



Sreesanth says he confessed after Delhi Police tortured him

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AgustaWestland bribery case accused brought to India

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British PM to hold talks with EU to renegotiate withdrawal agreement

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India will look to continue winning streak against New Zealand

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## NEARBY



Shelter home owner held for intimidating residents

NEW DELHI  
NGO Love Commandos chairperson Sanjoy Sachdev has been arrested for allegedly intimidating couples at its Paharganj shelter home, the Delhi Commission for Women said on Wednesday. DCP (Central) M.S. Randhawa said Sachdev was arrested on Tuesday and sent to jail following an inspection by DCW.

DELI METRO ▶ PAGE 1

## DDA online portal for land pooling policy on Feb. 5

NEW DELHI  
The Delhi Development Authority will launch an online portal for the land pooling policy on February 5, senior officials told *The Hindu* on Wednesday. The policy promises to provide 17 lakh houses in the Capital, including 5 lakh for the economically weaker sections.

DELI METRO ▶ PAGE 1

DELI METRO ▶ 6 PAGES

# Rahul, Parrikar engage in an all-out letter war over Rafale

Parrikar protests Congress president's reference to him after the latter's Goa visit

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday kept up his attack on the Modi government over the Rafale deal at a Youth Congress (YC) meeting in New Delhi, alleging that the current government had "sold" the Air Force and "stolen" opportunities from the youth to benefit specific corporates. Later, Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar and he engaged in letter warfare over their meeting on Tuesday and statements made by him in two public meetings thereafter.

While speaking at a public meeting in Kochi on Tuesday, after a short courtesy call on an ailing Mr. Parrikar in Goa, and during the address to the YC conclave on Wednesday, Mr. Gandhi targeted the government on the deal and referred to Mr. Parrikar's avowal of not having a role in it.

**'Whole nation heard it'**  
"On the one hand Mr. Parrikar said in a Cabinet meeting in Goa, that the Rafale file is with him and that no one can remove him from Goa, his Minister speaks to a journalist on the phone, the whole country has heard the

**G**Parrikar ji had himself said that while changing the (Rafale) deal, the Prime Minister did not ask the (then) Defence Minister

RAHUL GANDHI,  
Congress  
president

**G**In the five minutes you spent with me, neither did you mention anything about Rafale, nor did we discuss anything about/related to it

MANOHAR PARRIKAR,  
Chief Minister  
of Goa

tape, so Prime Minister Modi to mollify Mr. Parrikar. On the other hand the CBI wants to investigate the deal, here Amit Shah seeks to quieten things down," he said.

In New Delhi, Mr. Gandhi told Youth Congress members that he had met Mr. Parrikar in Goa. In the next sentence, he added, "Parrikar ji had himself said that while changing the deal, the Prime Minister did not ask the Defence Minister." He did not make it clear whether he was referring to Tuesday's meeting or earlier remarks by Mr. Parrikar.

**Parrikar feels 'let down'**  
This prompted Mr. Parrikar to write a letter in protest to Mr. Gandhi, accusing him of using the courtesy call for

"petty political gains" and to assert that no mention of the deal had been made during the meeting.

Mr. Parrikar, in a strongly worded letter, asked Mr. Gandhi not to use the visit to an "ailing person" to "feed political opportunism." "I feel let down that you have used this visit for your petty political gains. In the 05 minutes you spent with me, neither did you mention anything about Rafale, nor did we discuss anything about/related to it," he said.

"Here I am fighting against a life-threatening illness. Due to my training and ideological strength, I wish to serve Goa and its people against any/all odds. I thought your visit would give me your good wishes in that cause of serving our people.

Little did I know that you had other intentions," Mr. Parrikar wrote.

He also noted that Mr. Gandhi had called on him on Tuesday without any prior information. He had received him in the spirit of India's healthy political tradition of rising above partisan considerations and wishing even opponents a quick recovery from any ailment. He also reiterated that the inter-governmental Rafale agreement was as per procurement procedure and that he stood by that.

**'Goa CM under pressure'**  
By late evening, Mr. Gandhi responded to Mr. Parrikar with a letter of his own. "I have not shared any details of my conversation with you when we met in Goa yesterday. In my two speeches since we met, I have referred to what is already in the public domain," he said.

