that were a couple of inches taller than that of the other two.

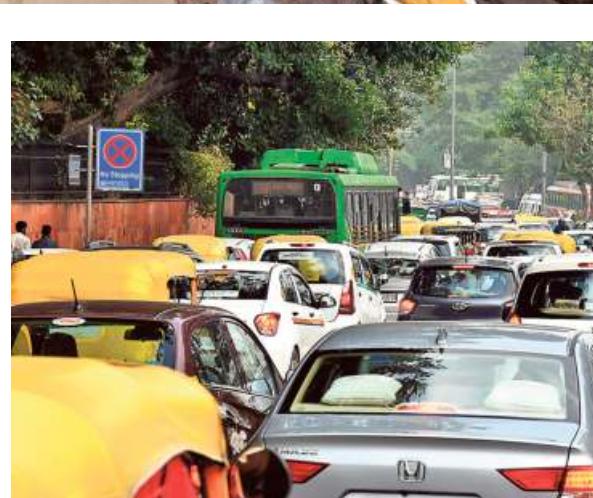
Amid chants of "Congress party zindabad", Mohammad Khan (65), who had travelled to the Capital Delhi from Rajgarh district in Madhya Pradesh, was glued to a speech. "The inflation is very high and at my shop back in Madhya Pradesh, the rate of biscuits has gone up to ₹75/kg and less people are buying them now," he complained.

He said that the country has to be saved from the inflation. However, when asked if the Gandhi family should continue at the helm of Congress, he referred to the murders of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi and said, "Gandhi parivaar ne balidaan diya hai desh ke liye. Aur kaun diya hai? Gandhi parivaar hi hona chahiye [The Gandhi family had sacrificed for the nation. Who else has done that? Gandhi family should continue]."



Congress workers dressed as students at a graduation ceremony fry fritters at Ramlila Maidan on Saturday; (right) The rally led to massive traffic snarls.

■ PTI, SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA



"[PM] Modi wins because of his speeches. But there is nobody in the Congress who can talk like him. Modi damdaar hai, baashan mein. Humara bhi neta damdaar hai, par baashan mein nahin. [Modi is very good in delivering speeches. Our leaders are also good, but not when it comes to giving speeches]," he said.

"Sachin Pilot or Scindia should be the president of the party," he said. "Modi ko takkar dene ke liye woh hi hai bas [Only he can compete against Modi]," he said.

Mr. Bhaskare said that they should strengthen the ground-level network. "Now workers are used only during elections and nothing happens after that. There should be more meetings at the ground level and at regular intervals," he added.

Congress does not listen to workers like it used to before. Sangathan kamzoor hai [the organisation is weak now]. Till you strengthen it, you cannot come back to power," said 40-year-old Arvind Mihra who said he is a former municipal vice-president in Madhya Pradesh.

Sanjeev Bhaksare (35) from Khargone in Madhya Pradesh said that the Congress lacked big leaders. "Rahul Gandhi is at least 40% behind Modi in terms of giving speeches. Scindia

should be made the president of the party," he said. "Modi ko takkar dene ke liye woh hi hai bas [Only he can compete against Modi]," he said.

Mr. Bhaskare said that they should strengthen the ground-level network. "Now workers are used only during elections and nothing happens after that. There should be more meetings at the ground level and at regular intervals," he added.

However, many elderly supporters were against the idea of someone from outside being the party president. "Gandhi parivaar hi hona chahiye. Aur kaun hogaa? Bataiye. [It should be the Gandhi family at the helm of power. Who else will

become the President? Tell me]," Parsadiya Sonkar (68) a farmer and labourer from Uttar Pradesh, who works for ₹200 a day, said.

Outside the ground, 17-year-old Tanihq Negi, a Class XII student from Vinod Nagar in Delhi, was part of over 100 youth Congress volunteers who held an over 100-metre-long banner with photos of Rahul Gandhi. "I have come to support the party. I am yet to become a member. I have come with my friends at 8 in the morning," an excited Tanihq said.

Next to the them, a seven-member team was performing a Rajasthani folk dance and a board on the background read: "India's unity is its diversity".

Mother Dairy hikes milk prices by up to ₹3 per litre

Amul raises rates by ₹2 across States

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

India's leading dairy firm Amul on Saturday announced hiking milk prices by ₹2 per litre across various States, while Mother Dairy increased rates by up to ₹3 per litre in Delhi-NCR due to rise in procurement cost.

The new prices will be effective from Sunday, Mother Dairy and Amul said in separate statements.

Prices of raw milk are generally lower in the winter, but this year they have risen due to late arrival of monsoon followed by excess rain.

Increase in milk prices by the two major dairy firms could impact retail inflation that spiked to a more than

three-year-high of 5.54% in November due to costlier food products.

Mother Dairy has increased prices of token and poly pack or pouched milk by ₹2 per litre.

Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which markets dairy products under Amul brand, said it has decided to revise milk prices by ₹2 per litre in Ahmedabad and Saurashtra markets of Gujarat, Delhi-NCR, West Bengal, Mumbai and Maharashtra.

GCMMF supplies 1.4 crore litres of milk per day across the country, of which 33 lakh litres is in Delhi-NCR. Mother Dairy too sells over 30 lakh litres per day in the NCR.

ENGLAND My Love (an Indian's love affair with England)

It was 1st May 1959 when I arrived at Victoria Station, London. As I stepped out of the carriage, a sort of feeling ran through my body and mind that that's where I belong. Having now lived 60 years and in spite of all the struggles that I had to go through, my love and respect for England is still the same as it was then. It is "England My Love".

Today, Bill Lall, Chartered Accountant by profession, is a successful, retired businessman and author of two very

successful books. He has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Business Administration by the University of East London (2003), Freedom of the City of London in 2012 and the British Empire Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honour list of 2014. He also holds the title of Lord of the Manor (Woodlands).

In the process of achieving his success, Bill has developed a sort of personal love and admiration for England, English people and their culture. He feels indebted to England for achieving his goals. He has written this book in an unusual, inspirational style, which is so much evident in his previous books, to explain why England has been crucial to his success so much so that it enlightened his overall personality.

The Book is an invaluable insight into England and English ways. It is essential reading for anyone who happens to have an opportunity to come and live and work in this country. It is an enjoyable insight into today's England.



Jamia Millia declares vacations till January 5

Students call off lockdown

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Jamia Millia Islamia students called off their university lockdown against the new citizenship law on Saturday, a day after violent protests rocked the campus area, even as the varsity cancelled exams and announced vacation till January 5 in view of the tension.

The university administration said those who indulged in violence and clashed with police on Friday were "outsiders" and not students.

Jamia students, teachers and alumni, said they have formed a coordination panel to hold peaceful protests against the amended Citizenship Act. They say the law is discriminatory.

The university had turned into a virtual battlefield on Friday when students and policemen clashed with each other as students tried to march to Parliament in protest against the legislation. The students had called for a lockdown of the university Saturday and planned to boycott exams.

Police have registered a case of rioting and obstructing government servants from performing duty against unidentified persons in connection with the protest. A senior university official said all exams at the university have been postponed and new dates will be announced in due course. The official said a vacation has been declared from Dec 16 to Jan 5 and the university will reopen on Jan 6 next year.

The university would like to clarify and put the incident in proper perspective as to who were involved and why this happened. Thousands of people from nearby localities assembled at the site of the protest along with a section of students.

"The outsiders who have nothing to do with the university clashed with the police and not the students. In fact, the students tried to stop them from doing so. Students were caught in clashes resulting in injuries to some of them," the university official said.

Earlier Saturday, before the university announced the decision to postpone exams, students shared their experience during the violent clash on Friday.

'For our rights'

"Jamia will raise voice if anything wrong happens to our nation. We have boycotted classes and exams. We will march again and again for our rights," Nihal Ashraf, a 25-year-old student.

Wajahat, a 22-year-old student of BA Political Science, said, "On Friday, the Delhi Police brutally attacked us while we were marching and many students got injured. They used baton and tear gas against students. We have boycotted the exam."

"Everyone wants to live. This is not Israel or Syria. We should learn from Bangladesh how they killed extremism and opted for an economic democracy. The government is not focusing on main issues," said Pappu Yadav, another student.

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ENGLAND My Love (an Indian's love affair with England)

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2 foreign nationals held for cloning credit cards

They stole data to paste on empty cards

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Two Nigerian nationals, including a former priest have been arrested for allegedly cloning debit and credit cards, the police said on Saturday.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South West) Devennder Arya said that the accused have been identified as Oluwatoyin Isaiah Adewale alias Old Soja alias Maito alias Mark (46) and Nosa Tony Lawani (43) who were arrested from Vasant Kunj based on a tip-off. The police said that 37 cards and electronic devices were recovered from their possession.

Skimmer devices

During interrogation, the police said, it was revealed that a Bulgarian national namely Eris used to steal the debit and credit cards data by placing skimmer devices and hidden cameras in ATMs and after decoding the

ATM card numbers, he would send this data to Oluwatoyin to paste it on empty cards. "Nosa used to assist Oluwatoyin in pasting this data on the cards available with him with the help of a magnetic strip reader and writer machine. Thereafter, they used to withdraw money with these cloned cards," Mr. Arya said.

The police said that Oluwatoyin lives in Greater Noida and had come to India in 2012 for a medical visa. His visa expired a year later, but he continued to stay and worked as a priest at a church in Greater Noida. Later, he started a business of exporting hair to African countries, but could not make much profit. He then met Eris who taught him how to clone cards.

The police said that Nosa had met Oluwatoyin in 2018 at a party in Janakpuri after which the two started working together.

Three women killed in Shalimar Bagh blaze

2 minors and a senior citizen among four who sustained severe injuries in the fire

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Three women were killed and four persons, including two minors, sustained severe injuries as a residential building caught fire in north-west Delhi's Shalimar Bagh on Saturday evening, the police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Gaurav Sharma said that the deceased have been identified as Kiran (65), Somvati (42) and Kanta Devi (75) and the injured as Vanshika (14), Akshit (16), Inna (28) and Lajwati (68) who are admitted in the ICU of a private hospital in Shalimar Bagh.

Delhi Fire Service Director Atul Garg said that they received a call about the blaze at 6.05 p.m. after which eight fire tenders were pressed into service. The fire was doused after two hours, he said.

Mr. Garg said that the building comprised a parking floor, ground floor and three floors above that. "The fire seems to have started from the kitchen on the ground floor and spread to upper floors. The ground floor was locked from outside," he said.

The fire department said that a senior citizen was rescued from the first floor, five persons were rescued from the second floor and one from the third floor – all of whom were rushed to a hospital. Three of them were declared brought dead, they said.

A senior fire official said that the persons who died were suffocated and none of them were charred. "It is suspected that the victims could not escape the building as the fire had started from the ground floor," he said.

Mr. Sharma said that police officers, including Station House Officer of Shalimar Bagh police station, reached the spot immediately and opened the door of the terrace to rescue two women

who were lying unconscious. "The building was engulfed in smoke and the police had to take help of firemen to search for others who were stuck," he said.

Fire in Mundka

Another major fire broke out at a plywood factory in outer Delhi's Mundka in the early hours of Saturday, the police said, adding that nobody was reported injured in the incident.

A Delhi Fire Service (DFS) official said that they were informed about the blaze in Mundka around 5 a.m., after which 20 fire tenders were

pressed into service. "The fire also spread to the bulb factory situated opposite to the plywood factory. No injuries were reported in the incident," the official said.

The DFS also said that the fire at the factory in Mundka was brought under control by 9.30 a.m., while the cooling operation continued for the next few hours.

The police said that a case under Section 285 (negligent conduct with respect to fire or combustible matter) of the Indian Penal Code has been registered and two more kalandras under Section 133 (conditional order for removal of nuisance) of the Criminal Procedure Code have been made against the bulb and shoe factory in the area.

On December 8, a major fire broke out at a four-storey building housing illegal manufacturing units in north Delhi's congested Anaj Mandi. The incident claimed 43 lives and several others sustained injuries.



The fire broke out at a residential building in Shalimar Bagh.

* SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Auto driver killed, another injured in road accident

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

An autorickshaw driver was killed and another man sustained injuries when the three-wheeler hit a truck in outer Delhi's Narela in the early hours of Saturday, the police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer North) Gaurav Sharma said that the deceased has been identified as Ratibhan Singh, who lived in Ashok Nagar, and the injured as Budhpal, a resident of Ashok Vihar Phase-II.

The police said that they received a call at 4.22 a.m. regarding an accident near Narela red light towards Sonepat. When a police team reached the spot, they found an autorickshaw in accidental condition. The injured were shifted to a hospital where Ratibhan was declared brought dead, while Budhpal was referred to a government hospital.

During investigation, it was revealed that the autorickshaw was speeding and hit a truck which was slowing down at the red light, they said. "It appears the negligence of the deceased autorickshaw driver had led to the accident," said a senior police officer.

A case under IPC Section 279 (rash driving), 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety) and 304A (causing death by negligence) has been registered and further investigation is under way, the police said.

'Bond' fire



A mother and her child sit around a bonfire on a cold morning in New Delhi. ■ R.V. MOORTHY

'Neither the system, nor people changed since 2012 incident'

Nirbhaya's mother says parents need to empower daughters, teach sons how to behave with girls

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

Nirbhaya's mother on Friday said that neither the system nor the people had changed over the past seven years since the gruesome incident of rape and murder of her daughter on December 16, 2012. She said it seemed that they were still in 2012.

Speaking at a day-long annual TEDx event themed, 'Bold + Brilliant - TEDx Gurugram Women 2019', at Westin Hotel near IFFCO Chowk here, Nirbhaya's mother said

parents needed to empower their daughters so that they did not have to face what they had been through over the past seven years. She added that we also need to teach our boys as to how to behave with girls.

Jointly organised by Garage Society, a Hong Kong-based flexible co-working space provider, and TEDx Gurugram, the event saw participation of celebrated women working in different fields, such as media, urban transport, psychological

counselling and documentary photography.

'Equal opportunities'

"We teach our boys to be bold and courageous, but scare our girls by asking them to be cautious every time they step out. We have to remove this fear from their minds. We need to treat them at par with our sons and provide them equal opportunities for education," she said.

Accompanied by her husband, she said her husband

and elder son were her pillars of strength over all these years. She said her husband, despite working in a private firm, did not allow her to go alone for any event and had always managed to come with her.

She also recalled the family's financial struggle and how her husband sold their ancestral land in Uttar Pradesh to provide for their daughter's fee for a paramedical course.

In an indirect reference to the delay in execution of

death sentence to the convicts in the 2012 gang rapemurder case, she asked if only criminals had the human rights. "Our daughters also have some human rights," she added.

Among others, Rahagiri Day Movement leader Sarita Bhatt; Country Director, BBC Media, Priyanka Dutt; Psychological Counsellor, Chumki Bose and Documentary Photographer Cheena Kapoor spoke on different women-related issues pertaining to their respective fields.

The letter written on Day

investing it online. With the help of technical surveillance, the accused were traced to a luxury hotel where they had come to collect money from a person on Thursday, the police said, adding that a trap was laid and the accused were arrested.

20-30 % commission

During interrogation, it was revealed that the accused had cheated more than 100 people. "Masih was the mastermind. He had employed four-five boys promising them 20-30 % commission in return of each target plus bonus on trapping huge investors. They opened 15 accounts in different names in different banks which saw transaction of more than ₹5 crore in two years," Mr. Thakur added.

Rain reduces pollution, Capital breathes easy

AQI improves to 'moderate' from 'poor'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The air quality of Delhi improved and entered 'moderate' category on Saturday after the city received rainfall over the past two days. The air quality index (AQI) is likely to deteriorate slowly towards 'poor' category by Sunday, said government-run monitoring agency System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR).

On Saturday, the average level of PM2.5 – deadly respirable particles, which is a chief pollutant – was 61.7 ug/m³, the safe limit being 60 ug/m³, as per Indian standards, in Delhi and NCR at 7 p.m., according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The level is, however, more than twice the safe limit of 25 ug/m³ set by the World Health Organization.

Delhi's AQI on Saturday



was 163 (moderate) down from Friday's 240 (poor) and Thursday's 430 (severe), according to the 4 p.m. bulletin by the CPCB that is the average of the past 24 hours.

"The AQI is now forecasts to deteriorate slowly towards the 'poor' category by Sunday. SAFAR model suggests AQI is likely to be in the 'poor' to lower end of 'very poor' category on Monday. On Tuesday, AQI may further deteriorate, but will remain in the lower side of 'very poor' category," SAFAIR said.

Unauthorised colonies: 'withdraw land acquisition proceedings or denotify it'

Bajjal says it's a major step towards implementation of PM-UDAY

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Lieutenant-Governor Anil Baijal on Saturday issued directions to withdraw land acquisition proceedings, or denotify it, in respect of land situated within the delineated boundaries of 1,731 unauthorised colonies for the "smooth implementation" of the PM-Unauthorized Colonies in Delhi Awas Adhikar Yojana (PM-UDAY).

The move, Mr. Baijal said on Twitter, was a "major step" towards the implementation of the scheme which seeks to confer ownership rights on an estimated 40 lakh residents of such colonies – excluding 69 settlements inhabited by affluent sections of society.

"It's a major step for conferring ownership rights to the residents of Unauthorised Colonies & will pave way for smooth implementation of PM-UDAY.

HousingForAll" the Mr. Baijal tweeted.

Detailed orders outlining the procedure for the same have been issued by the Land Building Department with the approval of the Lieutenant-Governor, the Raj Niwas said in a statement.

"The L-G stated that this is a major step taken for conferring/recognising ownership rights on the residents of UCs for land where

ever the proceedings of land acquisition is not completed and will also help in smooth implementation of PM-UDAY (PM - Unauthorized Colonies in Delhi Awas Adhikar Yojana)," the statement said further.

'Arrangements on track'
In a related development, Hardeep Singh Puri, Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, took to Twitter to announce that procedural arrangements related to the implementation of the scheme were on track.

"With honest intentions Delhi will get the right development. Maps of Delhi's 1,500 unauthorised colonies are ready. 1,000 maps have been uploaded to the portal. On another portal 4,052 citizens have registered their names. This is the real speed of development," Mr. Puri tweeted in Hindi.

BJP leaders pay visit to unauthorised colonies

Some carry out signature campaigns

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

BJP leaders, in the run up to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally scheduled later this month, visited unauthorised colonies and slum clusters as part of a public outreach programme to apprise the residents of the steps taken by the BJP-led Centre to provide housing to an estimated 60 to 70 lakh of them, on Saturday.

Surveys in 32 colonies have been completed and the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has started surveying 160 colonies. As soon as these surveys end, construction of these flats will be started. I have talked to the residents of jhuggi-jhupdis and they looked so happy," Mr. Goel said.

The scheme, he said further, sought to provide two-bedroom flats of 30 sqm on land where their tenements existed earlier. For this purpose, he said, the DDA will appoint a developer who will also arrange transit accommodation for those residents whose flats are yet to be constructed.

BJP to hold rally in city to thank Modi

Some carry out signature campaigns

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The BJP will initiate a massive public outreach programme on the heels of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally here later this month, Delhi BJP chief Manoj Tiwari announced on Saturday.

The 'Dhanyaad Rally' is scheduled to be held at the Ramlila Maidan on December 22 to thank Mr. Modi for the Centre's decision to confer ownership rights on an estimated 40 lakh residents of unauthorised colonies.

The Prime Minister had been "invited" to address the "massive rally" in the run up to which, the North East Delhi MP said, the party's state unit will initiate a signature campaign on December 14-15 with a target of collecting 11 lakh signatures from residents of such colonies in order to thank him for the decision.

C M Y K

Fear of uncertain future haunts AMU students, teachers

An uneasy calm prevailed on the campus as the central university is enveloped in three layers of police barricading

ANUJ KUMAR

ALIGARH

A day after the peaceful protest in the Aligarh Muslim University against the Citizenship Amendment Act, an uneasy calm prevailed on the campus. The central university is enveloped in three layers of police barricading. Inside, students are either taking exams or are discussing the possible fallout of the act and the proposed NRC across the country.

"Forget about carrying the baggage of the Partition, I was born after the Babri Masjid was demolished. I was not nurturing any ill-will against the BJP. My brother who is a science student used to appreciate the cleanliness drive of the Modi government. Instead of winning me over, suddenly, I find, my Indian identity is gradually being scratched to reveal a Muslim beneath,"



AMU students protesting at the university gate on Saturday.

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

match.

A few years back, she said, there was an assertion of the Muslim identity, now we are being advised to hide it. "I am advised to put on a bindi in public places; some of my friends who used put on hijab, now don't cover their faces in public spaces," said Lubna.

The issue has not only brought together teachers and students but also different ideologies that prevail on the campus. Groups like Fatima Sheikh Study Circle, a "left to the centre" group, which organised a protest on Saturday and Lalkar, a "liberal" group are on the same page as the "conservative" elements of the Students' Union. Providing the intellectual heft is the Debating and Literary Club, part of the "cultural island" called the General Education Centre that also houses music and drama clubs,

spaces that conservatives find "un-Islamic". Ansab Aamir, secretary of the club said it was these groups that started the protest against the CAB on December 9 before the Union took over. It from this 640 member club that the pamphlets and the explainers on the Act emerge. Aamir showed disappointment that the protest remained "symbolic" on December 13. "If we want to be heard, we have to take the protest outside the campus, without fearing about the consequences. Peaceful protest is our democratic right," he said.

A student of Mechanical Engineering, he felt that the CAA was a test for the judiciary but the fear was that it could "succumb" to the "national will" once again.

Mohibul Hoque, professor of political science, a popular figure among students said, "Our aim is to

keep the students away from the increasing influence of leaders like Asaduddin Owaisi. As it would be counterproductive and falling into the trap of the BJP. I always say Muslim good can never be different from the national good but with the CAA and the NRC the fear is that the faultlines will emerge again. The government should realise that uneasy calm is not equal to peace," he said.

He feared that it would lead to demonetisation kind of situation with people queuing up for documents. A source in the Controller Office said people were asking for degrees dating back to 1933-34.

Syed Ali Nadeem Rezvi, Chairman of Department of History said, said there was "no fear" instead there was "a concern" that "our constitution was being torn to pieces by those who never

believed in it." The impending NRC, he said, was essentially "anti-poor." "It is the landless farmers and the Dalits who would find it extremely difficult to prove their Indian identity."

It was not that Muslims didn't feel the "fear" during the Congress regimes," said Aftab Alam, professor of Political Science. "But it was sporadic. Riots would happen and social amity would return. In this regime, it is everyday communalism. Nationalism is the new opium and I fear it will last 15-20 years," he said.

Meanwhile, at the GEC, the good old attendant Wasi, was busy serving. "I have six more months to retire, after that I will start collecting documents," he said. "I don't think the sarkar is not in such a hurry. The elections are still far away," he mused, looking at the grey skies.

Akhilesh meets family of Unnao rape victim

'Centre, State out to hoodwink people'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

UNNAO

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav here on Saturday met the family of the Unnao rape victim who was set ablaze by the accused and assured help in the fight for justice.

Mr. Yadav, who arrived at the victim's village under the Bihar police station area here, said, "Our party will fight for justice to the family of the rape victim."

"It is our responsibility that the family gets justice and the guilty get punished. I have told my partymen that if the family wants any help, we will together work to make it available to them," he said.

When told that the government had immediately rushed her to a Delhi hospital to save her life, Mr. Yadav said, "They [government]

did not send the girl [to the hospital] to save her life but to safeguard themselves... The government was well aware of her health condition."

Taking a dig at the Centre and State government, he said that instead of taking steps to curb crime, they were presenting statistics belonging to earlier regimes.

"Both the governments are out to hoodwink people," he said.

The 23-year-old Unnao rape victim, who was set ablaze by five people, including two rape accused, had succumbed to burn injuries in Delhi's Safdarjung Hospital and her last rites were performed at her native village. She was attacked and set on fire while on her way to Raebareli.

All the five accused were subsequently arrested.

Change in distribution network caused M.P. urea shortage: Chouhan

Union Minister Tomar assures State of adequate supply

SIDHARTH YADAV

BHOPAL

Amid reports of urea shortage in Madhya Pradesh during the *rabi* season, former Chief Minister and BJP vice-president Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Saturday said the State government's negligence to act timely and change in the distribution network had led to the situation.

During a meeting with Union Minister for Agriculture Narendra Singh Tomar in New Delhi, he apprised him of the shortage. Assuring him of an additional shipment of 2.88 lakh metric tonne (LMT), Mr. Tomar said, "The State government will receive 15 rakes of urea in the next two-three days. And instead of 5 LMT quota for December, the government will get more than 7 LMT urea to meet the demand."

Mr. Chouhan's meeting came after Chief Minister Kamal Nath on Tuesday had asked the BJP in the Opposition to press the Centre to send additional urea shipments to the State, instead of "playing politics" over the shortage during the *rabi* season (October - February).

The area under wheat cultivation in the State has increased, given the extended monsoon towards the flag end of the *kharif* season (July-October), when more than 46% of annual average rainfall had ravaged crops, especially soyabean.

In November, Mr. Nath



Shivraj Singh Chouhan

had sought intervention of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to expand the State's quota of 15.4 LMT by 2.4 LMT. Pointing to the shortage, he had said, "Against the allocated amount of 8.76 LMT of urea for the month of November, the State has received only 6.85 LMT of urea leading to a situation of shortage."

Meanwhile, seconding Mr. Chouhan's contention, Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers, D.V. Sadananda Gowda, said the current crisis could be a result of issues with the ground-level distribution network. "Recently the State government has decided to distribute 80% of urea through cooperatives and 20% through private dealer network. This ratio was previously 50:50," he said. There is a heavy rush at State Markfed outlets which is being reported as shortage.

Accepting the demand for expanding the urea quota, yet stating there was enough of it with the State government, Mr. Gowda, during a meeting with State Agriculture and

Fertiliser companies have been advised to ensure urea dispatches on pro-rata basis to fulfil the field demand. The Railways has given priority to urea movement from the ports

UNION MINISTRY OF CHEMICALS AND FERTILIZERS

ture Minister Sachin Yadav on Thursday, said, "The same has also been reported upon by representatives of State government during recent weekly video conferences with officers of my department."

According to the Centre, the ongoing *rabi* season in the State had started with a comfortable urea opening stock of 5.96 LMT – more than one-third of its total seasonal requirement.

To address the peak demand during the current month, the Centre had ensured the supply plan for December was issued at its beginning.

"Fertiliser companies have been advised to ensure urea dispatches on pro-rata basis to fulfil the field demand. The Railways have given priority to urea movement from the ports. In case of Madhya Pradesh, nearly 85 urea rakes had been dispatched from plants and ports," said a note from the Union Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.

Snow block



Heavy snowfall left many trucks stranded on Srinagar-Jammu National Highway at Qazigund in Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday. The Valley remains cut off. • NISSAR AHMAD

Prashant Kishor stands by his Act comments

JD(U) national vice-president had asked all non-BJP Chief Ministers to oppose it

AMARNATH TEWARY

PATNA

After meeting Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar late on Saturday evening, party national vice-president and poll strategist Prashant Kishor said he stood by what he had said earlier on the issue of Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). He also said that Mr. Kumar turned down his resignation offer.

Mr. Kishor earlier had

tweeted against CAA and urged all non-BJP Chief Ministers to oppose it but his party JD(U) had voted in favour of the Bill in both the Houses.

Later, senior party leaders, like R.C.P. Singh and State president Basishtha Narayan Singh had apparently took offence at Mr. Kishor's comment and said everyone should abide by the party line.

Mr. Kishor earlier had

Mr. Kishor's next move, he met Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday evening for over an hour at his official residence 1, Anne Marg in Patna.

"I still stand by what I had said earlier on CAA and I have briefed chief minister Nitish Kumar on the issue...now it all depends on him...he will brief media on the issue after his ongoing *Jal Jivan Hariyali* yatra across the state", Mr. Kishor told journalists after his meeting Mr. Kumar.

Mr. Kumar's journey on climate change is expected to end by January.

Mr. Kishor further said that Mr. Kumar rejected his offer to resign from his party.

Earlier, along with Mr. Kishor party leaders Pawan Verma and Ghulam Rasool Vallyavi too had openly made objections over party's stand on the issue of CAA.

Sukhbir elected as Akali Dal chief again

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHANDIGARH

The Shiromani Akali Dal on Saturday re-elected Sukhbir Singh Badal as its president for the third time at a meeting held in Amritsar.

Mr. Badal's name was proposed by senior party leader Tota Singh and seconded by another senior leader, Prem Singh Chandumajra, while Jagmeet Brar endorsed it.

The Akali Dal, which observed its 99th foundation day, passed several resolutions during the meeting. One of its resolutions called for making the election manifestos of political parties a legally enforceable document, and said offending parties and individuals must be punished for enacting fraud on the people, said an official statement.

Rights of farmers

The party also demanded that minimum support price and procurement of agricultural produce must be made the "fundamental right" of farmers.

In a political resolution, the party called for an immediate dismissal of the ruling Congress government in the State, which it alleged was not functioning in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

Honeytrap case: ₹1 lakh for information on Soni

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

INDORE

Authorities on Saturday demolished an alleged unauthorised industrial unit here, owned by relatives of Jitendra Soni, absconding owner of a newspaper which had published sensational reports about politicians and others targeted by a honey-trap racket.

In a related development, the reward for information about whereabouts of Soni, wanted in more than 30 cases including human trafficking, has been increased to ₹1 lakh.

An electroplating factory, spread over more than 2,500 sq feet at Polo Ground Industrial Area, was razed, an official of the Indore Municipal Corporation said.

The factory was run by Soni's brother Mahendra and nephew Jignesh Soni, and built without permissions of the IMC and in violation of the industries department's rules, he added.

Outlines of new Rajasthan industrial policy announced

It will offer timely disposal of grievances

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

JAIPUR

Subodh Agarwal said a plan of action had already been formulated for resolving issues related to power, water, pollution and revenue, identified in the dialogues organised at the divisional headquarters.

The suggestions made at the dialogue included installation of common effluent treatment plants, subsidy for charging of electric vehicles, simplification of land conversion procedure, release of gas connections in Bhiwadi and Neemrana industrial areas, reduction of power tariff and VAT on natural gas and granting the industry status to warehouses.

The State government has also announced a State-level export awards, under which 30 exporters in various categories have been selected. The awards, which will be distributed at a ceremony here later this month, were instituted to encourage exporters, promote shipments and bring in a healthy competition among the entrepreneurs.

Farmers highlight indigenous farming practices at conclave

Event focused on sustainable farming and safeguarding of forest, land and seeds

MOHAMMED IQBAL

JAIPUR

Farmers from the tribal belt of southern Rajasthan highlighted their struggle to save indigenous agricultural practices as well as their efforts for rainwater harvesting, soil conservation and farming of medicinal plants at Tribal Swaraj and Sovereignty Conclave held in Banswara earlier this week.

The event focused on sustainable farming and safeguarding of forest, land and seeds.

3,000 representatives

About 3,000 representatives from 1,000 villages in the tri-junction of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh attended the two-day conclave. Rajasthan Assembly Speaker C.P. Joshi said at the event that there would be no threat to local communities and resources if the voice of elected representatives was the same as that of the people.

After observing the samples of traditional crops of the region at an exhibition at the venue, Mr. Joshi said they should be patented for

ensuring remunerative prices to the farmers and generating revenue for the government.

"Village panchayats should revive traditional farming systems without the government's interference... Utilisation of untied funds may serve the purpose," he said.

Experts addressing the conclave affirmed that the tribals had an "enormous storehouse" of knowledge on food gathering, shifting hill cultivation, pastoralism,

Vaagdhara secretary Jayesh Joshi said a renewed emphasis on protecting the natural rain-fed agricultural techniques would help save uncultivated nutritious food and make the tribal farmers self-sufficient.

Experts addressing the conclave affirmed that the tribals had an "enormous storehouse" of knowledge on food gathering, shifting hill cultivation, pastoralism,

and handicrafts.

Tribal farmers should be encouraged to define their own food and agricultural systems in order to get healthy and culturally appropriate food produced in a sustainable manner, they said.

Prominent among the speakers at the conclave were B. Venkateswarlu, former Vice-Chancellor of University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad; Kumar Prashant of Gandhi Shanti Pratishthan; Savyaasachi Das of Revitalising Rainfed Agriculture Network; Gandhian leader Sawai Singh; and Shailendra Pandya, member, Rajasthan State Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

Dr. Venkateswarlu suggested that the farmers should go for soil testing first and try to make up for the missing nutrients before sowing the crops.

A collective approach for restoring traditional methods of water harvesting and formation of Kisan Sangathan for marketing of farm produce would yield a better value for farmers.

While Agriculture Minister Lalchand Kataria called for reducing the use of pesticides in farming, Bagidora MLA Mahendra Jeet Singh Malviya stressed the need for maintaining traditional practices in animal husbandry as well.

"Vaccination of milch animals for more milk and stopping the use of cow dung is not advisable," he said. The issues raised and discussed in the conclave also included land degradation, community forestry, malnutrition-free tribal development, community seed management, circular economy, child labour and migration and the significance of Gram Sabha for empowerment of tribal communities.

Rajasthan Assembly Speaker C.P. Joshi observing the samples of traditional crops at a tribal conclave in Banswara.

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Rajasthan Assembly Speaker C.P. Joshi observing the samples of traditional crops at a tribal conclave in Banswara.

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MATRIMONIAL

BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

INDEX OF MATRIMONIAL

BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

BRIDES WANTED

BRIDES & GROOMS WANTED

Classification common for Brides, Bridegrooms, Brides & Grooms

Assamese

Awadhi

Bengali

Bhojpuri

Bihari

Chhattisgarhi

English

Gujarati

Haryanvi

Hindi

Kannada

Kashmiri

Konkani

Malayalam

Manipuri

Marathi

Marwari

Nepali

Oriya

Parsi

Punjabi

Saurashtra

Sindhi

Tamil

Telugu

Tulu

Urdu

Advocate

Business

Defence

Doctor

Engineer

Finance/ Banking

Government/ Quasi-Govt.

IAS/ Allied Services

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Assam govt.
employees to
cease work on
December 18

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWALI

Employees of the Assam government on Saturday announced that they will cease work on December 18 in protest against the new Citizenship Act.

Sadou Asam Karmachari Parishad (SAKP) president Basab Kalita said all employees of the State will not attend offices on December 18. "We have opposed the Bill since the beginning and will continue to do so till the Act is revoked," he said.

When members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) came to the State in May last year to take opinion of the people of Assam on the Bill, the SAKP had submitted a memorandum raising Mr. Kalita said. "We have also extended our support to the AASU in its three-day 'Satyagraha' from December 16," he added.

The employees had also supported the protesting students on December 11. Meanwhile, officials said that Internet services across the State will remain suspended till December 16 to prevent alleged misuse of social media in disturbing peace and to maintain law and order.

Mahanadi bird population took a hit due to Cyclone Fani, says study

From 800 a day before the cyclone, the numbers dropped 81% to 153 a day after

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

Extreme weather events like cyclones can have severe impacts on bird populations of a region, a recent study on the impact of super cyclonic storm Fani on a stretch of 40 km along the Mahanadi river has revealed.

The study was conducted by researcher Subrat Debata, who accessed and kept a record of the bird population before and after the cyclone that made landfall on the Odisha coast on May 3, 2019.

The study has revealed that the population of sandbar-nesting birds along a 40-km stretch from Baideshwari to Kakhadi along the Mahanadi river declined by 81%.

"As of May 2, 2019, a day before the cyclone, there were a total of 269 active nests and 154 chicks along the 40-km river stretch. On May 4, 2019, a day after the cyclone made landfall, all the nesting sites were damaged and none of the active nests or chicks of any species survived," said Mr. Debata.

The study also found that the population of the birds a day before the cyclone was about 800, which dropped to 153 a day after the cyclone. The researcher said that



Great loss: Nesting habitat of the Indian skimmer before Cyclone Fani; the body of a river tern chick in the Mahanadi river after the cyclone. ■ SHIV SAHAY SINGH

out of 154 chicks of all species, he could only detect the carcass of 12 chicks of Indian skimmer and seven chicks of river tern in the river.

The highest decline was observed in the case of *Glareola lactea* (little pratincole) whose population dropped from over 500 to 50 before and after the cyclone.

Details of the study have been published this month in the Journal of Threatened Taxa in a paper titled *Impact of cyclone Fani on the breeding success of sandbar-nesting birds along the Mahanadi River in Odisha, India*.

The study focused on eight species of sandbar nesting birds, which prefer riverine habitat and at times lay their eggs on the sandbars which emerge from the river when

the water recedes during the summer.

The researcher said that an increase in the water level and high tide in the river resulted in the submergence and flooding of the islands.

Nests flooded

"The heavy rain and rise in water level might have resulted in flooding of the nests. Due to high tide and water current, the eggs and chicks might have drowned in water. As the wind speed was very strong during the time, there is a possibility that some of the chicks and adults might have also been blown away," the publication points out.

Among all the eight species of birds that breed along the Mahanadi, five are globally threatened, including Ryn-



chops albicollis (Indian skimmer), classified as Vulnerable as per the IUCN Red list; *Sterna aurantia* (river tern), classified as Near Threatened; *Vannellus duvaucelii* (river lapwing), classified as Near Threatened; and *Esacus recurvirostris* (great thick-knee), also classified as Near Threatened.

Highlighting the significance of the study, Mr. Debata said the changing pattern of global climate would increase the frequency and intensity of storms worldwide, and the possibilities of cyclonic effects on birds are also likely to consequently increase. "The impact can be detrimental and could even lead to local extirpation of the species that represent limited population," the publication added.

Manipur CM's brother kidnapped, rescued in Kolkata; five arrested

The men had barged into victim's flat on Friday

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOLKATA

Five men pretending to be CBI officers went to the apartment of Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's brother Tongbram Lukhui Singh here and kidnapped him, police said on December 14.

However, the police rescued him within hours and arrested the five accused, two of whom were from Manipur. The incident happened on December 13 when the accused carrying

toy guns entered Mr. Singh's rented accommodation in New Town and kidnapped him and one of his associates, the police said, adding that they later called up Mr. Singh's wife and demanded ₹15 lakh.

Following a complaint lodged by Mr. Singh's wife, the police swung into action and rescued the two on the evening of December 13 and arrested the five accused from Beniapukur area in central Kolkata, a senior police officer said.

Of the five accused, two were from Manipur, two from the city and one from Punjab. The police seized two vehicles and three toy guns allegedly used by the accused, besides ₹2 lakh in cash during the raid at their hideout in Beniapukur, he said.

"The accused were working on behalf of someone from Manipur, who chalked out the plan," the police officer said.

The five accused are being interrogated.

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IN BRIEF



Cocaine, Ecstasy pills seized from foreigners

HYDERABAD In the run-up to the New Year celebrations, Telangana Prohibition and Excise Department's Enforcement officials seized eight grams of cocaine, nine grams of MDMA and four Ecstasy pills from a Palestinian and an Omani national, on Banjara Hills Road Number 12 on Saturday. The police have filed a case against the alleged drug peddlers Saeed Ali, 33, from Palestine, and Abdurabu, 29, from Oman.

Driver held for sexually abusing minor daughter

KOLLAM A driver of the Kerala State Transport Corporation was arrested here on Saturday for allegedly sexually abusing his 13-year-old daughter. Manoj, 40, was held on a complaint by the district childcare authorities. "It seems he used to sexually abuse the child after getting drunk. The child informed her mother and the Child line was informed," a probe officer said. PTI

CBI exhumes bones in A.P. student case

Agency collects remains of rape-murder victim to investigate 12-year-old crime afresh

STAFF REPORTER
GUNTUR

Nearly 12 years after the rape and murder of a 24-year-old pharmacy student from Tenali in her hostel at Ibrahimpatnam, near Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh, a CBI team and experts from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) exhumed the remains of the victim at the Idgah in Chenchupeta on Saturday.

The re-post mortem was done over six hours in the presence of police, revenue officials, the student's parents and religious heads.

High Court directive

The CBI started a fresh investigation in the case after the High Court of Andhra Pradesh ordered the agency to take it up, based on petitions filed by the victim's parents alleging that vital evidence was destroyed in the lower court while the appeal petition was pending in the High Court.

On Saturday morning, the CBI team collected evidence at the burial ground site with the help of local revenue and

Digging deep

Key developments after the sexual assault and murder of a pharmacy student at a ladies hostel in Ibrahimpatnam in Andhra Pradesh on December 27, 2007

Aug. 2008: Police arrest suspect Pidatala Satyam Babu

Sept. 2010: Trial court sentences Satyam Babu to life imprisonment

Oct. 2010: Satyam Babu files petition in the High Court challenging the conviction

March 31, 2017: High Court of Judicature for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana acquits Satyam Babu

April 2, 2017: Satyam Babu released from Rajahmundry Central Prison

police personnel. They collected bones of lower jaw, skull, elbow joint and preserved them in a box.

Professors of Forensic Medicine from Gandhi Medical College and Osmania Medical College were also present as the bones were placed in the form of a human body.

The CBI team refused to divulge details, while hun-

dreds of locals gathered outside the ground. The remains would be taken to the CFSL in Hyderabad to piece together the evidence.

Father hopes for justice

Turning emotional after watching the procedure, the father of the girl said the family hoped that justice would be delivered after 12 years.