He added that he "emphasised" with the ailing Chief Minister and the "pressure" he was under. "I understand the pressure that forced you to take the unusual step of demonstrating your loyalty to the Prime Minister and his cronies by attacking me in an uncharacteristic manner."

Now, govt. employees join Assam anti-Bill stir

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

Amid talk about a hung Parliament in 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said people should weigh the benefits of "a full majority government" against a "weak coalition government" and urged them to once again choose a government with a clear mandate.

Addressing a youth conclave in Surat, a BJP bastion, Mr. Modi said "strong and big decisions are taken only by the government" with a decisive mandate. "The change that people are witnessing in India is because of the power of the vote and not the power of Modi. For 30 years, coalition governments ran the country. All of them took their benefit from it," he claimed. "One prime

reason behind the current rapid development in India is because people voted intelligently and gave freedom to the country from coalitions," Mr. Modi said.

Congress veteran Ahmed Patel reminded the Prime Minister that his party is running coalition governments in Maharashtra, Bihar and Goa.

**Mementos returned**

The day also saw the families of 855 martyrs of the anti-foreigners Assam agitation (1979-1985) return the mementos received from the government last year as recognition for their sacrifice.

The memento was part of the award package that included ₹5 lakh each.

The Swahid Parial Samannayak Parishad, an organisation of the agitation martyrs' families, gathered at the 'Saeed Niwas' in Guwahati – the headquarters of the All Assam Students' Union that had spearheaded the movement – to stage a protest against the contentious Bill. "If the Bill becomes an Act, the sacrifices made by over 800 martyrs of the Assam agitation would become meaningless," SPSP president Rajen Deka said.

The anti-Bill protests took an ugly turn when a mob assaulted Lakheshwar Moran, president of the Tinukia district unit of the BJP, at a meeting organised by the Lok Jagran Manch.

The organisation, affiliated to the RSS, has been organising a series of meetings in Assam to "dispel myths" about the Bill that has kept Assam and adjoining States in the Northeast on the edge for almost a month now.

(With PTI inputs)

# Modi warns against coalition regime

Cong. points to BJP-led State govts.

MAHESH LANGA  
AHMEDABAD

Amid talk about a hung Parliament in 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said people should weigh the benefits of "a full majority government" against a "weak coalition government" and urged them to once again choose a government with a clear mandate.

References to Constitutional and statutory bodies like the EC have to be done in the form of a letter to its Secretary, Principal Secretary or Deputy Election Commissioner (Deputy EC). Simply sending an office memorandum from junior officials to the EC is not acceptable, it said.

**CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10**



Narendra Modi speaking at a youth conclave in Surat on Wednesday. ■ VIJAY SONEJI

reason behind the current rapid development in India is because people voted intelligently and gave freedom to the country from coalitions," Mr. Modi said.

Congress veteran Ahmed Patel reminded the Prime Minister that his party is running coalition governments in Maharashtra, Bihar and Goa.

**CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10**

# Ministries flouting norms, says EC

Follow protocol to clear decisions

VIKAS DHOOT  
MUMBAI

Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has rebuked Union Ministries for violating protocols while seeking approval for decisions to be announced after the Model Code of Conduct kicks in.

In a letter to Cabinet Secretary P.K. Sinha, the EC has indicated that requests to the EC for grant of 'No Objection' for specific decisions would simply be returned without consideration if the Ministries' communications to the Constitutional body did not follow procedure.

The Commission had returned such requests in several cases during the recent State Assembly elections and has cited some examples from the polls held in five States last year, and the Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh elections of December 2017.

The Commission has taken "a serious note of the way in which officers of various Central government departments are sending references" without following due procedure, and urged the Cabinet Secretary to ensure strict compliance.

References to Constitutional and statutory bodies like the EC have to be done in the form of a letter to its Secretary, Principal Secretary or Deputy Election Commissioner (Deputy EC). Simply sending an office memorandum from junior officials to the EC is not acceptable, it said.

**CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10**

# If no votes for a win, then no cash either

After losing election, candidate's husband asks people to return cash paid for vote

B. PRADEEP  
JAJIREDDYGUDEM

For some, elections apparently come with a money-back guarantee. A two-minute video clip of a man going door-to-door, asking people to return the cash he had given them, has gone viral on social media.