Murder trail: Re-postmortem being conducted at the burial site of the pharmacy student in Tenali on Saturday. ■ T. VIJAYA KUMAR

Aug. 2017: Government constitutes a Special Investigation Team to re-investigate the case

Aug. 2018: Parents of the victim tell High Court that vital evidence in the case was destroyed during trial

Nov. 2018: High Court hands over the case to CBI and directed it to investigate the case afresh

Dec. 2018: CBI registers separate FIR against the court staff for destroying the evidence

July 2019: CBI seeks permission from the victim's parents and the court to conduct re-postmortem

Dec. 14, 2019: Remains exhumed, re-postmortem conducted

Yediyurappa yet to approach BJP Central leaders

Cabinet expansion, a tough call

B.S. SATISH KUMAR
BENGALURU

Though Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa has cited the busy schedule of the BJP Central leadership for putting off the Cabinet expansion exercise to the fourth week of December, it is learnt that he is yet to formally approach the leadership on the issue.

"Mr. Yediyurappa is yet to come to us with a formal proposal regarding ministerial expansion," said a highly placed source in the BJP Central leadership.

"Yes, we are focussing on Jharkhand elections now. But every day, most top leaders return to New Delhi after campaigning in Jharkhand. The leadership will definitely find time to discuss the issue with Mr. Yediyurappa if he comes out with a formal proposal," he said.

Several senior party MLAs are also lobbying hard for ministerial berths. This is learnt to have complicated the matter as Mr. Yediyurappa would have to ensure a semblance of balance in the Ministry between the "outsiders" and those from the party cadre.

Mr. Yediyurappa may be taking time to negotiate with the defeated defectors and ministerial aspirants from the party, said another leader in the BJP State unit.

Meanwhile, the BJP Central leadership is learnt to have taken a firm decision against creating additional posts of Deputy Chief Ministers or removing any of the three existing posts.

The two defeated defectors, A.H. Vishwanath and N. Nagaraju (MTB), and another defector R. Shankar, who did not contest the bypolls, appear to be firm that they too should be accommodated in the Ministry



B.S. Yediyurappa

along with the 11 who won. This has turned out to be a tough call for the Chief Minister as only 16 berths are vacant in the Ministry and he needs to accommodate others from the party too," a prominent BJP leader said.

All eyes have been on the Ministerial expansion ever since the BJP ensured stability of its government by winning 12 out of the total 15 seats in the bypolls, the results of which were announced on December 9.

Political situation

The time being taken for expanding the Ministry even after the resounding victory is being seen as an indication of the complexity of the political situation faced by Mr. Yediyurappa in balancing various lobbies.

"It is a good day today," said the RDO while addressing the crowd. The Dalits marched for about four km to the village from Pattikonda town and entered the temple in a great furore.

'Callous' driver causes boy's death in Kerala

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A 13-year-old boy was injured after he was hit by a car in Palakkad district recently, but the driver allegedly abandoned him en route to a hospital. He was later pronounced dead at a nearby hospital, prompting the Kerala Human Rights Commission to register a suo motu case.

The police arrested the driver on Friday after the family filed a complaint.

Sujith, a Class 7 student, was hit by the car on December 12 at Kaithakuzhi. The driver agreed to take him to hospital. A neighbour too went along. But en route, the driver told him that the car had a flat tyre and asked him to take the child in another vehicle. The police said the driver admitted to abandoning the boy and lying about the flat tyre.

Dalits enter 200-year-old temple in A.P. village for the first time

Villagers take out a massive procession

TADI VIDURA
KURNool

Celebration rented the air at Hosur village of Pattikonda mandal in Andhra Pradesh's Kurnool district on Saturday when 300 Dalit families formally entered the temple for the first time. A massive procession, led by various caste organisations, was taken out from Ambedkar statue in Pattikonda town to the village.

According to the temple



Good beginning: Dalits entering the temple in Hosur village of Kurnool on Saturday. ■ U. SUBRAMANYAM

authorities, while the records for the Veerabhadra Swamy (village deity of Hosur) temple exist only from the 1960s, the temple is said to be about 200 years old. Dalits of the village were not allowed into the temple

since the beginning.

The village's power structures were challenged by young educated Dalits in early September. The Dalits demanded that they be included in the 'Peerala Panduga' (Muharram) processions. However, "caste Hindus" disagreed to include them.

When the police tried to intervene, "caste Hindus" along with Muslims hurled stones at officers damaging a few vehicles and injuring a few policemen. Later, cases were registered against a few people. This brought the village into the lime-light.

This attention brought va-

rious caste organisations and the Human Rights Forum (HRF) to Hosur. These organisations alleged that the Dalits in Hosur were facing numerous issues, including exclusion from temples.

The district authorities took up the issue and held about four meetings with Dalits and "caste Hindus". In the meetings, Dhone DSP V. Narayana Reddy and the Adoni Revenue Divisional Officer A. Balaganeshiah asked the "caste Hindus" to allow Dalits into the temple.

According to the authorities, the "caste Hindus" agreed to the propositions and told them that Dalits could enter the temple freely.

On Saturday, Dalits, led by Kula Vivaksha Porata Samithi (Organisation against Caste Discrimination, KVPS) and Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti (MRPS), entered the temple. This was the first time in the village's history that Dalits formally entered the temple.

"It is a good day today," said the RDO while addressing the crowd. The Dalits marched for about four km to the village from Pattikonda town and entered the temple in a great furore.

The wind in the winnows



Reaping benefits: As the sun sets, farmers winnowing paddy in Belagavi district of Karnataka on Saturday. ■ P.K. BADIGER

Both factions hold separate State committee meetings

HIRAN UNNIKRISHNAN
KOTTAYAM

The escalating factional war within the Kerala Congress (M) has entered yet another delicate phase with the rival groups led by Jose K. Mani and party working chairman P.J. Joseph deciding to go their own way, putting the United Democratic Front (UDF) leadership in a quandary ahead of the local body elections in the State.

With both groups holding separate State committee meetings here on Saturday, the doors of consensus between the factions now appear shut, at least for the time being. While the State committee meeting convened by the Jose faction commenced the procedures to elect the new party chairman and fill the vacancies at the helm, the meeting by the

rival group resolved not to share its seats with the Jose group in the local body elections.

Armed with a few orders, including that by the State Election Commission in his favour, Mr. Joseph is determined to push ahead with his strategies to firm up his control over the regional entity.

Accordingly, the faction initiated the procedures for election of the new party chairman by appointing Sanjan Francis as returning officer.

The election to the posts, according to Jose group leaders, will be based on consensus. Meanwhile, the existing office-bearers, appointed last year, can continue till 2021.

They also hinted at the possibility of Mr. Joseph seeking to initiate disciplin-

ary action against Jose K. Mani for organising a parallel party meeting. "Mr. Mani is repeating his mistakes by convening unauthorised meetings for the second time. Let him release the photographs of the people who attended the meeting. A large majority of them are not actual members of the KCM State committee," Mr. Joseph said in Thodupuzha.

Mr. Mani, on the other hand, is resolved not to wilt under pressure and decided to field his own candidates in all the seats to be allocated to the KCM in the next local body elections.

Claiming transparency in all organisational activities of his faction, he pointed out that the State committee meeting had been convened based on a list endorsed by the State returning officer.

The faction review

In 2012, Shweta Saran, whose daughter is now a little over nine years old, made the page with the intention of helping people get reviews on schools from other

parents. It has since evolved to cover more issues that are actively discussed. A group of parents help run the platform.

The social media page allows parents to take 'virtual' tours of 15 schools through Facebook live, which is followed by FAQs on various topics such as pupil-teacher

ratio in classrooms, curriculum followed and so on.

The idea to organise an expo took root after they received requests from parents to organise events offline as well. Some schools have also agreed to come on board as sponsors.

A lot of thought and planning has gone into it. Manoj Thelakkat, co-admin, Bangalore Schools, said that they have been visiting several expos in the last one-and-a-half years. "None of them connected parents, students, educators, school management and service providers on one platform and our expo tries to bring them together," he said.

The expo will be held on January 4 and January 5 at NIMHANS convention hall. Entry is free.

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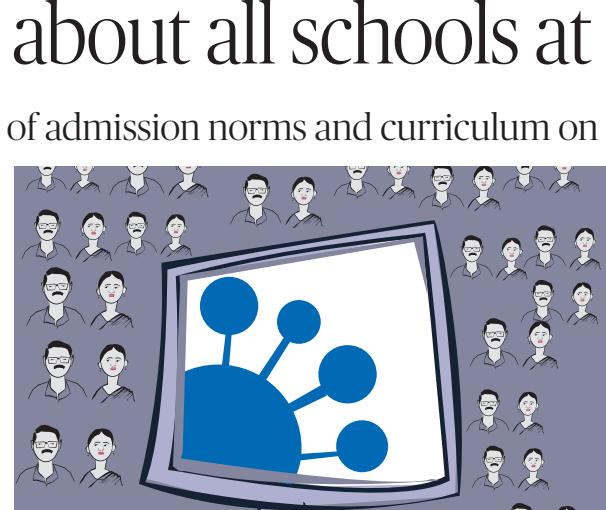
tine – two five-minute "stretch breaks" at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. – and everyone seems to have embraced it," said Bipin Gopal, State Nodal Officer for NCD Control.

The idea of "stretch breaks" was introduced as part of the workplace inter-

ventions that the State NCD Control division has been planning, to introduce people to physical activity and to get people to move more to keep lifestyle diseases in check.

"We realised that the salaried class were at higher risk

Parents get to know of admission norms and curriculum on one platform



it has nearly 43,000 members, a majority of whom are parents.

Firsthand review

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IN BRIEF



High legal costs cut access to justice: CJ

NAGPUR
Chief Justice of India Sharad Bobde said on Saturday that high legal costs block access to justice, and added that lawyers might have to see their role as mediators and not only as "professional men paid to argue". He also stated that "we need to introduce pre-litigation mediation". PTI

Withdraw advisory to TV channels: Editors Guild

NEW DELHI
The Editors Guild of India on Saturday sought the withdrawal of a recent advisory issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting asking all private television channels to desist from showing content that could incite violence or promote "anti-national attitudes". The Guild said it believes that the media's overall commitment to responsible coverage of developments in the country should not be questioned through such an advisory. PTI

Minor girl gang-raped, killed in Odisha

NABARANGPUR
A 16-year-old girl was allegedly kidnapped, gang-raped and subsequently killed in Odisha's Nabarangpur district, the police said on Saturday. The incident happened at Gumandli village on Friday night. Local residents found the minor's body on a paddy field on Saturday morning.

JNU VC says students tried to attack him

NEW DELHI
JNU Vice-Chancellor Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar on Saturday claimed that a group of 15-20 students surrounded him "in a violent manner" on the campus and abused and tried to attack him but the university security staff and police personnel rescued him. The university has been seeing protests over hike in hostel fees. PTI

Three lakh rural habitations lack quality drinking water supply

Rajasthan, Bengal, Assam, T.N. among worst affected

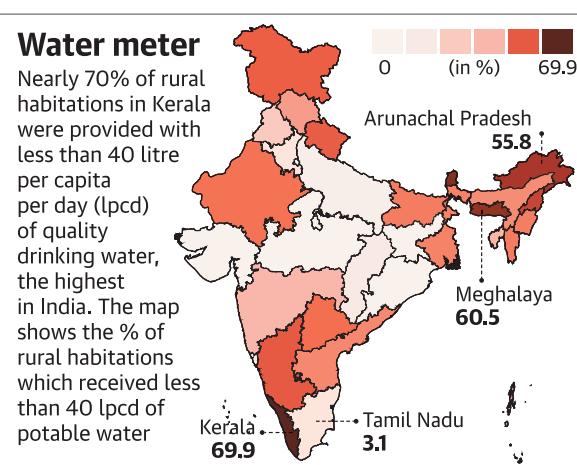
BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

Over three lakh rural habitations across the country continue to be deprived of the government's minimum prescribed provision of 40 litre per capita per day (lpcd) of potable drinking water with assured quality.

With the ambition to now achieve a service level of 55 lpcd by 2024, the data presented by the Ministry of Jal Shakti in the Lok Sabha this past week notes that Rajasthan, West Bengal, Assam top the list where the coverage is facing quality issues or seeing diminished supply.

Bihar, Punjab, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand are the other States which are battling the problem.

The Ministry noted that the coverage was monitored in terms of habitations hav-



ing provision of a minimum 40 lpcd with sources at a reasonable distance.

"As reported by States/UTs till Dec., 2019, 81.27% rural habitations having 76.61% population have provision of minimum 40 lpcd of potable drinking water and 15.56% rural habitations having 19.69% population have service level of less than 40 lpcd, whereas 3.17% rural habitations having 3.69% population are with water

sources having quality issues," noted Minister for Jal Shakthi Gajendra Singh Shekhawat.

Fund sharing

He explained that the fund-sharing pattern between the Centre and the States/UTs for the National Rural Drinking Water Programme, a Centrally sponsored programme, was 100% for the Union Territories, 90:10 for the Himalayan & the north-

eastern States and 50:50 for other States. The Ministry noted that in the past five years ₹31,569.77 crore had been made available to States and since 2014, to improve piped water supply in low income States, namely Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, ₹1,185.23 crore had been released with the assistance of the World Bank.

Also to provide safe drinking water to 27,544 identified arsenic and fluoride affected rural habitations, the National Water Quality Sub-Mission was launched and so far ₹3,690.34 crore had been released. "To meet the domestic needs of every rural household, the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) has been launched in August, 2019 which aims at providing portable water through Functional Household Tap Connection (FHTC) at service level of 55 lpcd by 2024 with an outlay of ₹3.60 lakh crore, in partnerships with States," said the Minister in his reply.

Hybrid lanes to ease traffic and avoid hardships to public: govt.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

To avert inconvenience to citizens, the government said on Saturday that up to 25% of FASTag lanes at the National Highway toll plazas would be treated as hybrid lanes for a month.

The hybrid lane will accept FASTag and other modes of payment. The government had earlier announced rollout of mandatory FASTag for electronic toll collection from December 1, which was later extended to December 15, 2019.

"Considering the request of the NHAI and further that citizens are not put to inconvenience... it is decided that depending on the traffic pile-up at high traffic volume fee plazas, not more than 25% of the FASTag lanes may be temporarily converted to hybrid lanes," the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways said.

This should be considered on a case-to-case ba-



No waiting: The government had earlier extended the date to December 15 for making FASTag mandatory. ■ SIVA SARAVANAN

sis, the Ministry added.

"A daily evaluation of such cases should be made to take necessary corrective action," it said. It should be ensured that at least 75% lanes of every fee plaza remain operational as FASTag lanes, it added.

Temporary measure
The Ministry clarified that it is a temporary measure to be adopted for 30 days only to facilitate smooth flow of traffic.

The National Electronic

Toll Collection programme, the flagship initiative of the Ministry, has been implemented on a pan-India basis in order to remove bottlenecks and ensure seamless movement of traffic and collection of user fee, using passive radio frequency identification (RFID) technology.

A customer may dial the helpline number '1033' for any assistance related to FASTags, the Ministry had said, and added that they could also reach out to banks to obtain FASTags.

NPPA hikes ceiling price of 12 essential medicines

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has hiked the ceiling price of 12 essential first-line treatment drugs, crucial in the public health programme, by 50% to ensure availability of these drugs.

"Many companies have applied for discontinuation of the product on account of high cost of the raw material for these drugs. Access to these drugs cannot be jeopardised. Also, we did not want the public to be forced to switch to costly alternatives," the NPPA noted.

The NPPA invoked extraordinary powers under

para 19 of DPCO 2013 for upward revision of the low-priced drugs. "To address the situation arising due to repeated price control, one-time increase of 50% from the present ceiling price is being considered in public interest as an exceptional measure," noted an order issued on December 13.

The drugs consist of 21 formulations of varying doses – BCG vaccine, Benzathine Benzylpenicillin, Benzypenicillin, Choloroquine, Dapsone, Furosemide, Metronidazole, Ascorbic Acid or Vitamin C tablets, Co-trimoxazole, Pheniramine, Prednisolone and Clofazamine.

"Somehow this couldn't be done so far," an official told *The Hindu*, "but one of the points taken up was about having this meeting more regularly."

The meeting was also attended by Uttar Pradesh

Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and several Union Ministers attend

Modi chairs first meeting of Ganga council

Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and several Union Ministers attend



Thorough appraisal: Prime Minister Narendra Modi reviews the Namami Gange project in Kanpur on Saturday. ■ PTI

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath; Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat; Union Ministers Prakash Javadekar, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Harsh Vardhan, R.K. Singh, Prahlad Patel, Mansukh Mandavia and Hardeep Singh Puri. Several officials from Bihar, Ut-

tar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal – all Ganga basin States – were also present.

The full quorum of the Council – with the Prime Minister in attendance – is largely ceremonial. The work of coordinating, supervising and deliberating on funding Namami Ganga projects is carried out by an executive committee of the National Mission for Clean Ganga that meets every month. The latest meeting was on December 3.

Mr. Modi also took a boat ride from Atal Ghat to Sisamau drain outfall point. The Sisamau drain was one of the official said.

Asia largest drains that emptied nearly 140 million litres of untreated sewage into the Ganga and was a symbol of pollution in the river. It no longer empties sewage into the Ganga but the river continues to be unfit for bathing or use as a drinking water source, *The Hindu* reported in July.

On his return, Mr. Modi stumbled and fell on the steps of the Atal Ghat. The official cited earlier said he was in the vicinity and the Prime Minister appeared unharmed.

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WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY

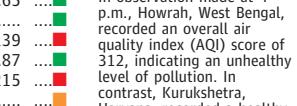


Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorms likely in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Cold wave conditions very likely in isolated pockets over Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Dense fog likely in pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	SO ₂	NO _x	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Agartala	29.0	29.0	12.7	29.0	17.7	109	0.88	0.88	■
Ahmedabad	26.6	26.6	13.3	20.3	8.9	8.9	0.88	0.88	■
Aizawl	20.3	20.3	11.6	16.8	16.8	16.8	0.88	0.88	■
Allahabad	0.2	20.3	16.5	28.8	20.0	20.0	0.88	0.88	■
Bengaluru	4.5	4.5	18.0	25.9	13.8	13.8	0.88	0.88	■
Bhopal	25.9	25.9	13.8	29.2	18.4	18.4	0.88	0.88	■
Bhubaneswar	29.2	29.2	18.4	31.3	21.3	21.3	0.88	0.88	■
Chandigarh	38.3	19.2	10.3	24.6	26.6	22.9	0.88	0.88	■
Chennai	24.6	24.6	10.3	20.2	18.4	18.4	0.88	0.88	■
Coimbatore	0.2	24.6	22.9	18.8	18.8	18.8	0.88	0.88	■
Dehradun	8.3	18.9	7.3	12.8	8.1	5.4	0.88	0.88	■
Gangtok	12.8	12.8	5.4	34.4	22.5	22.5	0.88	0.88	■
Goa	29.0	29.0	22.5	27.2	13.5	13.5	0.88	0.88	■
Guwahati	27.2	27.2	13.5	29.0	19.0	19.0	0.88	0.88	■
Hubballi	29.0	29.0	19.0	29.0	21.0	21.0	0.88	0.88	■
Hyderabad	29.0	29.0	20.0	22.3	6.5	6.5	0.88	0.88	■
Imphal	22.3	22.3	6.5	31.6	25.8	25.8	0.88	0.88	■
Jaipur	19.6	19.6	9.0	24.4	6.4	6.4	0.88	0.88	■
Kochi	31.6	25.8	25.8	24.4	6.4	6.4	0.88	0.88	■
Kohima	24.4	24.4	6.4	24.4	6.4	6.4	0.88	0.88	■
Kolkata	28.1	20.0	20.0	28.1	12.0	12.0	0.88	0.88	■

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday



In observation made at 4 p.m., Howrah, West Bengal, recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 312, indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In Coimbatore, Kurnool, Haryana, recorded a healthy AQI score of 33.

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.)

NO_x: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease.

Snakebites claimed 3,000 lives between 2016 and 2018

The figure provided is not even the tip of the iceberg, says expert

SHIV SAHAY SINGH
KOLKATA

More than 3,000 people died of snakebite between 2016 and 2018, data provided by the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence to Parliament says.

The number of deaths in the past three years stood at 3,013 – 1,068 in 2016, 1,060 in 2017 and 885 in 2018. West Bengal with 609 deaths in the three years – 138,

FROM PAGE ONE

Protests turn violent in West Bengal

Violence was reported in Howrah near Garfa Bridge on Kona Expressway where protesters attacked several buses and set them on fire. In the same district, a ticket counter at Sankrail was set on fire on Friday. Protests and road blockades by burning tyres was also reported from at Domjur and Bauria. At several places in the district protests and disruptions were reported at different railway stations.

More than half a dozen

long distance trains of South Eastern Railways were cancelled and trains remained stuck at various stations. Suburban railway services in Sealdah Hasnabad section in North 24 Parganas were affected as protesters squatted on the railway track.

There were reports of protests from several places in the district as also from Murari in Birbhum district and a few places in Paschim Medinipur district.

Meghalaya Chief Minister for entry permit

A delegation led by Mr. Sangma met Mr. Shah late on Friday night and demanded that some "protection" on the lines of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) be also implemented in the State.

Mr. Sangma said the Amended Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Bill (MRRSA) 2019, similar to the ILP, which was passed by the Cabinet in the form of an ordinance in November, still awaited Governor Tathagata Roy's assent.

Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram are under the ILP system and have been exempted from the Citizenship legislation.

"There are misconceptions around the ordi-

nance, it is not to bar outsiders from visiting the State. It is an information collection mechanism and anyone who wants to come to our State has to register beforehand online or on reaching here. It is for the security of the State and also the person coming here. We told the Home Minister that the ordinance awaits the Governor's nod and he assured that he will exercise his mind," Mr. Sangma told *The Hindu*.

The Home Minister assured us that the issue will be resolved soon," he said.

The Meghalaya government has decided to convene a special one-day session of the Assembly to bring in a resolution to implement the Inner Line Permit regime in the State.

'Modi has to apologise for destroying economy'

"The BJP asked me to apologise. My name is not Rahul Savarkar, it is Rahul Gandhi, and I will never apologise for speaking the truth. I will die, but I will not apologise for speaking the truth, nor will any Congressman do so. It is Narendra Modi and his assistant Amit Shah who have to apologise to the country for destroying India's economy," Mr. Gandhi said.

"All of India's enemies wanted that its economy, which is its strength, should be destroyed. That work [destruction] has not been done by the enemies, but by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself. And, [he] still calls himself a patriot," he said.

The former Congress

chief said the economy was hit so hard because of demonetisation that it is yet to recover and claimed that the actual growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 2.5% if one went by the earlier method of calculation.

Referring to the CAA, the Congress leader alleged that the BJP and Mr. Modi have set the entire north-east region on fire and States such as Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh are burning.

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh criticised Mr. Modi for not delivering on his promise of making India a \$5-trillion economy, double farm income in five years and offer two crore jobs to youth every year.

ICF gets nod to make Vande Bharat rakes

The second rake, flagged off a couple of months ago, is operating between New Delhi and Katra. The production was halted over the alleged procedural flaws in the making of the train," a senior railway officer said.

The tenders to make more Train18 rakes were withdrawn after the Vigilance Directorate launched a probe into the allegations that included one company being favoured in the making of the first two rakes.

While then ICF General Manager S. Mani retired from service, then Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer Shubhranshu, who played a key role in the project, and a few others were not only transferred but served questionnaires by the vigilance officials to respond to the allegations.

Even as the investigation was on, the Railway Board proposed to procure 60 rakes by floating global tenders. The reason why production was halted at the ICF was that the rakes were found to be heavier and also consuming more power compared to the Shatabdi Express. The move drew sharp criticism from railway officials including Mr. Shubhranshu who recorded his

protest in writing to the Chairman Railway Board, the All India Railwaymen Federation and a couple of political parties that raised the issue in Parliament.

The 45 rakes, meaning 720 coaches, that the ICF has been mandated to make now will be on a revised design of the Train18 model approved by the RDSO. Parrying questions on whether the new specifications would weigh lesser to minimise electricity consumption, the official who preferred not to be quoted, said the new design would conform to world-class standards of comfort and safety.

Considering the fact that the earlier two rakes were made at a cost of ₹100 crore each, the 45 rakes for which tenders will be floated soon meant an order of at least ₹5,000 crore taking escalation in the cost of materials and other modifications into account, the official said. He said full credit to restore the project to the ICF went to Railway Minister Piyush Goyal who recently told Parliament that he was proud of the ICF which made the Vande Bharat Express, the first high-speed train made in the 168-year history of the Indian Railways.

Mr. Naidu said as against the scheduled available time of 108 hours, 33 minutes with 20 sittings, the House functioned for 107 hours 11 minutes resulting in a productivity of over 99%.

He said the monsoon session with over 100% productivity succeeded by equally effective winter session was perhaps the first time that the House had functioned so well for two consecutive sessions.

"A total of 11 hours, 47 minutes, accounting for about 11% of the available time of the House, has been lost due to interruptions. Spurred by the sense of duty, the members, however, sat for 10 hours, 52 minutes beyond the scheduled hours, resulting in a productivity of close to 100%."

He said the Upper House clocked the best performance in 49 years with an average 9.5 starred questions orally replied every day and 39% of the time spent on passing Bills.

CMK

A chorus to bring back Rahul

Younger leaders ask him to be the face of the fight against the Modi government

SANDEEP PHUKAN
NEW DELHI

Not just Rahul Gandhi's aggressive speech but the whole *Bharat Bachao* (Save India) rally here on Saturday seemed to be a carefully planned setting for him to make a comeback as Congress president.

From party workers shouting Mr. Gandhi's name in chorus to having 30-foot-tall cutouts all over the historic Ramlila Maidan, the rally saw young leaders such as Sachin Pilot, Jyotiraditya Scindia and Rajiv Satav asking him to be the face of the fight against the Modi government.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said the party may have lost the Lok Sabha election, but the issues such as economic slowdown, joblessness and alleged corruption in defence deals like the Rafale fighter jet were still relevant.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel credited the former Congress chief with promising higher minimum support price to the farmers of the State. "As Rahulji had promised *nyay* [justice], I want to tell the people every farmer will get *nyay* by receiving ₹2,500 in their pockets," he said.

Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot urged Mr. Gandhi and his sister,



Venting their anger: Congress workers during the Bharat Bachao rally at the Ramlila grounds in New Delhi on Saturday. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

Priyanka, to resolve to travel around the country and revive the country to take on the BJP.

Pitching for a change of regime in the country, Mr. Scindia said "the war cry at Ramlila ground should reverberate across the country under Soniaji and Rahulji's leadership".

Congress leader from Maharashtra Rajeev Satav, who was handicapped by Mr. Gandhi, asked the former party chief to be the face against the party's fight against the Modi-led government.

Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, the only leader who addressed the rally in English, too talked about the ideology of Hindutva ideologues like M.S. Golwalkar and V.D. Savarkar being pursued by the government.

Broken economy

"Today, India is suspect in the eyes of the world. India's economy is broken, India's polity is broken and India's leadership has completely failed us. If it is one person who should bear the responsibility, it is Narendra Modi,"

Mr. Chidambaram said.

"They are pushing an agenda which does not belong to Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru or Babasaheb Ambedkar. The agenda they are pushing is the agenda of Golwalkar and Savarkar. Your job, my job, our job is to fight the agenda of Golwalkar and Savarkar which will break India. I want you to stand up and fight the BJP and save India," he said.

On Kashmir, he said the voice of 75 lakh people was being suppressed and now they had spread unrest in the northeast.

Oppose politics of divide, says Priyanka

'Our Constitution will be destroyed'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday launched a scathing attack on the ruling BJP for the "injustices" done by its government, and said those who did not fight "the prevailing situation today will go down in history as cowards".

Addressing the *Bharat Bachao* (Save India) Rally, Ms. Vadra urged everyone to come together to fight the "divisive and disruptive" policies of the BJP government.



C If we remain silent, the division of the country will start and we will all be responsible

PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA
Congress leader

father's blood is in this soil just as the blood of the Unnao victim is nurturing this earth. This country is ours and it is our moral duty to save it," she said as her mother and party chief Sonia Gandhi and brother, Rahul, listened to her.

She also took a dig at the BJP election campaign *Modi hai to mumkin hai* (Modi makes it possible).

"When I saw the father of the Unnao rape victim burying his face in his palms and crying, I remembered my own father whose body I saw as a 19-year-old. My

NIA yet to file chargesheet in Pulwama case

With prime suspects killed in various operations, the exact details of the attack are difficult to know

VIJAYA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has not filed a chargesheet in the Pulwama terror incident, nine months after the attack took place, as none of the key suspects are alive.

The two main suspects, Mudasir Ahmed Khan and Sajjad Bhat, were killed in an encounter with security forces in March and June, respectively.

The third, Adil Ahmed Dar, was on a suicide mission. On February 14, Dar, a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) member, rammed a vehicle into a CRPF bus on the Jammu-Srinagar highway near Pulwama in South Kashmir. All the 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel



Ground zero: The National Investigation Agency received the forensic report used in the Pulwama attack. ■ REUTERS

in the bus were killed. The JeM is a Pakistan-based terrorist outfit. A senior government official said that since the prime suspects were killed in various operations, the exact details of the attack were difficult to know.

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"We know the broad contours of the case but in a chargesheet the role of each individual has to be spelt out. We have identified the suspects and will file an overall chargesheet in the incident regarding the role of Pa-

kistan and Pakistan-based terror outfits in planning the attack," said the official.

Another official said that after the Pathankot terror attack 2016, all the four terrorists who stormed the airbase were killed but after several months a chargesheet was filed against Jaish chief Masood Azhar and three others who are based in Pakistan.

Under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the investigation agency has 90 days to file a chargesheet in court but this can be extended if the suspects are dead or additional time is required.

In June, Minister of State for Home G. Kishan Reddy said in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha that the Pulwama terror attack was not an

"intelligence failure" and "the investigation by the NIA so far has resulted in identifying the conspirators, suicide attacker and the vehicle provider".

Sajjad Bhat's car was used in the Pulwama attack. It was first sold in 2011 and was then resold several times before Bhat purchased it on February 4, 10 days before the attack.

Mudasir Ahmed Khan, the other suspect killed in an encounter in March, had arranged for the explosives.

The NIA received the forensic report used in the attack but it is yet to trace the origin of the high-grade military explosives. Crucial evidence was washed away due to heavy rain at the site of the attack the next day.

Session productive, quality of debates improved: Venkaiah

15 Bills were passed; MPs sat beyond scheduled hours'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The 250th session of the Rajya Sabha that was adjourned *sine die* on Friday recorded near 100% productivity. House Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu complimented the members for making the session productive and for improving the quality of debates.

"I am overall happy for this session but for the small disappointment which also could have been avoided," he told the House during his valedictory address at the completion of the session.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was present during the valedictory remarks.

"I am glad that collectively, all of you have risen to the occasion and kept up the happy tide. I would like to sum up the course of this historic session as one marked by seriousness and brevity," Mr. Naidu said.

The Chairman said the session had steadied the stormy ship which had been facing stormy waters for some time now.

Best show in 49 years' He said the Upper House clocked the best performance in 49 years with an average 9.5 starred questions orally replied every day and 39% of the time spent on passing Bills.

SCHEDULED TIME:	108 hours, 33 minutes
FUNCTIONED FOR:	107 hours, 11 minutes
TIME SPENT	39% Legislative business
25.4%	Discussion on matters of public importance
13%	Question Hour
5%	Private Members' Bills

Mr. Naidu said as against the scheduled available time of 108 hours, 33 minutes with 20 sittings, the House functioned for 107 hours 11 minutes resulting in a productivity of over 99%.

He said the monsoon session with over 100% productivity succeeded by equally effective winter session was perhaps the first time that the House had functioned so well for two consecutive sessions.

"A total of 11 hours, 47 minutes, accounting for about 11% of the available time of the House, has been lost due to interruptions. Spurred by the sense of duty, the members, however, sat for 10 hours, 52 minutes beyond the scheduled time

The Chairman said that during the session, 39% of the functional time was spent on legislative business, 25.4% on raising and discussing matters of urgent public importance, 13% on Question Hour and 5% on private members' bills.

He said 15 Bills were passed and the discussions were qualitative as "they have brought out the best from all sides of this August House. Spirited arguments and counter-arguments were made from both the sides."

He said 199 Zero Hour submissions and 115 Special Mentions were made at the record 14 and seven a day, respectively, as against nine and 5.5 during the previous session.

While countries like

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Saturday, that one of the problems in building partnerships in the Indo-Pacific maritime region was the lack of consensus on what such a concept meant or "even its geographic extent".

Indian Ocean Region (IORA) countries should, therefore, build on a common vision, he said.

They all had the guiding principle of ensuring that the region remained "open and free for inclusive partnerships with all, within the parameters of sovereignty, equality, and a rules-based system."

The challenge, however, was that countries to the west of India had fewer mechanisms than those to the east to pursue such ties.

INTERVIEW | ABDULLA SHAHID

'Security ties with India a priority, but China a generous donor on infra'

New Delhi has means, location and a generous heart towards us which actually makes security relationship our reality, says the Maldives Foreign Minister

SUHASINI HAIDAR

Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid met his counterpart S. Jaishankar on Friday for the first India-Maldives Joint Commission to be held in four years. In an exclusive interview, he said bilateral ties on development projects are going apace, but also that the Maldives is staying the course on Chinese projects, despite misgivings over past loans.

Your government has been in office for a year now. How is India-Maldives development progressing?

■ Unfortunately since 2015, we have not had a joint commission meeting, for obvious reasons, because we did not have the best of relations. I think it is essential that we continue the formal process. Since President [Ibrahim Mohamed] Solih took office a year ago, we have had a whirlwind relationship; the leaders have met so many times, in Male, Delhi and New York. The desire they

both have is to get things done, to consolidate the relationship.

In particular, India has announced \$1.4 billion in budgetary support in addition to a \$8,000-million line of credit and others. Would you prefer India's focus to be on small development projects (SDPs) or in large infrastructure projects?

■ The good thing about the Indian assistance at present is that it is spread out. Already we have more than 100

million rupiah projects awarded which have social impact, and some of those have been completed in record time. We have an India-assisted convention centre on one of the islands, which has brought in livelihood for people as well as fish processing projects. Last week, the leaders announced three more projects.

What are your priorities on defence assistance? In the Yameen government's tenure, there were many irritants between the two countries.

■ Our security relationship with India goes back decades. Given the geographical location of India and the Maldives, it is India which is placed best to come to Maldives assistance immediately. India has the means and



For us, the freedom of navigation, the total concept of the Indo-Pacific strategy is paramount

of navigation, the total concept of the Indo-Pacific strategy is paramount, and we are fully part of it. In Washington this year, I assured Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that we will play our role as the heart of the Indian Ocean.

How will your government deal with the issue of China's loans and infrastructure projects?

■ What I tried to say is that, to be fair to China, it has been a generous donor. It has invested in housing and infrastructure projects. There has been irresponsible bor-

rowing by the previous government and unfortunately we have to deal with it. I was in Beijing in September and met the State Councillor and I found in the Chinese leadership goodwill to work with us.

and talking with everyone. Speaker and Party leader Mohammad Nasheed has said that the Maldives wants to "rid itself" of the Chinese debt. Is that your position?

■ No comment. I think the Speaker should be allowed to speak for himself.

India is keen to see the Maldives as an international cricketing nation and build a cricket stadium there. How far has that project come?

■ Land has been allocated. India is not just building infrastructure but capacity. Our teams are already in India, being trained, and our trainers and coaches are also being trained, for which we are grateful. Who knows, we may one day even beat the Indian team (laughs).

IN BRIEF



Fuel shortage hits northeastern States

IMPHAL
The ongoing agitations in Assam have caused a shortage of fuel in the northeastern States since Assam is the supplier. Some States have started rationing petrol and diesel from Saturday. Meanwhile, roadside fuel vendors are profiting by selling at extortionate prices. So far, there is no report of arresting the illegal vendors.

RJD calls for bandh on December 21

PATNA
The Opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) on Saturday called a bandh in Bihar on December 21 in protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, even as the police baton-charged Patna University students who protested against it. 'The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill is a black legislation that has blown the Constitution to smithereens. As a mark of protest, the Rashtriya Janata Dal will organise a Bihar bandh on December 21,' RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav tweeted.



Asaduddin Owaisi

The legislation effectuates discrimination on the basis of the intrinsic and core identity of an individual, that is, his religious identity as a Muslim.

'Singled out'
The Act ensures that only an illegal immigrant who is Muslim would be singled out and prosecuted under the Passports (Entry into India) Act, 1920 or the Foreigners Order 1949 and deprived of his personal liberty.

On the other hand, illegal migrants from the protected six religions would be entitled with Indian citizenship

and the benefits that come with it. While Muslim migrants would have to show their proof of residency in India for at least 11 years, the new law allows illegal migrants from the six communities to be naturalised in five years' time.

Mr. Owaisi quoted Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, "in the name of democracy there must be no tyranny of the majority over the minority".

The Act follows a religion-based classification which is violative of Articles 14, 21 and 25 of the Constitution. In fact, it explicitly discriminates against Muslims as it assumes they do not experience persecution in these countries, the petition said.

A separate petition challenging the new citizenship law was filed by an MP from Kerala, T.N. Prathapan, represented by advocate Suvindu M.S., in the court on Saturday.

Mr. Prathapan said the amendments in the Citizenship Act of 1955 are against the secular ethos of the country and unconstitutional.

"This is to bring to your kind attention the misuse of

A black day



Muslim women protest against the NRC and Citizenship (Amendment) Act at Iqbal Maidan in Bhopal on Saturday. ■ A.M.FARUQUI

France, Israel, U.S., U.K. issue advisories

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

France, Israel, the U.S. and the U.K. have issued travel advisories for nationals travelling to India in view of the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

In a statement by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the U.K. has urged visitors to the northeast to avoid "all but essential" travel and "monitor local media".

It advised against all travel to Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh and all areas (except Wagah) near the Pakistan border.

The U.S. asked citizens to "exercise caution", "The U.S. government has temporarily suspended official travel to Assam," the U.S. has announced.

The French and Israeli governments have urged their citizens to stay alert while travelling in India.

The advisories were issued after the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern saying the Act was "fundamentally discriminatory in nature".

Ensure children are kept out of protests: child rights panel

They are used for stone throwing and other acts, it says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has written to the DGP against the 'misuse' of children in protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act, citing legal provisions applied in cases of organised begging and child marriage.

"This is to bring to your kind attention the misuse of

children in the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act in different parts of the country. It has come to the Commission's notice that certain groups of protesters are involving children in unlawful activities like stone pelting and other violent acts," wrote NCPCCR Chairperson Priyank Kanoongo in a letter to the DGP.

Mr. Kanoongo, an RSS worker before joining the NCPCCR as Member in 2015, cites provisions from the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 to support the advisory. It cites Section 83(2), which is used to nab adult offenders using children in organised begging or trafficking. The offence carries a punishment of up to seven years in jail along with a fine of ₹5 lakh.

SOUTH EASTERN COALFIELDS LIMITED "A MINI RATNA COMPANY"

SECL/BSP/MARKETING & SALES/ROAD SELSIE-AUCTION/677 DATE: 11.12.19
NOTICE

SECL have decided to sell 101200 tonnes of Non-Coking Coal in December 2019 [168 th e-Auction] by Road through Spot e-Auction.

SECL has engaged service provider for conducting e-Auction on behalf of SECL on 18 December - 2019 as per below.

Date	Mode	Product	Service Provider
18/12/2019	Road	Non-Coking Coal	MSTC Limited

For Form to Bank Guarantee and other relevant details consumers/customers are advised to visit the website of Coal India Limited (www.coalindia.in) and service Provider website: www.mstccommerce.com & www.mstcindia.co.in, SECL (www.secl-cil.in), GM(M&S) SECL,Bilaspur

23793/2019

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER, WATER RESOURCES (NORTH) HANUMANGARH

No.:F.2/Actt/NIB/2019-20/3288-8300 Dated: 07-12-19

NB No.02/2019-20

This office invites bids from eligible bidders for 8 nos. works of Rehabilitation of Bhakhra canal system under RWSLIP Estimated Cost Rs. 1575.83 Lacs and Rehabilitation of Gang canal system under RWSLIP Estimated 705.19 Lacs, 662.36 Lacs, 225.65 Lacs, 171.90 Lacs, 731.42 Lacs, 507.25 Lacs, 213.14 Lacs respectively. The other detail can be seen as per bid documents published on websites: [www.dpr.rajasthan.gov.in](http://dpr.rajasthan.gov.in), www.waterreresources.rajasthan.gov.in, <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>, <http://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in>

UBN No.- WRN1920WLOB00163, WRN1920WLOB00164, WRN1920WLOB00165, WRN1920WLOB00166, WRN1920WLOB00167, WRN1920WLOB00168, WRN1920WLOB00169, WRN1920WLOB00170.

Chief Engineer

KARNATAKA STATE WAREHOUSING CORPORATION

"Bheejha Bhavan Building", 4th & 5th Floor, Bellary Road, Hebbal, Bengaluru - 560 024. Tel: 080-23415679

Phone: 080-23415672 Website: www.karnatakastatewarehousing.com

No:KSWC/TECH/TENDER-89/3529/2019-20 DATE:14.12.2019

SHORT TERM Re-TENDER NOTIFICATION

The online e-tenders are invited from the manufacturers of lorry weighbridges for Installation of 60 MTs Electronic Lorry Weigh bridges at State warehouse (1) Maddur, (2) Maluru(Irabanahalli), (3) Devihsur (Haveri), (4) Machenahalli, (5) Bagalakote U-3, (6) Koppala (Guladahalli) and (7) Kadajji (Davanagere). The tenders are invited as per the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurement Act 1999 & Rules 2000. The Last Date for submission of Tender through online **23.12.2019 up to 4.00pm**. The interested tenderers may download tender documents in website : www.eproc.karnataka.gov.in & www.kswc.in The help desk No. is 080-46010000/22631200 or this office for more information.