The man in the video is Uppu Prabhakar, 55, the husband of Hymavathi Prabhakar, who contested and lost as a ward nominee in the gram panchayat elections at Jajireddyguudem village in Telangana's Suryapet district on January 25.

The video has attracted contrasting comments – from "Worse than beggars!"



ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK HARICHANDAN  
"Good initiative, people will stop taking money from candidates." Mr. Prabhakar, a liquor vendor and farmer, has been incommunicado since the video came out. Villagers said Mr. Prabhakar told them that

the money now belonged to him since they did not vote for him. Ms. Prabhakar had lost, securing only 24 of the 269 votes in the ward.

But the video is only half the story. Mr. Prabhakar was recently deemed a rebel and suspended by the Congress.

Shortly thereafter, on January 17, his wife became a ward nominee as an independent candidate, and he campaigned for her in his own style. "He would walk in with a quarter bottle of liquor kept in a plastic jug and ask for votes. He distributed jugs, as the jug was his wife's election symbol," a Jajireddyguudem resident said. Village elders said the 'cash per voter (CPV)'

tradition' was widely prevalent, as was the practice of giving every voter a quarter bottle of liquor every day until polling day. The CPV ranged from ₹800 to ₹1,500. Mr. Prabhakar, villagers said, allegedly gave every voter ₹800, along with liquor and the plastic jug.

After his wife had lost, Mr. Prabhakar, the villagers said, targeted about 110 voters. He visited their homes with *mantra biyyam*, raw rice mixed with turmeric, and asked them to swear on it that they had voted for his wife. If they didn't, he demanded his cash back. "We were afraid that the *mantra biyyam* could go against us. So we told him the truth and returned the cash," said a resident.

(With PTI inputs)

cesses were dependent solely on the directors discharging their fiduciary duty to recuse themselves and avoid conflict, implies that the bank's processes were rendered ineffective by her approach to such disclosures and avoidance of conflict," the bank said.

Ms. Kochhar, who assumed charge as MD and CEO on May 1, 2009, resigned in October last year.

**CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10**

**ANOTHER REPORT ▶ PAGE 13**

# Ten get life for 2008 Assam serial blasts

RAHUL KARMAKAR  
GUWAHATI

A special court on Wednesday sentenced Ranjan Daimari, the chairman of the extremist National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB-R), and nine others to life imprisonment for their role in the deadly October 2008 serial bomb blasts that killed 88 people and injured 540 others in Assam.

Four others were convicted under certain sections of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, where the maximum punishment is five to seven years.

**Jail term already over**  
Except for Nilim Daimari, facing a separate case of illegal entry into the country, the others could walk free after paying a nominal fine as they have already spent 10 years in jail.

Almost all of them are members of the NDFB-R.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which probed the serial blasts case since December 2008, had charge-sheeted 22 persons. Seven of them were declared absconders and three among them are believed to have died in encounters with the security forces.

**CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 10**

## Bengal Congress on the back foot with Noor's exit

Party leaders, workers worried about remaining MPs, MLAs

SUVOJIT BAGCHI  
KOLKATA

The departure of Congress MP Mausam Benazir Noor, elected from Malda-North in central Bengal, has set off ripples in the party.

Malda has remained a Congress bastion since 1980. But after Ms. Noor's exit many Congress workers and leaders are sceptical if the party will be able to keep the rest of the flock - three MPs, and two dozen MLAs in West Bengal - together till the Lok Sabha polls given that about one and a half dozen of its legislators have already joined the Trinamool Congress since the 2016 Assembly polls.

Ms. Noor, the niece of legendary Congress leader late A.B.A. Ghani Khan Choudhury, joined the TMC on January 28 and said that she "trusted Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in her fight against communalism".

Her exit has dented the confidence of State Congress workers. "National leaders of the Congress and several possible coalition partners shared the stage with Mamata Banerjee about a week ago. We never thought she would poach from the Congress after that January 19 meeting, but she did. It indicates how ruthless she is," said a Congress MLA.