Managing Director, KSWC.

NC may act against Farooq's detention

Denied meeting for nine weeks: MP

PEERZADA ASHQI

Srinagar
National Conference MP Hasnain Masoodi said on Saturday that he had not been allowed to meet party president Farooq Abdullah, whose detention has been extended by three months.

"I have written three times to the authorities to allow me to meet Dr. Abdullah. Besides being an MP, I am his legal aide. It is now nine weeks that we were denied any meeting," Mr. Masoodi said.

On whether to challenge the Public Safety Act in court, Mr. Masoodi said, "Earlier, Dr. Abdullah was for release of all political detainees and decided against approaching the court for individual relief. I think the NC will have to look afresh now."

NC vice-president Omar Abdullah also remained detained since the August 5 decision to revoke J&K's special status.

Mr. Masoodi said the argument that NC leaders' release was "a threat to public order holds no water".

"NC leaders detained included Sakin Ittoo, daughter of assassinated Assembly speaker Wali Mohammad Ittoo; another assassinated leader son Ishfaq Muhammad; Showkat Gani, who lost his father and two brothers to bullets. The detention move is only aimed

Suggestions by Srikrishna panel left out

SONAM SAIGAL

Mumbai
The retired Supreme Court judge, B.N. Srikrishna, who led the committee that came up with the draft of the Personal Data Protection Bill, said all the safeguards suggested by the committee were no longer part of the Bill.

"We didn't have to pick and follow everything there is in the General Data Protection Regulation. So we built upon it in less than 18 months and mentioned all the safeguards which are no longer part of the Bill."

Commenting on the constitution of the Data Protection Authority of India, he said, "We had said in the draft that the DPA should comprise people who are independent, people who are representatives of the stakeholders and, maybe, some government nominee. However, now all we have is government nominees, so it will be like a government department. That's another dangerous part, it defeats the purpose."

He explained that the government could profile individuals and misuse data in several ways – which book you read, how much money you have in the bank. "All this information can be accessed without your consent. It will lead to framing people and implicating them."

KIDWAI MEMORIAL INSTITUTE OF ONCOLOGY GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA AUTONOMOUS INSTITUTION REGIONAL CENTRE FOR CANCER RESEARCH & TREATMENT MEMBER OF INTERNATIONAL UNION AGAINST CANCER

DR. M.H. Marigowda Road, Bengaluru - 560029.

Phone: 080-26560733, 91-80-26560722 (DIRECTOR), 91-80-26094000, Fax: 91-80-26560723

Date: 11.12.2019

E-PROCUREMENT TENDER NOTIFICATION

Online Tenders are invited in TWO Bid System for the supply of following through GOK e-Procurement.

SI.No. Enquiry No./Date Name of the Equipment

1	No. KMIO/SME(1)Tender/Lifts & Transformer/140/2019-20 dt.11.12.2019	Supply & Installation of Lifts at Bibi Ayesha Ward, Shanthidhamma & Sippani Daga Block & Supply & Installation of 1000 KVA Transformer
2	No. KMIO/SME(1)Tender/M.Equip/141/2019-20 dt. 11.12.2019	Procurement of Liquid Based Cytology with Image Scanner

Vote raises hopes and fears in N. Ireland

For the first time, the election returned more Irish republican than unionist lawmakers to Parliament

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BELFAST

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's crushing election victory gives Britain a chance to move past years of gridlock over Brexit – especially in Northern Ireland, where social and political divides run deep. "We're leaving limbo," said Orlaith McKeever, preparing food for the lunchtime rush at St. George's Market in Belfast, a redbrick rabbits' warren of stalls and kiosks.

Thursday's snap general became a re-run of the 2016 EU membership referendum in which Mr. Johnson championed the Brexit cause. He ran this campaign on the promise to "get Brexit done" – a simple but effective message with profound implications for Britain's most politically volatile region.

Constitutional change?

Northern Ireland voted by 56% to remain in the EU in 2016. Since then, it has become central to a Brexit deal with Brussels. Unease spread about the prospect of a no-deal Brexit and the re-emergence of a hard border with EU neighbour Ireland to the south. Border checks are as-



Pro-Brexit demonstrators outside Downing Street in London on Friday. ■NYT

sociated with three decades of sectarian violence over British rule of Northern Ireland that left some 3,500 people dead. The potential removal of an open border – a plank of the 1998 agreement that ended "The Troubles" – has been seen as an unwelcome return to the past.

It also reopened the issue of Northern Ireland's place in the U.K. with England, Scotland and Wales, and the potential of a united Ireland.

For the first time, the election returned more Irish republican than British unionist lawmakers to the U.K. House of Commons.

The largest republican party Sinn Fein even took the seat of North Belfast from unionist hands for the first time since it was drawn up in 1885.

Sinn Fein leader Mary Lou McDonald called it a "historic moment". "The discussion around constitutional change is now under way."

"It's safe to say that Irish unity will be firmly on the agenda in a way that it has never been before," said Queen's University Belfast politics lecturer Jamie Pow.

But he said the combined republican vote share from Thursday "still amounts to a

minority". Those describing themselves as neither republican nor unionist will be key in any vote. They would likely be swayed by changes in economic or political circumstance, including those Brexit is forecast to bring.

On a wider scale, the DUP's loss of influence in London could help kick-start talks for the resumption of the devolved legislative assembly in Belfast. The Assembly has not functioned since January 2017 after the power-sharing executive between the DUP and Sinn Fein collapsed over a mismanaged heating scheme.

'Scots want to have the right to choose'

REUTERS
LONDON

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson needs to "focus on reality" and recognise that the Scottish National Party (SNP) has been given a mandate for a second independence referendum, Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said on Saturday.

The SNP won 48 of Scotland's 59 seats in the U.K. Parliament in Thursday's national election, prompting Ms. Sturgeon to step up her demands for another independence referendum. However, Mr. Johnson told Ms. Sturgeon by phone on Friday that he opposed another independence vote.

"Scotland very clearly wants a different future to the one that's been chosen by much of the rest of the U.K., and Scotland wants to have the right to choose its own future," Ms. Sturgeon said on Saturday. "I know that people may have been breaking the voting habits of generations to vote for us," Mr. Johnson told supporters in Sedgefield, a symbolically important seat as it was once held by former Prime Minister Tony Blair. "I want the people of the north-east to know that we in the Conservative Party, and I, will repay your trust."

I will repay your trust, Johnson tells former Labour voters

PM visits erstwhile Labour strongholds in northern England

REUTERS
LONDON

Prime Minister Boris Johnson visited former strongholds of his Labour opponents in northern England on Saturday and pledged to repay their trust for helping to deliver a stunning victory for his Conservative Party in Britain's national election.

The election saw the crumbling of Labour's "Red Wall" of formerly safe seats in working-class areas across northern and central England where most people voted in a 2016 referendum to leave the European Union (EU). Mr. Johnson, the face of the "Leave" campaign in that referendum, fought the election on the slogan "Get Brexit done".



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaking to supporters on a visit to Sedgefield on Saturday. ■REUTERS

Brexit was widely seen as the decisive factor in the election, with Mr. Johnson's promise to take Britain out of the EU by January 31, 2020, winning over many former Labour voters.

"What an incredible thing you have done, you have changed the political landscape, you've changed the Conservative Party for the better and you've changed the future of our country for the better," said Mr. Johnson.

"First of all, what are we going to do to repay that trust? We are going to get Brexit done," he asserted.

Mr. Johnson, who called the snap election to break years of deadlock in Parliament over Brexit, has also promised to spend more money on health, education and the police.

Meanwhile, Labour's finance spokesman John McDonnell will not be in his party's next shadow Cabinet.

"The new leader will come in place, appoint the shadow cabinet, I won't be part of that shadow cabinet, I've done my bit," Mr. McDonnell told BBC television. "We need to move on at that stage with that new leader."

North Korea conducts test at satellite site

Sudan leader Bashir gets 2 years in corruption case

Former President convicted for receiving \$25 million from Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince



Sudan's ex-President Omar al-Bashir sitting in an enclosure during the hearing in Khartoum on Saturday. ■REUTERS

years. Instead, the court, taking into account his age, ordered the 75-year-old to serve two years in a correctional centre for the elderly.

Second case
Mr. Bashir will serve his sentence after the verdict has

been reached in another case in which he is accused of ordering the killing of demonstrators during the protests that led to his ouster, the judge said. The court also ordered the confiscation of 5.7 million Sudanese pounds (\$1,28,000) found at Mr. Bashir's home. The ex-President will appeal the verdict, said one of his lawyers, Ahmed Ibrahim.

Charges Mr. Bashir faces at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Sudan is now ruled by a joint civilian and military sovereign council, which is tasked with overseeing a transition to civilian rule.

Mr. Bashir admitted to having received a total of \$90 million from Saudi leaders and the trial centred on the \$25 million received from Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Mr. Bashir said the money seized from his home came out of the \$25 million. The funds, he said, formed part of Sudan's strategic relations with Saudi Arabia and were "not used for private interests but as donations".

The trial does not relate to charges Mr. Bashir faces at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Palpable sense of fear among Britain's Muslims'

U.K. Muslim body expresses concern



Harun Khan, who heads Muslim Council of Britain.

Describing the 2019 general election campaign as being the most "divisive in living memory", the group called on Mr. Johnson and his team to work towards national unity. The MCB's statement came as the former Conservative Party chair, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, renewed her call for an independent inquiry into Islamophobia. "My party must start healing its relationship with British Muslims," she tweeted. "Independent Inquiry into Islamophobia is a must first step. The battle to root out racism must now intensify," she said.

On the campaign trail, Mr. Johnson was forced to formally apologise for any "hurt and offence" as he was confronted on the issue of Islamophobia and his own perceived anti-Muslim statements in newspaper columns in the past.

House panel approves impeachment charges

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

Committee voted along party lines to approve two articles of impeachment against the President.

The panel recommended by 23 votes to 17 that the Democratic-led House ratify both articles, ahead of a vote by the entire chamber that is expected to make Mr. Trump only the third U.S. President in history to be impeached.

In a grave moment for a deeply divided nation, members of the Judiciary

Hong Kong leader Lam visits Beijing

Kong with Chinese officials. She will meet Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday.

Protests on for 6 months

Hong Kong has been convulsed by daily and sometimes violent protests for the last six months as demonstrators against a now-withdrawn extradition Bill broadened into demands for greater democratic freedom.

Hundreds of thousands of people marched last Sunday to protest against what is seen as Beijing undermining freedoms guaranteed when the former British colony was handed back to China in 1997.

to protest against what is seen as Beijing undermining freedoms guaranteed when the former British colony was handed back to China in 1997.

"Our sincerity to have dialogue with citizens has not changed," Ms. Lam said in a Facebook post on Saturday.

She said her governing team would continue to pursue "different formats of dialogue to listen to citizens sincerely."

New Zealand police identify volcanic eruption victim

Australian Krystal Browitt was on a family holiday



new calculation was that there is a 35-50 per cent chance of an eruption occurring," Natalia Deligne, a volcanic hazard and risk modeller, said.

New Zealand police on Saturday officially identified the first victim as Australian woman Krystal Browitt. Ms. Browitt, 21, was on a family holiday to celebrate her birthday in New Zealand when she joined her older sister Stephanie and father Paul on a visit to the island.

Her mother Marie stayed behind on the boat, and has since been by the bedside of her daughter and husband who were both originally in a coma in a hospital burns unit following the eruption, according to a GoFundMe page set up for the family.

Scientists monitoring the island said the likelihood of another eruption over the weekend was decreasing but the risk remained. "Their

ELSEWHERE



Mahathir could stay as PM beyond 2020

Doha
Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, 94, again raised the prospect on Saturday that he could stay in office beyond 2020, declining to give a definitive pledge to step down. Anwar Ibrahim, seen as the likely successor to Mr. Mohamad, has previously said that he expects to take office by May 2020. ■REUTERS

Nine killed in 'insider attack' on Afghan militia

KABUL
At least one member of an Afghan militia opened fire on his fellow militiamen early Saturday, killing nine, in what the country's Interior Ministry called an insider attack. The Taliban, however, claimed the attack was actually a coordinated insurgent assault on the checkpoint where the shooting took place. ■AP

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

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Ami Bera to chair key sub-committee on Asia

It also has jurisdiction over India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
WASHINGTON



Four-time Indian-American lawmaker Ami Bera.

American interests, and maintain and enhance the U.S. commitments in Asia and the Pacific.

He said he looked forward to working with Ranking Member Ted Yoho and his colleagues on the subcommittee to ensure a sustained U.S. strategy that would help foster a more stable, free and open Asia.

Mr. Bera also serves as the Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Korea and previously chaired the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans.

As the Chair, he said he will work to ensure that the U.S. is utilising all of its political, military, cultural and economic tools to support

No SEBI relief to lenders in Karvy matter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

Markets watchdog SEBI has refused to provide any relief to Bajaj Finance and three other lenders in the Karvy Stock Broking matter regarding pledged shares. The others are ICI-CI Bank, HDFC Bank and IndusInd Bank.

On December 4, the Securities Appellate Tribunal denied immediate relief to lenders who had petitioned against the transfer of securities held with Karvy Stock Broking Ltd (KSBL) back to the clients.

The tribunal had directed the four lenders to approach SEBI. "... reliefs sought by the represented are not tenable and the remedy for the representors lies against KSBL before civil court of competent jurisdiction," SEBI Whole Time Member Ananta Barua said in the order.

Coffee Day targets 'financial health'

Nurturing Fresh & Ground an opportunity to build national brand, interim chairman tells investors

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

BENGALURU

Coffee Day Enterprises, promoted by late coffee baron and serial entrepreneur V.G. Siddhartha, said it had identified financial health as the key agenda for the group in the next three years.

In his address to shareholders at the company's AGM held on Saturday, interim chairman S.V. Ranganath said, "We will continue to strengthen the much-loved Coffee Day brand, build on our relationships with millennials by offering newer, more relevant and a wider choice of products," he said.

Another national brand

To add an additional large revenue stream, Mr. Ranganath said the company had entered into a 51:49 venture with Impact HD Inc. from Japan to set up a chain of convenience stores in India to expand its Fresh & Ground



CDE will continue to strengthen the Coffee Day brand, and offer a wider choice, says S.V. Ranganath. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

(F&G) business.

"About 425 retail outlets have been transferred to this subsidiary to be re-modelled into a chain of retail stores that will go by the brand name Essentials. Work is underway to develop this brand into a round-the-clock, go-to store for food

and beverages (F&B) and convenience products. I see this as the perfect opportunity for us to launch yet another national brand, starting out from the largely local outlets of F&G," he told shareholders.

Keeping in view the current business health and

long-term prospects, the group was looking to disinvest stake in a few business undertakings to reduce its overall debt, he informed shareholders.

The investigation – by former DIG of CBI Ashok Kumar Malhotra into the circumstances surrounding Mr. Siddhartha's demise and into the books of accounts of the company and its subsidiaries – is still underway and a final report is awaited.

The company's Same Store Sales Growth rose from 7.23% in FY18 to 9.55% in FY19.

"We continue in our leadership position in fresh milk-based automated coffee vending machines. Indus Plus, our IoT-enabled, Android-based touchscreen machine, has received encouraging response.

"The freshly brewed tea market is larger than that of coffee; we launched Indus

Automated Tea Brewer, which uses innovative tea pods," he said.

Logistics, a gainer

He added that the logistics sector was going to be a big gainer in the coming years. However, he said group company Sical Logistics needed additional capital infusion for new initiatives it is undertaking. The company was exploring various options of divestment of its assets, including partial stake sale, to strengthen liquidity, he added.

"To ensure we remain relevant in the next decade, we continue to invest in three pillars: talent, technology and superlative customer experience. To continue the expansion of our business, as recommended by the executive committee, the board is exploring options of having suitable business or financial partners," he said.

Google wants U.S. Fed to follow India's UPI example

Planning, design were key: Isakowitz

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI

In thumbs up to India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) scheme, Google has written to the U.S. Federal Reserve Board detailing the successful example of UPI-based digital payments in India in order to build 'FedNow' – a new interbank real-time gross settlement service (RTGS) for faster digital payments in the U.S.

Google Pay's monthly active user-base grew three times to reach 67 million in September this year – up from 22 million in the same month last year.

According to the latest Worldline report titled 'India Digital Payments Report – Q3 2019', the total volume of UPI transactions in Q3 2019 in India touched 2.7 billion, a whopping 183% rise from a year ago. In value, UPI clocked ₹4.6 trillion, up 189% from Q3 2018.

The number of transactions done on mobile wallets was ₹0.4 billion, a rise of just 5% over the previous year period, while the value of transactions in the July-September period was ₹466 billion, an increase of 2% over Q3 of the previous year, the report said.

NPCI deployed a real-time payment system UPI in 2016. UPI was thoughtfully planned and critical aspects of its design led to its success, Google said.

According to a recent Assocham-PWC study, digital payments in India will more than double to ₹135.2 billion in 2023 from ₹64.8 billion this year, with a compounded annual growth of 20.2%.

Google said after learning its lessons from the India digital payments market, it offered specific suggestions to the Fed Reserve to "support real-time low-value and high-value payments, use standardised messaging protocols with extended metadata, and provide clear standards for an Application Programming Interface (API) layer that enables licensed non-financial institution third parties to access and submit requests into this payment system."

'Banking' on deposits not a good idea, says this fund house

With savings accounts yielding low returns, Nippon India woos salaried class to deposit their pay with the MF for investments

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR

MUMBAI

A savings bank (SB) account, where pay is credited for millions of salaried-class people across the country every month, earns one of the lowest interest rates – mostly 3.5% – among most categories of deposit accounts.

As a result, a large chunk of money flows out from savings accounts every month after the salary is credited, as individuals eye a higher return by investing in fixed deposits, mutual funds, direct equities and public provident fund, among other avenues.

However, this requires some amount of paperwork or efforts, at least initially, as



As of November, the 'Salary Addvantage Program' had more than 37,000 investors. ■ R.V.MOORTHY

the money has to be moved from the savings account to another account.

Nippon India Mutual Fund, earlier known as Reliance Nippon Life Asset Management, is targeting

this huge segment through its 'Salary Addvantage Program', wherein the salary of an individual is directly credited to his account with the fund house and not a bank, before it is invested in liquid

funds to earn higher returns compared with bank deposits. "We directly approach companies and explain the benefits of the scheme. If they are convinced, we create accounts for their employees, wherein the salary is directly credited and invested," said Kapil Arora, segment head – New Business Initiatives, Nippon India MF. The scheme was launched in 2017 and the fund house has been able to bring on board over 200 organisations with names including Shapoorji Pallonji, Ola, Swiggy, Bajaj Finserv, Angel Broking and Prabhudas Lilladhar.

As of November, the scheme had more than

37,000 investors with the monthly average inflow pegged at over ₹20 crore. Further, the assets under management of such investments is around ₹280 crore, with around 8,000 systematic investment plans as well.

Incidentally, an individual also has the flexibility of choosing the quantum of salary – say 50% or maybe just 35% – that goes directly to the fund house and the rest remains in his SB account.

The aim is to generate higher returns than a savings account.

Nippon India Liquid Fund, in which the investments are made, delivered a compounded annual growth rate of 7.01% in the last three

years.

According to Mr. Arora, liquidity is the biggest concern that investors have, since a savings account is completely liquid.

A debit card on offer

"An investor can withdraw a maximum of ₹50,000 per day. We also give Visa debit cards to all our investors that can be used across ATMs and shops," said Mr. Arora.

"There is huge potential for growth as there are still millions of salaried people whose salary is just lying idle in the savings account. With the right push and awareness, they can start investing without taking any undue risk," Mr. Arora said.

INTERVIEW | SACHIN PILLAI

Awaiting right time for IPO, says Hinduja Leyland Finance CEO

'Post DHFL issue, investor confidence has fallen'

N. ANAND

Hinduja Leyland Finance Ltd., a non-banking finance company of the Hinduja Group, which had deferred its Initial Public Offering, is adopting a wait-and-watch policy for investors' confidence to return, its chief executive officer Sachin Pillai said in an interview. Edited excerpts:

businesses. Till then, growth will remain unaffected. We will wait and watch for investors' confidence to return for NBFCs. The current capital is sufficient for the next one year.

How were the first two quarters in the backdrop of the economic slowdown?

We are largely into financing medium and heavy commercial vehicles. It constitutes 40% of our book. We have three non-vehicle financing capital businesses – loan against property, wholesale financing of smaller NBFCs and affordable housing finance.

Even in 2013-14 when there was substantial growth in the vehicle sales segment, the same pattern played out. We expect Q3/Q4 much better than Q1/Q2. Last year, from November to March, we had de-growth. Going forward, in these five months, we will see lesser degrowth, or marginal growth. That's our expectation.

Will the transition from BS-IV to BS-VI affect your business?

We don't anticipate slowdown per se to come in. However, there might be a brief period of wait-and-watch as far as customers are concerned, because it is a technology change happening.

What are your growth and expansion plans?

We are looking at 20% growth in this fiscal; this is broadly in line with the expectation at the start of the year. We are present in 1,550 locations. Our distribution is largely in the trucking cluster. So, we are in semi-urban and urban areas and have 3% reach in rural areas. Rural could well be a growth engine for us in future.

How is your affordable housing subsidiary doing?

We have a book size of ₹1,600 crore. We have presence in 480 locations. Our average ticket size is around ₹1 lakh. We will be focussing in the same space – on ₹1 lakh to ₹20 lakh loan size. We should be able to establish a growth of 25-30%,

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Historically, 40% of business has happened in H1 and the rest in H2 due to festivals, monsoon and kharif crop. We always see Q3 [as a] stable quarter and Q4 sees growth.

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How is your affordable



Tech titans under watch

Why are Amazon, Google, Facebook and Apple facing antitrust issues?

NARAYAN LAKSHMAN

The story so far: After years of blistering growth driven by an ever-growing share of the online ad market and big data, the giants of Silicon Valley, including Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google, are facing an unprecedented challenge – calls by lawmakers to curb their market monopoly power. There are two sources of tension relating to these four tech firms that have caused alarm across the United States, Europe and elsewhere: first, that they may have engaged in anti-competitive behaviour over many years thus undercutting smaller potential rivals and holding onto an outsized market share; and second, that as a result of this metastatic growth, they now have a vast influence on politics, policy and personal reputations across the spectrum, making cost of data privacy breaches by these firms catastrophic. Thus, in July 2019 the United States Justice Department and the House Judiciary Committee separately announced major antitrust investigations into Google, Facebook, Amazon and Apple promising “a top-to-bottom review of the market power held by giant tech platforms.”

What are the main concerns with each platform?

Amazon: Given the disruptive effect of its online sales platform on traditional retail markets and smaller sellers, lawmakers for years and in multiple countries have contemplated regulations to clamp down on Amazon’s alleged anti-competitive practices. For example, questions have often been raised on whether Amazon favours its self-branded products over those of third-party sellers, by requiring other sellers to use its advertising services or fulfilment network, by rankings of product search displays, or by using data on other sellers to tweak its own offerings to its advantage. Regulators are also said to be looking into the conglomerate’s acquisition of Whole Foods, an upmarket U.S. grocery chain.

Apple: In September 2019, U.S. congressional investigators demanded documents from Apple to shed light on the company’s App Store policies, specifically regarding how Apple ranks search results on that platform, questions surrounding how Apple determines the share of revenue it takes from in-app purchases, and the exclusion of certain competing apps from the Store. For example, Spotify and those behind certain parental-control apps have filed complaints to regulators in the U.S., Europe, and Russia about Apple’s alleged restriction of their apps once the tech giant introduced self-made competing services.

Facebook: Regulators have focused their attention on Facebook’s acquisitive streak in capital markets, for example, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) enquiry into whether Facebook defensively purchased certain companies to maintain its pre-eminent market position in the social networking ecosystem. Specifically, questions have centred on Facebook’s relationship with Onavo, a data analysis firm that Facebook purchased in 2013, which then allegedly helped the social media giant see off potential competitors. Investigators have also started looking into allegations that Facebook may have cut off certain third-party apps from its data.

Google: This company handles more than 90% of online searches across the world, so regulators have been observing its delivery of search results under a microscope. In recent years concern has grown over the fact that Google has increasingly been sending users to its own sites to answer their queries, including products such as Google Flights and Google Maps. Thus, Google may find itself grilled by regulators over whether it is abusing its search dominance, to the detriment of rival content producers. The European Union has already fined Google \$5.1 billion in 2018.

Who is leading the charge against the tech firms?

In March 2019 U.S. Senator and Democrat Elizabeth Warren announced as part of her 2020 presidential campaign, a plan to break up Amazon, Facebook, and Google. Shortly thereafter, on June 3, the House of Representatives’ Antitrust Subcommittee announced a bipartisan investigation into competition and “abusive conduct” in the tech sector. In mid-July, the U.S. Department of Justice publicly announced that it had started an antitrust probe into “market-leading online platforms”, following which Facebook confirmed that it was being investigated by the FTC, and Google that it was facing a Department of Justice antitrust probe. Over the next few months Attorneys-General across 50 U.S. states and territories announced a joint antitrust probe into Google and Facebook, and the House Antitrust Subcommittee made an enormous information demand to all four tech giants, requesting 10 years’ worth of detailed records relating to competition, acquisitions, and other matters relevant to the investigation. The case against these four Silicon Valley firms is also bolstered by the fact that U.S. President Donald Trump could hardly be considered an ally. In August 2018, he warned that tech companies could be in a “very antitrust situation.”

What is the prognosis for the antitrust case? In the U.S. the cases against the four tech firms will likely be centred on possible violations of the Sherman and Clayton Antitrust Acts – two laws that have been foundational in the past century of federal antitrust prosecutions. While the firms have, more or less, complied with the various investigations against them, they have on occasion provided only limited information.

Why is the Northeast on the boil?

In Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya, what is the unease over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019?

SUDIPTA DATTA

The story so far: Curfew was eased on Saturday for some hours in towns and cities of the Brahmaputra Valley including Guwahati in lower Assam and Dibrugarh in upper Assam after days of violent protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 since the Bill was passed by the Rajya Sabha on December 11 and the President of India gave his assent on December 12. Some States were kept outside the purview of the Act, which will grant citizenship to Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities of three countries, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan, under the Sixth Schedule and the inner line permit (ILP) system, but there is unease on the ground about what it will mean for the ethnic diversity of the region. In Assam, for example, observers say the division between the Assamese-speaking Brahmaputra Valley and the Bengali-speaking Barak Valley is likely to deepen; and that relations between tribals and the Bengali-speaking majority in Tripura will suffer. The rules of CAA under which Hindu and other minorities may get amnesty have not yet been specified.

Why is Assam agitated?

Between 1979 and 1985, the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad spearheaded a movement against illegal migration, which had been simmering for long, leading to widespread violence and insurrections by various outfits including the United Liberation Front of Assam. After thousands of lives were lost, the Assam Accord was signed in 1985 that aimed to address two key concerns of the Assamese people: stop “foreigners” from Bangladesh and provide some constitutional safeguards for Assamese citizens. First, the cut-off date for foreigners to gain citizenship was set at March 25, 1971, though, initially, the leaders of the movement wanted illegal migrants to be expelled as per the National Register of Citizens 1951 of Assam; agitation leaders had also spoken of a 1967 cut-off; and Clause 6 of the Accord stated that “constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.” The AASU on Friday filed a petition in the Supreme Court of India challenging the Act, according to the outfit’s chief adviser Samujal Bhattacharya. He told a gathering which had defied curfew to protest against the Act: “[Narendra] Modi had promised to deport all illegal immigrants after May 16, 2014. He did not send back a single illegal Bangladeshi, instead he is now welcoming them.”

According to Census 2011, Assam has a population of 3.12 crore, with 61.47% Hindus, and 34.22% Muslims. Around 12.44% of the population is tribal, comprising Bodos and others. Tribal States of the Northeast have got protection from the CAA with the ILP system, unlike Assam.

What about protection under the Sixth Schedule? The CAA, 2019, while inserting a new sub-section 6B, listing out the provisions to grant citizenship rights to Hindu and other non-Muslim minorities of three countries, says “nothing in this section shall apply to tribal area[s] of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram or Tripura as included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution and the area covered under ‘The Inner Line’ notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873”.

The Sixth Schedule allows constitution of autonomous district councils in tribal areas: of Assam (three), Meghalaya (three), Mizoram (three) and Tripura (one) – 10 in all in the Northeast. Thus in Assam, there are the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (for the Karbi



A flame torchlight procession protesting the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill – now an Act – in Guwahati, Assam, on December 9. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR

Anglong District), the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council (for the Dima Hasao or the erstwhile North Cachar Hills District) and the Bodoland Territorial Council (The Bodoland Territorial Areas District). These regions are exempt from the purview of the Act.

How does the Inner Line Permit help?

As Home Minister Amit Shah met political and civil society groups from the region, one of the suggestions that came up was to expand the ILP system. The ILP regulates the visit of outsiders to States under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873. It was in force in three northeastern States, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and

The All Assam Students Union has filed a petition in the Supreme Court of India challenging the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019. Tribal States have got protection from the Act under the Inner Line Permit system, unlike Assam

Nagaland, but on Wednesday, Manipur too came under the ILP regime, a demand of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government of the State. The ILP was withdrawn from Manipur in 1950. The State government’s attempts to reintroduce it through three bills led to violent protests by tribals in 2015. Chief Minister N. Biren Singh mooted the idea again in 2018 and one of the bills, the Manipur People’s Protection Bill, was passed after

consultations with all stakeholders including tribals. The bill, which is awaiting the President’s approval, sought to introduce a system similar to the ILP, regulating the entry of outsiders. After the Centre extended ILP to the State, Mr Singh said its implementation would protect the indigenous people of the State.

Manipur has a population of 28.56 lakh, according to the 2011 Census, with 41.39% Hindus and 41.29% Christians and a host of tribes including the Tangkhul Nagas and Kukis.

In Nagaland too, Dimapur, the commercial hub of the State which had been outside the ILP, was brought under its purview. Dimapur has a large population of non-tribals. The Nagaland government notification says that every non-indigenous person who settled or entered Dimapur on or after November 21, 1979, will have to

obtain an ILP within 90 days. Now that Dimapur too has become a “tribal belt”, all 12 districts of Nagaland are under ILP. As the National Register of Citizens was being updated in Assam last year, the Nagaland Tribes Council, Tribal Hohos and a group of civil organisations petitioned the State government to seek changes in the colonial era law (Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873) to bring the entire State under ILP to protect the “indigenous people” from outsiders, including “illegal migrants” from Bangladesh. Around 19 lakh people have been left out of the final NRC list and have to prove their citizenship in Assam’s foreigners’ tribunals.

Why are Tripura and Meghalaya rattled?

After the passage of the Bill, Mr. Shah met delegations of the Indigenous People’s Front of Tripura, which is an ally of the BJP in the State, and Tripura’s royal family head, Kirit Pradyot Deb Barman, who later tweeted: “Told him [Shah] we are going to SC [Supreme Court] against CAB as we cannot compromise! No retreat no surrender!” Around 32% of the people of Tripura, which has a population of about 36 lakh, are tribal. In 2015, after insurgency appeared to have waned, the Tripura government revoked the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, or AFSPA. The AFSPA, which had been in force in the State since 1997, was repealed after elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council. It had been a long-standing demand of tribal parties such as the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura and the Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura. After the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill was passed, protests broke out in at least four districts, shattering years of peace. Journalist Patricia Mukhim wrote in the Mint: “The state has been overrun by migrants, first from East Pakistan and later from Bangladesh. Now, the Bengali-speaking population is a majority in Tripura and runs the affairs of the state. Fears of a similar fate are real and widely held across all states in the region.”

Most of Meghalaya is protected from CAB because of the Sixth Schedule – some areas of capital Shillong, however, fall outside its purview. But there is a demand to extend ILP to the State. Protesters want the Governor, Tathagata Roy, to give his nod to a proposed ordinance that seeks mandatory registration of outsiders entering the State. There were protests against Tura MP, Agatha Sangma (daughter of P.A. Sangma and sister of Chief Minister Conrad Sangma), who voted in favour of the CAB for the National People’s Party, an NDA ally.

What does the doping ban mean for Russia?

Why has the World Anti-Doping Agency barred the country from global sporting competitions?

N. SUDARSHAN

The story so far: On December 9, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) announced a decision to ban Russia from global sporting competitions for a period of four years. The 12-member WADA executive committee voted unanimously to declare the Russian Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) “non-compliant” with global anti-doping rules. The move was a ratification of the findings by the independent Compliance Review Committee (CRC) which had recommended that Russia be banned. The anti-doping watchdog’s decision is expected to affect Russia the most at the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games and the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics where the nation’s flag, name and anthem will not be allowed.

What triggered the ban?

It dates back to the lead up to the 2016 Rio Olympic Games when an independent commission set up by WADA found a “deeply rooted culture of cheating” in Russian athletics. Barely weeks before the Games, whistle-blower reports alleged that Russia ran one of the most sophisticated doping programmes in the world in which the Russian sports ministry, the intelligence service and the country’s anti-doping experts colluded to hide large-scale violations. The 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi – in which Russia topped the medals tally – was under the scanner, where it was alleged that dope-tainted urine samples were replaced with clean ones. It led to a series of sanctions; the IAAF (now called World Athletics), the world athletics’ governing body, suspended Russia’s athletics federation (a ban that continues till date) before the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and WADA followed suit by de-recognising the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) and RUSADA respectively. Last September, as part of the resolution of the case, WADA threw a lifeline by asking Russia to turn over raw data stored in its Moscow laboratory in order to corroborate the findings in the whistle-blower reports. Russia reluctantly agreed, only for WADA to now rule that Russia had tampered with this evidence too, leading to the latest reprimand.

How far does the ban go?

Apart from the Olympics, the ban can extend to the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, provided Russia qualifies. Sports and government officials from Russia will not be able to attend competitions, and Russia cannot host international events during the four-year period. It does not however apply to Euro 2020 which is considered a continental (and not global) football competition and Russia will remain a co-host. WADA’s very own Athlete



Committee, though, is dissatisfied and has termed the sanctions piecemeal. Even as Russia, the nation, stands barred, individual Russian athletes deemed untainted can still participate as neutrals, like they had at Rio and the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Games (South Korea). In the latter, Russia’s men’s hockey team played as the “Olympic Athletes from Russia” and even won the gold medal. The only meaningful action, according to the Athlete Committee, is a complete ban on Russian participation. The legendary Edwin Moses, the current chairman of the United States Anti-Doping Agency and a two-time Olympic gold medallist, said anti-doping leaders and the IOC have prioritised Russian sentiments over those of clean athletes from elsewhere. Moses told The New York Times recently: “The Russians are asserting their athletes that may be clean deserve the opportunity to compete. They destroyed all the evidence that could have exonerated them.”

What is the International Olympic Committee’s stand?

The IOC, under its president Thomas Bach, has always opposed a blanket ban. He has maintained that he favours “individual justice over collective punishment”. An athlete whose views have played a significant role in shaping the IOC’s thinking is Penelope (Penny) Heyns, a South African gold-medallist in the 100 and 200m

breaststroke events at the 1996 Olympics. In an interview to The New York Times, she said it would be wrong to penalise an entire generation of Russian athletes for the misdeeds of their predecessors. “They were 10 or 11 when all of this was going down; they are not part of the system,” Heyns said, referring to a swimming event where young Russian swimmers participated. “It’s our duty to ensure all clean athletes have the right to compete, including those from Russia who can honestly prove their innocence.” However, unlike during the Rio Olympics, where the IOC Executive Board had left the decision to allow Russian teams to individual sports federations, the orders this time are expected to come from the very top. Immediately after the CRC made its recommendations public, the IOC said that it will support “the toughest sanctions against all those responsible” and urged WADA “to take further action given the seriousness of the manipulation”. Post ratification, the stance has remained unchanged. Seen along with WADA’s standard code on compliance, the governing bodies of different sports are likely to enforce the strictures in a similar manner.

What next for Russia?

Russia has three weeks (from the date of the order) to appeal at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) and the signs are that it will. While Russian President Vladimir Putin said, “we have all the reasons to file an appeal,”

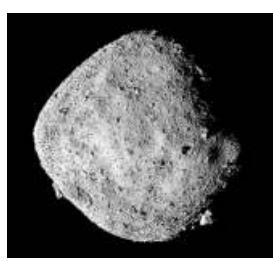
ROC’s president, Stanislav Pozdnyakov, dismissed the ruling as “inadequate, illogical and excessive”. According to Michael McCann, Sports Illustrated’s legal analyst, CAS would consider the appeal under “de novo review”. This is a form of appeal in which the court holds a trial as if no prior trial had been held, thus providing a window to produce new evidence and arguments. A line of

defence already advanced by Russia is to discredit the whistle-blower, Grigory Rodchenkov, the former head of the Moscow lab who is now under the protection of the US Federal Witness Protection Program. Generally, an arbitration is expected to take six to 12 months, which means that regardless of whether an appeal is filed, Russia will not be present at the Winter Youth Olympic Games that starts in Lausanne, Switzerland from January 9, 2020.

SNAPSHOTS



Visitor from far
Comet 21/Borisov is an interstellar visitor that is drawing a lot of attention from astronomers now. The first identified comet to have come close to the sun from another stellar system, its bulk is made of loosely knit ice particles and dust. Spotted by the Hubble telescope, it measures 3,200 kilometres across, which is just nine football fields wide. Expected to zoom past Jupiter and leave the solar system by mid-2020, this is only the second interstellar visitor to have been spotted.



Samples from Bennu
OSIRIS Rex mission will be NASA's first to collect samples from an asteroid and return to Earth. It has been orbiting asteroid Bennu since last December. It will touch down on one of two selected sites, give out a puff of nitrogen and gather the dirt sample that is raked up, according to a report in *Nature*. The target area, known as the Nightingale site, is just 16 metres across and sits inside a large crater, 140-metre wide, in Bennu's northern hemisphere.

New molecule for rheumatoid arthritis may be effective in preventing cartilage destruction

It might prove a game-changer in treating rheumatoid arthritis if further tests and trials find it effective

R. PRASAD

A specific fragment of a protein secreted by the parasitic worm liver fluke (*Fasciola*) has been found to protect the articular cartilage of joints from being destroyed by the body's aberrant immune system, thus preventing rheumatoid arthritis from progressing. Besides protecting the cartilage from further destruction, the team of researchers from the Central Drug Research Institute (CSIR-CDRI) also found that the protein prevented the joint bone from being destroyed. In rheumatoid arthritis, the joint bone starts getting destroyed following cartilage destruction.

Liver fluke secretion

Liver flukes secrete certain specialised proteins that help the parasites to evade recognition by the host immune system and also blunt the killing machinery of the immune system by dialling down the inflammatory responses.

The protein – *Fasciola* helminth defence molecule-1 (FhHDM-1) – secreted by liver fluke has similarity with a human protein that mitigates inflammatory responses. So the team led by Naibeda Chatopadhyay isolated a specific fragment of this protein having a high anti-inflammatory function. They then synthesised and tested it in a cell culture system followed by animal testing.

The results were published in *FASEB Journal*.



Targeted protection: The liver fluke peptide provides selective protection to the joints but does not alter the systemic immune system, says Naibeda Chatopadhyay (centre). ■

A mouse model that is vulnerable to rheumatoid arthritis was used for testing the protective effect of the protein. The type-II collagen protein, the major component present in the cartilage matrix of the joints, but not as a whole protein seen in blood was introduced in large quantities to trigger an autoimmune response. With this, the process of cartilage destruction was set in motion.

Twenty days after introducing the antigen protein to trigger an autoimmune response, the researchers introduced the synthesised peptide every second day to evaluate its potential to protect the collagen from destruction. "The peptide rapidly stopped further damage to the cartilage. The cartilage that has already been dam-

aged was not repaired because the damage is irreversible in the case of rheumatoid arthritis," says Yasir Akhtar Khan from the Department of Zoology at the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, and the first author of the paper. "Besides preventing cartilage destruction, the peptide also prevented the joint bone from destruction."

Action on mice

The cartilage of animals that only received the type II collagen but not the peptide was completely destroyed by the end of the experiment (46 days), while the cartilage of the treatment group that received the peptide for four weeks was protected from further damage.

The effect of treatment in controlling cartilage destruc-

tion was assessed externally during the course of treatment by measuring paw swelling every day. "By 25 days of treatment, there was complete abolition of paw swelling compared with the diseased animals that did not receive any treatment," says Dr. Khan. All the animals were sacrificed at the end of 46 days and the joints examined.

"There was extensive structural damage to the cartilage in mice that did not receive the peptide. The barrier that insulates the cartilage was destroyed leading to disease progression," he says. "In the treatment group, the barrier was intact and comparable to the control group that did not have rheumatoid arthritis. We also did not see any immune cells in the joints of the treat-

ment group."

Thus, in the Indian scenario, the peptide that specifically prevents joint inflammation and destruction without affecting the body's overall immune function might prove a game-changer in treating rheumatoid arthritis if further tests and trials find it effective.

ed animals."

In contrast to the currently used anti-rheumatic drug (methotrexate), the biggest advantage of using the liver fluke peptide is that it does not produce a wholesale suppression of the immune system. Even the monoclonal antibodies that act against individual inflammatory molecules have inherent problems. For instance, the monoclonal antibodies target and suppress the tumour necrosis factor (TNF alpha), which is the first line of defence against *Mycobacterium*. In the Indian context, the anti-rheumatic drug and even the monoclonal antibodies that target TNF alpha will leave the person susceptible to infections, including TB.