Mausam Benazir Noor

in 2013 to 30 in 2018, the BJP's jumped from none to six. The Left Front and the Congress' dropped from 31 to two. Ms. Noor read the writing on the wall and left the party that was never defeated in Malda [delimitation bifurcated the seat into Malda-North and Malda-South Lok Sabha constituencies] since 1980. "Huge turnout in [BJP president] Amit Shah's rally in her constituency earlier this month also disturbed her," the MLA, known to be close to Ms. Noor, said.

Bengal Congress president Somendra Nath Mitra said that Ms. Noor's exit will not affect the Congress' poll prospects in any way, indicating that Ghani Khan Choudhury's nephew, Isha Khan Choudhury, will be its Malda-North candidate in the Lok Sabha elections. If so, then the seat will witness a fight between two cousins - Mausam Benazir Noor from the TMC and Isha Khan Choudhury from the Congress.

**The BJP factor**  
Another factor responsible for Ms. Noor's decision to join the TMC is the BJP's growth in parts of her constituency. The BJP won six of Malda district's 38 zila parishad seats in the three panchayat polls last year, despite large-scale violence in the region. While the TMC's seats in the zila parishad went up from six

Legislators of two Assembly segments under the Malda-North Lok Sabha constituency joined the TMC over the last few months. One of them, Samar Mukherjee, was with the Congress, while the other, Dipali Biswas, was a CPI (M) leader. "This development shook the confidence of Mausam Noor," said the MLA. Ms. Noor was the Malda district president of the Congress.

High Court lifts liquor sale 'ban' in Mizoram

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

The Aizawl Bench of the Gauhati High Court has set aside the Mizoram government's notification extending dry days and allowed liquor vendors to open shop till March 31.

The Mizo National Front government, headed by Chief Minister Zoramthanga, had – in keeping with an election promise of imposing prohibition – declared dry days from December 21, 2018, to January 14 this year for a liquor-free Christmas and New Year. The dry day period was later extended till March 10.

The Mizoram Liquor Dealers' Association and owners of three bonded warehouses in the State had filed separate lawsuits against the government on January 17 challenging the extension of dry days. The dealers said the extended dry run made them incur a loss of ₹4 lakh per day while the liquor stock was piling up because of purchases made till the end of the current fiscal.

"The High Court on Tuesday quashed the notification of the government since there was no exit protocol to pave the way for prohibition. It is a relief for vendors and warehouse owners whose business was hampered due to the sudden declaration of dry days," said Francis Saito, a liquor vendor.

## 'Odisha tribals being harassed over murders'

OPDR demands high-level inquiry

STAFF REPORTER  
BERHAMPUR

2018.

Similarly, Jitendra Pradhan, an educated tribal youth of Bhogara village, was killed in August 2018.

**Slow probe**  
"In both cases, the police investigation was too slow," said Mr. Gaya. But the Kui tribals who protested against the delay in investigation have been entangled in cases of violence and arson. They are being harassed because of these cases, he claimed.

OPDR activists said the family members of both the deceased have alleged that the main culprits behind the murders were being protected by the police. "But the police have entangled over a hundred people in cases of armed attack and arson. Fearing arrest most male members of these remote villages are not daring to go out," said Mr. Ranjan.

A tribal leader named Ganesh Mallik (55) of Salaptailla, who was protesting against the lewd activities of some locals, was murdered in June 2018. The OPDR has demanded a high-level inquiry into the two murders and arrest of the accused.

## MHA tribunal to visit Tripura

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
AGARTALA

An Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal, formed by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, would visit Tripura from February 2 to record evidence against two outlawed insurgent outfits.

The Ministry had imposed a fresh ban of five years on the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) on October 3, 2018, for their violent and subversive activities.

The government had set up the tribunal, headed by Delhi High Court Judge Suresh Kait, on November 15 last year for adjudicating whether or not the two Tripura-based militant outfits should be declared banned organisations under the law. The tribunal had issued show-cause notice to the two outfits on November 27, 2018, for submitting their objections or reply within 30 days.

**DELHI** Timings

THURSDAY, JAN. 31
RISE 07:10 SET 17:59
RISE 03:29 SET 14:19
<b>FRIDAY, FEB. 01</b>
RISE 07:10 SET 18:00
RISE 04:22 SET 15:05
<b>SATURDAY, FEB. 02</b>
RISE 07:09 SET 18:01
RISE 05:14 SET 15:54

**Delhi Weather** max min  
Delhi City 21 05  
Safdarjung 21 05  
Palam 21 06

**Delhi Pilm Today**  
19°C Rise in pollution level with cloudy weather expected. Moderate fog/mist is likely with light rain.