Immune system intact

"The liver fluke peptide only produces selective protection to the joints and does not alter the systemic immune system. So the body's ability to combat bacterial pathogens will remain intact. Dr. Chatopadhyay says.

"We are yet to study the mechanism of selective joint protection (cartilage and bone) provided by the peptide."

At 16 microgram per ml concentration, the molecule took about two hours to completely kill the actively dividing bacteria that are sensitive to drugs and two-four hours to kill drug-resistant strains of *A. baumannii*. However, at the same concentration, the molecule needed less than two minutes to kill the dormant, drug-sensitive bacteria, and about five minutes to kill the dormant, drug-resistant bacteria.

"At this point in time we don't know the reason behind the rapid killing of the dormant bacteria," says Prof. Haladar.

The molecule was tested using human embryonic kidney cell line. Not a single cell was killed when 8-16 microgram per ml concentration was used. Even when the concentration was increased to 500 microgram per ml, about 80% cells were still not killed. "The molecule did not show any toxicity at the concentration needed to kill both drug-sensitive and drug-resistant bacteria," Barman says.

The researchers also tested if the molecule killed red blood cells. Even at 1,000 microgram per ml concentration, which is several times the concentration needed to kill the bacteria, only about 1-3% of red blood cells were destroyed.

Killing mechanism

A. baumannii bacteria are already resistant to most antibiotics. So to evaluate how quickly the bacteria would develop resistance against the synthesised molecule, the researchers exposed the bacteria to the molecule for 14 days. "The bacteria did not develop any resistance against the molecule at the end of 14 days, while the bacteria exhibited 250-fold resistance against meropenem drug," says Prof. Haladar. "The bacteria developed a high level of resistance against the last resort antibiotic colistin too."

The molecule is able to destroy the integrity of the membranes thus killing even the multidrug-resistant *A. baumannii*, Prof. Haladar says. Gram-negative bacteria have an outer and an inner membrane thus making it difficult for drugs to effectively kill them unlike in the case of Gram-positive bacteria that have only one membrane.

The molecule was found to destroy the integrity of the outer and inner membrane and permeate through the membranes even at a low concentration of 5 microgram per ml. The permeability increased when higher concentration of 20 microgram per ml was used.

"We will soon be studying the efficacy of the molecule in animal models," Prof. Haladar says. "Based on the *in vitro* studies, we feel this molecule has immense potential for being developed as a future therapeutic agent."



Comparable: The molecule's efficacy to disrupt biofilm was comparable with the last-resort antibiotic colistin, say Jayanta Haladar (left) and Swagatam Barman. ■

Tackling drug-resistant *A. baumannii*

In 2-4 hours the novel molecule killed actively dividing drug-resistant strains

R. PRASAD

A novel molecule developed by chemically linking (conjugate) an amino acid (glycine) to a polymer has been found to possess high antibacterial activity against multidrug-resistant *Acinetobacter baumannii* while showing no toxicity whatsoever to human cells. The antibacterial activity was also seen against clinical isolates of *A. baumannii* that are multidrug-resistant.

The team led by Jayanta Haladar from the Antimicrobial Research Laboratory at the Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru, found that the molecule has several other salient properties. The most important being its ability to kill even the dormant bacteria.

At 16 microgram per ml concentration, the molecule took about two hours to completely kill the actively dividing bacteria that are sensitive to drugs and two-four hours to kill drug-resistant strains of *A. baumannii*.

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Plants emit ultrasonic 'distress screams' when stressed

R. PRASAD

Researchers have for the first time found evidence of plants making airborne emission of ultrasound screams when subjected to stresses. The sound contains information that can reveal the state of the plant emitting it. The researchers experimented with tomato and tobacco plants and subjected them to two different stresses – drought and cutting of stems.

The ultrasound emitted is in the range 20-100 kHz and can be detected from a distance of 3-5 metres. The team led by Lilach Hadany from the School of Plant Sciences and Food Security at Tel-Aviv University which carried out the research speculates that if stressed plants can emit ultrasound, then neighbouring plants

should be equipped to hear these distress sounds too.

"We don't know the mechanism of response in the plants yet. We have recently shown that plants' response to pollinator sounds involves their flowers, but we expect that receptors to ultrasound, if such exist, would be in the vegetative parts," Prof. Hadany says in an email to *The Hindu*.

Many moths, which use tomato and tobacco plants as hosts for their larvae, are already known to hear and react to ultrasound at frequencies emitted by the plants. "These moths may then potentially avoid laying their eggs on a plant that had emitted stress sounds," she writes.

The results have been posted on *bioRxiv* preprint server; the man-

script is yet to be peer-reviewed.

Producing sound

The researchers suspect that the sounds are generated by a process called cavitation – where air bubbles form, expand and explode in the xylem causing vibrations. "Cavitation explosions have been shown to produce vibrations similar to the ones we recorded," they write.

The sounds were first recorded in the laboratory conditions using boxes that are acoustically isolated and then verified in greenhouses that were not acoustically isolated. They found that on average, tomato plants subjected to drought stress emitted 35 sounds an hour compared with tobacco that made just 11. However, when the stems were cut, the average number of sounds

emitted by tomato plants dropped to 25 per hour while it increased slightly to 15 per hour in the case of tobacco. Controls emitted fewer than one sound per hour.

Greenhouse studies

In greenhouse, the researchers studied how the plants emitted sounds in response to lack of water. Watered tomato plants were placed in the greenhouse for 10 days without watering.

Very few sounds were emitted in the first three days when there was sufficient water. But the number of sounds per day increased on the fourth to sixth day and decreased as the plants dried.

Tomato and tobacco plants emitted ultrasound at different mean peak frequencies when subjected

to the two stresses. In general, the two plants emitted sounds at a higher peak frequency when the stem was cut than when under drought. Under water-stressed conditions, the mean peak frequency was nearly 50 kHz for tomato and about 55 kHz for tobacco. When the stems are cut, the mean peak frequency was 57 kHz for tomato and nearly 58 kHz for tobacco plants.

Plants belonging to two different taxa also emitted ultrasound when subjected to the same stresses. "But the stresses were not identical, and we did not run a fully controlled experiment of them. We are sure that they emit sounds, and the peak frequency of the recorded sounds was in the same range, but all the rest would require additional experiments," she says.

Evidence of river Saraswati's existence found?

Analysing sand from 3-10 metres below modern Ghaggar, researchers estimate the date and source of the river

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

The Indus valley civilisation which flourished in present day northwestern India and adjacent Pakistan was the largest and oldest urban civilisation in the world. Nearly two-thirds of the 1,500 archaeological sites of the Harappans occur on the dried up banks of the Ghaggar river. Today, the Ghaggar is a seasonal, monsoon-fed river originating in the sub-Himalayas. The question arises about the role played by the Paleo Ghaggar, ancient counterpart of this river, in the lives of the Harappans. Did the Harappans live on the banks of a perennial river, mighty and fed by the glacial rivers arising in the Higher Himalaya, or was Paleo Ghaggar also a monsoon-fed and seasonal river that rose in the sub-Himalaya?

These questions are tied to another. The Rig veda mentions a mighty, snow-fed river Saraswati on whose banks the literature was supposed to be derived. Was this then a description of the Paleo Ghaggar, making it the mythical Saraswati River? These questions are sought to be answered in a paper published in *Scientific Reports*.

Researchers from Physical

Indus Institute of Technology Bombay, have analysed sand from 3-10 metres below surface of modern Ghaggar and found that it was indeed a perennial river, fed by glacial rivers in the past.

Finding the source
"Coarse-grained white or grey sands that contain abundant white mica are typical of glacier-fed Higher Himalayan rivers such as the Ganga, Yamuna and Sutlej... We found such sand layers 3-10 metres below the surface on both sides of the modern Ghaggar in a stretch of 300 kilometres up to the Pakistani border," explains Jayant Ray of PRL. "Presence of this sand itself is an indication of existence of a powerful river in the past."

The team identified the source of these sands by stu-

dying the strontium-neodymium isotopic ratios. They also measured the ages of the mica samples in the sand by argon-argon dating method. "We found that the isotopic ratios and Ar-Ar ages overlap with those of the rocks of the Higher Himalaya; thus we establish that these sands have been transported by the river from Higher Himalaya to the plains," says Dr Ray.

Further, the team established the depositional ages of the samples by radiocarbon dating and optical dating of mollusk shells found in the deposit. The researchers thus established that the ancient Ghaggar transported sands from glaciated regions of the Higher Himalaya. "Any river that originates from such region remains active round the year – doesn't de-

pend on the monsoonal rains only," explains Dr Ray.

The key result of the paper is that the river Ghaggar had two distinct perennial phases: one during 80,000-20,000 years ago and the other during 9,000-4,500 years ago.

Early, late Harappans

"The paper contains excellent isotopic geochemical data on the sediments of the river Ghaggar. On the basis of their data the authors show that the Sutlej River was flowing into the Ghaggar River to make it perennial for the Early Harappans," says Jayant Kumar Tripathi of School of Environmental Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, who is an expert in the field. In a 2004 paper in *Current Science*, he has studied the later phase of the river Ghaggar. "However, what made mature Harappans to stay back on the Paleo Ghaggar, remains unanswered in their paper," Prof. Tripathi adds commenting on the recent work.

The authors write in the paper that the revived perennial condition of the Ghaggar, between 9,000 and 4,500 years ago can be correlated with the Rig veda Saraswati, and that it "likely facilitated development of the early Harappan settlements along its banks".

Ancient settlement: Nearly two-thirds of the 1,500 archaeological sites related to the Harappans occur on the dried up banks of the present-day Ghaggar river. ■ V. V. KRISHNAN

dians Institute of Technology

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The researchers said this could be as far back as at least 20 million years, a time when our common ancestor with monkeys lived, and already presumably had the capacity to produce contrasted

Young, black, poor and dead

The death of 9 black youth in police action at a slum in São Paulo has triggered mass protests

SÃO PAULO



Paraisópolis is home to 1,00,000 people who live in a cluster of brick houses and shanties perched on hills, just across the leafy lanes of Morumbi, where million-dollar houses sit behind high walls in southern São Paulo. Every weekend, young folks of Paraisópolis gather for a night of "Baile Funk", a party form developed in the slums where they play hip-hop music. On December 1, the state military police (PM) stormed the party, causing a stampede that left nine persons – all young, black and poor – dead.

As the *favela* (slum) boiled with anger, the police claimed that they were chasing two criminals who fired at them and it led to the confusion in which the victims got trampled. But witnesses said the police came in firing bullets and tear gas into the crowd. Within a day, videos shot by *favela* residents began to emerge online. In one video, cops are seen kicking a boy as he lies on the ground. In another, an PM officer shouts, "Everybody is going to die", as another one strikes the youth with an iron bar.

The Paraisópolis incident has once again exposed the racial fault line that divides Brazil, where the blacks – mostly poor – are often at the receiving end of violence by police officers, mostly white. This division came to a boil last week as thousands of Paraisópolis residents took to the streets as the State government dithered in taking any action. According to a report released by the country's top research firm in November, blacks represent three out of four people in the poorest group; in the richest group, blacks are only one in four people. The positions, said the report, with the highest salaries are held by a white majority. In 2018, for every seven white people in top positions, there was only one black woman. In the field of IT, the blacks have just 4% representation, the report said.

The only place the blacks have



more representation than the whites is the country's notorious prison system, where they make up 64% of the inmates. According to a Ministry of Justice report published in 2017, a typical prisoner in Brazil is a "male, under 30 years of age, black and un-

educated". A report released by Amnesty International in 2017 showed that of the 56,000 homicides in Brazil every year, 77% of the victims were young, poor, male and black.

Right-wing black

Despite such high inequality, a large number of Brazilians live in complete denial of race-based discrimination. In a shocking statement last month, Sergio Camargo, the head of Palmares Foundation whose mandate includes working with the Ministry of Culture to support "policies for the inclusion of Afro-descendants in the process of development", said racism in Brazil was only a "leftist propaganda". Mr. Camargo, a black man who supports President Jair Bolsonaro, also called for the abolition of the Black Awareness Day, celebrated every year on November 20. "Black Awareness Day is a shame and needs to be relentlessly fought until it loses its relevance and disappears from the calendar," said Mr. Camargo, who calls himself a

"right-wing black who is against political correctness". But the young Afro-Brazilians, like the ones who died in Paraisópolis, are not willing to take it lying down. For the past two weeks, they have been raising slogans against the police and campaigning on social media. Their effort forced Governor Doria, who initially defended his police force, to meet the family members of the victims and community leaders. In the past 10 days, Mr. Doria has removed 38 police officers, who were connected with the incident, from street patrolling and instructed the police to review their protocols while dealing with people. "I was very shocked when I saw the video of a PM unnecessarily beating young people out of a confined space," Mr. Doria said, adding that PM officers would be present at Baile Funk parties on Saturdays.

Paraisópolis residents, still fighting for justice, hope the police will be there for their protection, and not to crush the party.



Shobhan Saxena
is a journalist
based in
São Paulo, Brazil

Where Afghans fight each other

Afghan militias' night raids and U.S. air strikes have caused a large number of civilian deaths

BAGHLAN



"The situation here is not good. Actually, this place is never considered as safe", said Mir Suleiman, a teacher from the northern Afghan province of Baghlan. He grew up in an area called "the factory", which is named after an sugar plant that has been built in the 1940s near Pol-e Khomri, the provincial capital.

The area, once used to be an economic hub that attracted labourers and merchants from all around the country, is now haunted by violence. Several parts of Baghlan are controlled or contested by the Taliban. Fighting between the insurgents and security forces are taking place on a daily basis. "The other side of the [Kunduz] river belongs to the Tali-

ban. You can see and hear their motorcycles from here," said Farzad Sattar, a local engineer. While some youngsters are busy fishing, Mr. Sattar describes how the war continues to tear apart families and friends in the province. "We all know each other here. But you will find people fighting on different sides, even within families. There is one brother who joins the Taliban, and there's another one who goes to the Afghan National Army. "Young men are often easily recruited by the Taliban and thereby leave their families. "I think it's not just the propaganda they are trapped in. We have to consider the fact that everyone in Baghlan grew up with violence. They don't know anything else," said Mr. Sattar.

While the U.S. restarted peace talks with the Taliban earlier this month in Qatar, people in Baghlan



do not think that even a peace deal would bring in any immediate change to their lives. The U.S.-Taliban talks are focussed on the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. It's not about ending the war in which Afghans are fighting Af-

ghans. Most battles are taking place between the Taliban and the Afghan security forces.

"Any peace deal would be good, but we need to stop ourselves killing each other. A deal with the Americans would not guarantee enduring peace in Baghlan and many other parts of Afghanistan," said Mohammad Sultan, a local. He points out that government forces have become very violent too and often target civilians. "Often, they don't care if you are an insurgent or not. They just attack you and question later."

Civilian casualties on the rise

Recent reports underline that civilian casualties caused by pro-government forces increased in 2019. For example, a new report by the Human Rights Watch documents the violence caused by CIA-backed Afghan militias who are known for night-time raids at homes in remote villages, forced disappearances, torture and summary executions.

"In case after case, these forces

have simply shot people in their custody and consigned entire communities to the terror of abusive night raids and indiscriminate airstrikes," said Patricia Gossman, Associate Asia Director and the report's author, after speaking to three dozen witnesses of such operations.

In the 50-page report released last October, the New York-based rights group documents 14 cases across nine provinces over the last two years. According to HRW, the cases clearly illustrate that the Afghan forces trained and funded by the U.S. intelligence agency have shown little concern for civilian life and or accountability to international law. The militias are active all over the country, most recently in the provinces of Khost, Paktia, Paktika, Nangarhar and Wardak.

According to the UN, Afghan and international military forces have been responsible for at least 484 civilian deaths and 777 civilian injuries so far in 2009. At least 468 of those civilian deaths were attributed to fo-

reign military forces. Most of these casualties are results of airstrikes. U.S. forces conducted at least 797 air strikes in the month of October alone, which amounts to an average of 26 strikes a day, according to the Pentagon.

"Airstrikes happen in Baghlan too, but there are much more in neighbouring Kunduz," said Mohammad Sultan, who grew up in the region. Large parts of Kunduz province are controlled by the Taliban. In 2015, its provincial capital fell into the hands of the insurgents for a few days. The temporary fall of Kunduz was a shock for both President Ashraf Ghani and his international backers. It was the first big city that was captured by the Taliban since 2001.

The city was recaptured later. But "it's wrong to believe that the Taliban are gone," said another local resident. "They don't control the city but they are everywhere else. Their fighters regularly come to Baghlan. This is happening because we have a weak and corrupt government."

California's new climate refugees

Nearly 2,00,000 people were evacuated from northern California due to wildfires this year

BERKELEY



"Perhaps because the U.S. is such a large, large country, we don't think

in terms of ourselves as being refugees often, even though people are moving. And so, climate refugee is not a term we use to describe ourselves even though every time something like this wildfire happens, clearly, we are moving, you know?" Cynthia Strecker thought aloud sitting in her son's South Berkeley home. She had moved there following the Kincade Fire in northern California late October this year.

Ms. Cynthia, 73, a retired school teacher, has spent four decades living in the woods in Monte Rio, an idyllic town of just over 1,000 people along the Russian River, about 120

km northwest of Berkeley. But this October 26 was the first time she had to evacuate due to a wildfire. Nearly 2,00,000 people were ordered to evacuate from northern California's Sonoma County, the heart of the State's storied wine country.

Climate refugees is not a term that exists in international law, according to UNHCR. Climate change was not known in 1951 when the Refugee Convention was designed in the aftermath of the World Wars. The UNHCR refers to climate refugees as "persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change", clubbing them with other Internally Displaced Persons, who are not protected by a legal instrument unless they face armed conflict.

Moreover, movements due to climate incidents rarely evolve into international refugee migration, especially in large countries that offer

habitable spaces in other regions. But the lack of a universal legal framework to deal with climate-related displacements leaves such incidents to be dealt with largely by nation-states. Some fleeing the Kincade Fire camped out for days in their cars in Walmart parking lots and a cathedral as shelters and evacuation centres swelled. For some, this was their second year in a row. As the smoke from the fires spread, commuters in the Bay Area wore face masks handed to them by local non-profits.

The Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre states that of the 30.6 million people displaced in 2017, 18.8 million were disaster-related. The U.S. ranked sixth among the top 10 countries with nearly 1.7 million people moving due to disaster-related displacements in 2017 alone. That year, China topped the list with 4.5 million, followed by the Philippines with 2.5 million people displaced due to climate-related disasters.

In the U.S., the hardest hit are usually undocumented farm workers. Christie Lubin, who works at the Graton Day Labor Center, an undocumented workers' union for wine country daily wagers, said many members had lost nearly 10 days of wages and were struggling to pay rent for November. Ms. Lubin, along with her two daughters and their families, had to be evacuated from Graton.

Fire tornadoes

With lessons learnt from extremely destructive wildfires in the past couple of years, Calfire, the State's fire protection agency, was particularly pro-active this year. Residents also perhaps heeded calls to evacuate more readily than in previous years. Ms. Cynthia considers this sentiment as she sizes up the mind-boggling prospect of fire-proofing her redwood tree shingle-home.

The former Mayor of Palo Alto, Patrick Burt, called these fast-moving conflagrations "fire tornadoes". He



said it is something people had never witnessed before. Palo Alto is a small but wealthy city located in the heart of the Silicon Valley, sandwiched between the global headquarters of Google and Facebook. Administrators here fear a sea-level rise inci-

dent. When this reporter asked Mr. Burt how such climate events would be handled in the future, he said: "What is becoming apparent with the risk of massive wildfires and entire communities being eliminated, like in the case of Paradise – this is becoming a first world case of significant numbers of climate refugees. In more affluent countries, there are choices that could be made in the event of a climate-driven mass evacuation, which is the choice of return."

Mr. Burt added: "A small city administration would not be adequate to address climate change. On sea level rise, we have begun a San Francisco Bay wide coordinated plan, but there is no funding in place. In Palo Alto, we included an adaptation plan and looked at sea level rise and wondered which places to protect and places from where we would have to retreat. Could this be done without mass migration? We don't know, but displacement might be unavoidable".

Sri Lanka and the world under the new presidency

Colombo has seen both engagement and confrontation with outside world under new govt.

COLOMBO



In the weeks that followed President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's big election win, Sri Lanka witnessed some rapid international outreach – both from and to Colombo – reflecting the strategic and geographic prominence of the Indian Ocean island that is home to 21 million people.

India was among the earliest to reach out to the new leader, perhaps reflecting South Block's hope of emerging Sri Lanka's foremost partner.

Mr. Rajapaksa had barely assumed charge as President when External Affairs Minister Jaishankar landed in Colombo, to hand over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation to New Delhi. In about a fortnight after

his election, the newly-elected Sri Lankan President flew to New Delhi, promising to renew strong ties after a period of "misunderstanding" between India and the Rajapaksa. In an interestingly-timed interview to Indian website Bharat Shakti ahead of his departure, President Rajapaksa said his government will not do anything that would threaten India's security, and even spoke of possibly renegotiating the deal on the Chinese-built port in the southern Hambantota district where New Delhi's past concerns are known.

Both sides hailed the visit as successful, with India pledging a \$450-million line of credit to Sri Lanka, in addition to telling media that New Delhi conveyed to President Rajapaksa its "expectation" that he will take post-war reconciliation forward. Mr. Rajapaksa tweeted about inviting Mr. Modi to be the first fo-



reign dignitary to visit Sri Lanka in his presidency.

The regional outreach would continue the following week, with the visit of Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. During his talks, Mr. Rajapaksa sought Islamabad's

help in tackling the drug menace and extremism. Mr. Qureshi handed over an invitation from Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan to his counterpart Mahinda Rajapaksa, who accepted it.

Next to visit was Wu Jianghao, a special envoy from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, who called on the Rajapaksa brothers helming the country's two most powerful offices. Colombo's leaders, across party lines, have traditionally held a close relationship with China – one of its biggest donors – as well as with Pakistan.

'No debt trap'
Recently, dismissing criticism of high-interest Chinese loans, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa told China's state-run Xinhua news agency that Sri Lanka's engagement with the China-initiated Belt and Road Initiative did not amount to a "debt-trap" as portrayed by some "western media". "If Sri Lanka and China have any problems, we can easily discuss

and resolve them as friends," he said. However, not all matters on foreign relations have been pleasant. The U.K.'s Conservative Party may not have realised that omitting an Oxford comma in its manifesto would spark a diplomatic incident.

"We will continue to support international initiatives to achieve reconciliation, stability and justice across the world, and in current or former conflict zones such as Cyprus, Sri Lanka and the Middle East, where we maintain our support for a two-state solution," it read, leading some in Sri Lanka to interpret it as an endorsement of a two-state solution in Sri Lanka as well. Following criticism in Sri Lanka, the party clarified that the "two-state" reference only pertained to the Israel-Palestine situation in West Asia.

But another issue, regarding the alleged abduction and sexual harassment of a local staffer of the Colombo-based Swiss Embassy, has only escalated in the past few weeks, with Colombo and Bern putting out conflicting accounts of the incident.

Late November, the Embassy said its local staff member had been "detained" and "threatened" by a group of men in a "serious security incident". The Sri Lankan national, attached to the visa section, was reportedly forced to divulge sensitive information, soon after a senior police investigator probing cases involving members of the Rajapaksa family, sought asylum in Switzerland.

After a Colombo court imposed travel restrictions on the staffer and ordered a medical examination, the staffer has been testifying before the Criminal Investigation Department for hours together. Meanwhile the Secretary to the Defence Ministry has called the reported incident "a big drama".

Clearly, Colombo's foreign relations have seen both – proactive outreach and active confrontation – in the first month under the new administration. For foreign policy watchers here, 2020 might be a telling year for Sri Lanka and the world.



Meera Srinivasan
is The Hindu's
Colombo
correspondent

India starts as the overwhelming favourite in ODI series

Faltering Pant continues to be the cynosure; West Indies in a rebuilding mode in the 50-over format

WI IN INDIA

S. DIPAK RAGAV
CHENNAI

In a city known for its heat and humidity, the last two days have been a bit of an anomaly with gloomy weather and intermittent showers welcoming India and the West Indies ahead of the first One-Day International to be played at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Sunday.

While the teams wouldn't mind the pleasant weather, it has not exactly helped in terms of preparations with India's optional practice session being cancelled on Saturday.

However, it shouldn't matter much for the home team as it will start the overwhelming favourite despite not playing an ODI in the last four months.

Add to that, India's ODI record against West Indies in recent times has been impressive, the Men in Blue winning the last nine bilateral series.

West Indies' last triumph over India came 13 years ago – a 4-1 win in 2006 in the Caribbean islands.

Potent force

Despite the absence of Shikhar Dhawan, India's top-order of Rohit Sharma, K.L. Rahul and Virat Kohli continues to be a potent force, especially with Rahul finding form in the recent T20Is, with three half-centuries from four outings.

While India's top-order is one of the best in the world, the same can't be said of the middle-order and that is something the team would want to set right in this series. It has been a cause of worry for the second-ranked side in the world for a while and it proved to be costly in the World Cup semifinal against New Zealand.

Over the last few years, the team management has



Runs and tons: Rohit Sharma is an asset to India at the top of the order. ■ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

tried different players in the middle-order, from Manish Pandey and Ambati Rayudu to Dinesh Karthik and Vijay Shankar without satisfactory results.

More than just flamboyance

This series provides an opportunity for the likes of Shreyas Iyer and Shivam Dube, who could make his ODI debut on Sunday, to show what they can do. Shreyas was impressive in his last two ODI appearances in the West Indies with two half-centuries and has had some valuable knocks in the T20Is as well.

Under fire

But all eyes will be on Rishabh Pant, who has been under fire in recent times and it will be a crucial series for the wicketkeeper-batsman. One good thing going for him, though, is the faith the captain and the team management have shown in him as they see the 22-year-old as someone with the X-factor who could become a genuine match-winner for the side.

The West Indies, on the

other hand, is a side in rebuilding mode in the one-day format with five new players, who were not part of the T20I squad.

The teams (from):

India: Virat Kohli (Capt.), Rohit Sharma, Mayank Agarwal, K.L. Rahul, Rishabh Pant, Manish Pandey, Shreyas Iyer, Kedar Jadhav, Ravindra Jadeja, Shivam Dube, Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Shami, Deepak Chahar and Shardul Thakur.

West Indies: Kieron Pollard (Capt.), Sunil Ambris, Shai Hope, Khary Pierre, Roston Chase, Alzarri Joseph, Sheldon Cottrell, Brandon King, Nicholas Pooran, Shimron Hetmyer, Evin Lewis, Romario Shepherd, Jason Holder, Keemo Paul and Hayden Walsh Jr. and Khary Pierre.

Umpires (on-field): Shaun George, Nitin Menon; **Third umpire:** Rod Tucker; **Fourth umpire:** Anil Choudhary; **Match referee:** David Boon.

Match starts at 1.30 p.m. IST

■ India has won the last nine bilateral ODI series against West Indies

STAT SPHERE



INDIA TOP RUN-SCORERS



TOP WICKET-TAKERS



WEST INDIES TOP RUN-SCORERS



TOP WICKET-TAKERS



THE DATES

India vs West Indies in ODIs in India

Matches - 130

India - 62

West Indies - 62

Tied - 2

No Result - 4

India vs West Indies in ODIs

Matches - 55

India - 27

West Indies - 27

Tied - 1

All matches begin at 1.30 p.m.

Live on Star Sports 1 (SD & HD)

COMPILED BY ANANTAJAITH RA

Player Inns Runs HS Ave Strike Rate 50s/100s

Player	Inns	Runs	HS	Ave	Strike Rate	50s/100s
Kohli	35	2146	157*	76.64	97.1	10/9
Tendulkar	39	1573	141*	52.43	78.02	11/4
Dravid	38	1348	109*	42.12	74.39	8/3
Rohit	28	1265	162	57.5	89.97	10/2
Ganguly	27	1142	98	47.58	72.18	11/0

Name Inns Wkts BBM Ave Eco 4W/5W

Name	Inns	Wkts	BBM	Ave	Eco	4W/5W
Kapil	42	43	4/54	28.88	3.62	1/0
Kumble	25	41	6/12	23.73	4.36	1/1
Jadeja	26	38	5/36	27.34	4.69	1/1
Harbhajan	30	33	3/32	34.27	4.26	0/0
Agarkar	21	32	3/24	24.5	4.49	0/0

Player Inns Runs HS Ave Strike Rate 50s/100s

Player	Inns	Runs	HS	Ave	Strike Rate	50s/100s
Haynes	36	1357	152*	42.4	64.28	9/2
Gayle	41	1334	140	32.53	88.99	6/4
Chanderpaul	41	1319	149*	35.64	76.37	10/2
Sarwan	31	1296	115*	58.9	75.65	11/1
Hooper	42	1279	113*	44.1	84.75	8/1

Name Inns Wkts BBM Ave Eco 4W/5W

Name	Inns	Wkts	BBM	Ave	Eco	4W/5W
Walsh	38	44	4/16	24.15	3.24	2/0
Hooper	45	36	4/37	39.55	4.65	1/0
Richards	22	36	6/41	21.97	4.63	1/1
Ambrose	25	32	4/36	22.46	3.23	1/0
Rampaul	14	28	5/51	23.78	5.62	3/1

COMPILED BY ANANTAJAITH RA

S. DIPAK RAGAV

CHENNAI

India's batting coach Vikram Rathour laid out a strong case for persisting with wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant despite the youngster's lean patch with the bat.

Ahead of the first ODI on Sunday, Rathour explained the reasons for the long rope given to the 22-year-old Delhi player.

"The reason why we keep discussing him is that he has got immense ability. Everybody (the selectors and team-management) believes he can be the X-factor. He is working hard on his game and fitness and we hope he comes good. Once he starts coming good, he can be a match-winner. He has been

given an opportunity because he has done well in this format in the past," said Rathour.

When asked if Pant needed a break considering the intense criticism he has

come under, Rathour said, "I don't think the time has arrived yet (for a break). I think he is working on certain things, he is looking good in the nets and we are just hoping he comes good."

"He has played a couple of reasonable innings in the last few games in the T20s. Even in the last game, he was asked to do a certain job which he did, that's what the team looks for. It didn't come off, which happens on certain days."

On the issues with the middle-order, Rathour said the fact that top-order has done the bulk of the scoring meant the middle-order has often not had enough time.

"That's a difficult problem to address when the top-order is doing well."

"You are right, they are not getting enough balls to bat but I don't think we can do anything as a team to address it," said the former India opener.

Complete backing: India's batting coach Rathour feels Pant has been given an opportunity because he has done well in the past. ■ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM



Aussies in command despite collapse

Southee hits back with four scalps after Kiwi batting debacle

NZ IN AUSTRALIA

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE PERTH

Australia was in a commanding position despite a late batting collapse on the third day of the first Test against New Zealand here on Saturday.

Having led by 250 runs on the first innings, the home side was 167 for six at stumps, with Matthew Wade on eight and Pat Cummins on one – an overall lead of 417.

Cruising at 131 for one when Marnus Labuschagne (50) and Joe Burns (53) were at the crease, the Australians lost five for 29 under lights later in the day against some spirited bowling from the Kiwis, with Tim Southee claiming four for 63.

Labuschagne, dropped on four by Colin de Grandhomme off the bowling of Neil Wagner (two for 40), missed the chance to join elite company when he pulled a short ball straight to Mitchell Santner at mid-wicket from the same

bowler.

Without a Test century only a month ago, he was on track to become just the second Australian, and fifth overall, to score four Test centuries in succession.

The only Australian to do so previously was Jack Finley in 1936.

Santner couldn't get a wicket with his spin, but he was the centre of attention in the field, colliding with Aleem Dar late in the day and leaving the umpire with a knee injury.

Dar, umpiring in a record 129th Test, spent several minutes lying on the ground and needed medical attention before returning to his post.

Smith's relatively lean summer continued when he holed out to a short ball from Wagner for 16, the first time in his entire 71-Test career he has gone three matches without a half-century.

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Gone! Tim Paine is castled by Tim Southee. ■ AP

Southee hit four wickets in the first session, including the wicket of Paine, who was castled by a bouncer from the left-hander. The Kiwi batsman had

TV PICKS

NBA: Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 a.m.

Pakistan vs Sri Lanka: 1st Test, Sony ESPN (SD & HD), 10.30 a.m.

Australia vs New Zealand: 1st Test, Sony Six (SD & HD), 10.30 a.m.

BWF World Tour Finals: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 10.30 a.m.

India vs West Indies: 1st ODI, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 1.30 p.m.

Serie A: Sony Ten 2 (SD & HD), 5 p.m., 7.30 p.m. & 1 a.m. (Monday)

Premier League: SS Select 1 & 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m. & 9.30 p.m.

ISL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.

Bundesliga: SS Select 2 (SD & HD), 10 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Monday).

IN BRIEF



Lakers end Heat's home streak

Anthony Davis scored a game-high 33 points and delivered a pep talk to LeBron James as the Los Angeles Lakers handed the Miami Heat their first loss at home with a 113-110 victory on Friday. James scored 28 points, 12 assists and nine rebounds and leading scorer Davis also had 10 rebounds for the Lakers, who extended their winning streak to six games.

The results: Houston 130 bt Orlando 107; Philadelphia 116 bt New Orleans 109; Lakers 113 bt Miami 110; Indiana 110 bt Atlanta 100; Charlotte 83 bt Chicago 73; Milwaukee 127 bt Memphis 114; Utah 114 bt Golden State 106; Clippers 124 bt Minnesota 117; New York 103 bt Sacramento 101. AGENCIES

Olympic legend Peter Snell dead

WELLINGTON Three-time Olympic champion and World mile record-holder Peter Snell has died in Dallas. He was 80. Snell, who is regarded as one of the greatest middle-distance runners, won the 800m at the 1960 Rome Olympics and the 800-1,500 double at the 1964 Tokyo Games. He was the first man since 1920 to win the 800 and 1,500 at the same Olympics. No male athlete has done so since. Snell also won two CWG gold medals in the 880 yards and mile at Perth in 1962. AP

Lara weighs in for blind cricket

Lauds the initiative for providing a platform for disabled women

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

West Indian great Brian Lara has lent support to cricket for the blind by associating himself with the cause ahead of the Blind Cricket Nationals for women, sponsored by the Samarthanam Trust for the Disabled.

In an effort to promote equality and parity, Cricket Association for Blind in India (CABI) has taken the initiative to organise this tournament, to be held in the T20 format from December 16-19.

With India's marquee woman cricketer Smriti Mandhana championing the cause, CABI hopes to nurture the dreams and aspirations of talented women's cricketers and mould them into role models for the future.

CABI is also looking for support from BCCI and recently met Board president Sourav Ganguly. "Sourav is very inclusive and I am sure he will support blind cricket," Lara said.

"Disability should not be



For a worthy cause: Brian Lara with cricketers at the launch of the Blind Cricket Nationals for women on Saturday. ■ RAKESH RAO

considered a hindrance to achieving one's goals," said Lara.

"I thoroughly appreciate this fantastic initiative taken by CABI and Samarthanam Trust and I am convinced that if such strong stakeholders come together around the world, there is no reason why blind cricket will not see a growth world over. Such competitions will also provide a platform for talented women and empower them."

On blind cricket, Lara added, "I'm not blind. And I'm very grateful and blessed to have all my faculties to be able to do the things that I've done throughout my career. "But if I was, I suppose I will feel some sort of injustice. I would be like I wasn't given a fair share. But I'll come to terms with it. And I'd want to do the same things that I have done, as opposed to what I say.

"I would want to go to school, want to learn. Want to be educated, want to have a job. I would want to have

recreation. I feel very proud and humbled to be in their presence. I feel this is wonderful."

Seven teams representing the Delhi, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha and West Bengal will fight it out in the league stages over the first two days spread over three venues in Siri Fort Sports Complex, DDA Sports Complex in Saket and Jamia Millia University.

The final will be played at the Siri Fort Sports Complex.

Young chalks up victory

MRF CHALLENGE

SPORTS BUREAU
SAKHIR (BAHRAIN)

Dylan Young of Australia showcased his vast experience to chalk up a fluent win in the final race of the second round of the MRF Challenge, a support-event for the FIA World Endurance Championship, at the Bahrain International Circuit, here on Saturday.

Young, 30, while scoring his second win in the championship following his success in the first round at Dubai last month, ended the Bent Viscaal-David Schumacher domination.

The results notwithstanding, championship leader



On the podium: Dylan Young, centre, flanked by Manaf Hijjawi, left, and David Schumacher. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Schiavone defeats cancer



Schiavone. ■ GETTY IMAGES

ROME AGENCIE FRANCE PRESSE

Former French Open champion Francesca Schiavone said on Friday she had defeated cancer, defiantly telling fans: "I'm still breathing". The 39-year-old, who became the first Italian woman to win a Grand Slam title with victory at Roland Garros in 2010, revealed her diagnosis in a short video on her Instagram account. "A cancer had been diagnosed to me. I fought a tough battle and now I have won this fight. And now I am back in action," she said. AFP

Crespi takes EB to the top

I-LEAGUE

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Marti Crespi netted a goal a minute from time to help East Bengal beat TRAU FC 2-1 in an I-League fixture Saturday. The victory took the red-and-gold brigade to eight points and top of the standings after four rounds.

The hosts went ahead in the first half through Marcos de la Espada, but the strike was neutralised by Deepak

Devrani who found the target during injury-time in the opening period.

Riding on the confidence of its 4-1 win away at Neroca, East Bengal began strongly. The host missed Spanish attacker Jaime Santos, who was suspended. He was replaced by Ronaldo Oliveira.

Samad Ali Mallick made a move for East Bengal in the eighth minute, but his attempt, from the top of the box, went off the cross-piece. Samad turned provider 10 minutes later, his floa-

ter into the TRAU box helping Espada nod home. East Bengal failed to hold on to its advantage for long as TRAU defender Deepak scored the equaliser in the first minute of added time.

East Bengal struggled to break through TRAU defence after the break. It finally found a way, in the 89th, when defender Crespi provided the perfect finish.

The result: East Bengal 2 (Marcos de la Espada 17, Marti Crespi 89) bt TRAU FC 1 (Deepak Devrani 45+1).

Altered course will challenge the best

TSK 25K

Y.B. SARANGI
KOLKATA

An altered course will challenge some of the best long distance runners from across the world and India in the sixth edition of the Tata Steel Kolkata 25K here on Sunday.

A 9km stretch, including a significant hill and a flyover, has been altered to make the route a one-way path. The change will help participants get a clear course and drastically reduced traffic.

Double World marathon

champion and Olympic silver medallist Abel Kirui from Kenya, former Olympic 10,000m bronze medallist Tariku Bekele of Ethiopia and former World cross country silver medal winner Leonard Barosoton of Kenya will be part of the international men's field in the IAAF Silver Label event, which offers a total prize money of \$100,000.

Tariku, who is targeting 2:02 in marathon, has taken inputs from his brother and 2017 champion Kenenisa Bekele and will use this race as training for big marathons.

For runners like 10,000m specialist Barosoton of Kenya and 3000m steeplechaser American Stanley Kebenei, it will be a test ahead of stiffer road races.

Debele and Matanga in top shape

Among women, promising Ethiopian marathon runner Birke Debele and Tanzanian long distance specialist Failuna Matanga, who placed third two years ago with 1:26:11, are in top shape to give their best.

Sydney marathon third place finisher Tejitu Daba, who has switched from Ethiopia to Bahrain, and Ethiopian Guteni Shone, who ended inside top three in two marathons this year, will be among the top contenders.

Delhi half-marathon podium finishers Srinu Bugatha and Harshad Mhatre among men and local girl Shyamali Singh and Priti Lamba among women will try to claim top positions in the Indian category.

The race has attracted an overall 15,445 entries.

AICF ignores Ministry suggestion

CHESS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Ignoring the Sports Ministry's suggestion that its urgent General Body Meeting be cancelled, the All India Chess Federation (AICF) went ahead with the meeting here on Saturday.

In one of the important decisions taken at the meeting, called by president P.R. Venkateswara Raja, the AICF

decided to advance the organisational elections to February 10, from May/June, 2020.

It was also decided not to discuss the charges of forgery and financial irregularities during the National sub-junior tournament against the Bengal Chess Association. This was done so that the issue could be taken up in the presence of the Sports Ministry's observer at the GBM in Bhopal on Dec. 28.

It was also decided to form a four-member committee, comprising AICF secretary Bharat Singh Chauhan, treasurer Kishor Bandekar, Madhya Pradesh secretary Kapil Saxena and FIDE Zone 3.7 president Ravindra Dongre, to assist the president in the election process on February 10.

It is learnt that representatives of 17 associations participated in Saturday's meeting.

It was also decided to capitalise on the support and grow into champions, joining the organisation full-time to further pursue their sport," said Manjusha.

Manjusha and Rushmi have a common goal: to see Indian Oil step up its support for Indian sport and take it to a different level. They have done their bit to drive Indian sports, powered by Indian Oil!

won the bronze in the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in 2010.

"I feel tremendous satisfaction when young athletes capitalise on the support and grow into champions, joining the organisation full-time to further pursue their sport," said Manjusha.

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Two women and one goal



Rushmi and Manjusha.

■ KAMESH SRINIVASAN

SAF Games in 2004 in Islamabad, I thought it was important to give a junior player a chance in the team. I was posted as coordinator in the Northern region, and have now moved to the corporate office," said Manjusha, who had won the Commonwealth Games bronze in 1998.

Rushmi has an impressive record of having won 40-odd singles and doubles titles on the international circuit, and competed in the London Olympics with Sania Mirza. With Sania, Rushmi had also

won the bronze in the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in 2010.

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