**Delhi Pilm Tomorrow**  
19°C Very poor pollution level to continue. Shallow fog/mist during cold morning with cloudy sky and moderate winds.

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## Counting of votes for Ramgarh poll today

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
ALWAR

Counting of votes in the Ramgarh Assembly constituency of Rajasthan's Alwar district, which went to poll on January 28, will take place on Thursday.

As many as 20 candidates contested the election, which could not be held along with the other constituencies due to the death of the BSP candidate ahead of the December 7 Assembly polls.

"Counting will be held at Arts College in Ramgarh tomorrow. There will be a total of 20 rounds starting 8 a.m. amid tight security arrangements," Ramgarh Returning Officer Pankaj Sharma said on Wednesday.

Ramgarh has 2.35 lakh voters that include 1.10 lakh female voters.

A victory on the seat will help the Congress touch 100 in the 200-member House, reducing its dependence on support from other non-BJP parties.

## Biopolymer research to focus on new products

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
JAIPUR

Rajasthan is promoting research in the biopolymer sector with an emphasis on fabrication of new products and generation of more employment opportunities. The initiative will also be linked with the handicraft industry for extending the benefits to both of them.

State Industries Commissioner Krishna Kant Pathak said here earlier this week that institutions such as the Centre for Skill and Technical Support in Jaipur and the National Institute of Fashion Technology in Jodhpur could play a significant role in developing the technology and break the monopoly of some countries.

NIFT will establish a gallery exhibiting the textile industry's progress from handlooms to hi-tech machines and development of designs from medieval to modern period. Mr. Pathak said that a testing laboratory for plastic products would be set up and an awareness campaign launched on their utility and standard norms.

## Mann reappointed Punjab AAP chief

Sangrur MP claims Cong. working hand in glove with Akalis

**VIKAS VASUDEVA**  
CHANDIGARH

Sangrur MP Bhagwant Mann was on Wednesday reappointed chief of the Aam Aadmi Party's Punjab unit.

Mr. Mann had resigned from the post last year in protest against AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's apology to former Shiromani Akali Dal Minister Bikram Singh Majithia for alleging his involvement in the rampant illegal drugs business in the State.

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister and in-charge of party's affairs in Punjab Manish Sisodia, who was also present on the occasion, said that health, employment, education and farmers' concerns were the real issues and AAP was working to bring them into the national discourse.

"People across the country see AAP as a movement and a party which is working towards elimination of



Punjab AAP president Bhagwant Mann and Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia in Chandigarh on Wednesday. ■ AKHILESH KUMAR

corruption from politics. They [people] have high hopes from the party," he said.

Mr. Mann expressed his gratitude to the party for reposing its faith in him and accused Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and the Badals of the Shiromani Akali Dal of being hand in glove with one another.

"Capt. Amarinder had backed out on the poll pro-

mises that were made to the people ahead of the last Assembly elections. The people of Punjab are sick of the subsequent anti-people governments and see AAP as the only hope on the vast political horizon," he said.

Mr. Mann said that the Punjab AAP would reach out to the remotest village and every household across the State with the Delhi model of governance.

## Punjab seeks debt relief package

Recommend graded compensation tapering formula due to revenue loss'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
CHANDIGARH

Citing tight financial situation faced by the State, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Wednesday sought a special debt relief package from the 15th Finance Commission. The State needs funds to support the government's efforts to

revive fiscal health, along with a one-time package to enable payment of the entire debt of the distressed farmers of Punjab.

At a meeting of the 15th Finance Commission here, Capt. Amarinder expressed concern over the permanent loss of revenue suffered by the State after the GST implementation. The compensation from the Centre will also end from July 1, 2022, resulting in a drastic fall in revenue in the range of ₹10,000 to ₹12,000 crore per annum, he pointed out. An official statement said

that in view of the loss, the Chief Minister urged the Commission to recommend a graded compensation tapering formula to the Government of India for States like Punjab beyond June 30, 2022. The statement added that Capt. Amarinder sought a special package for the State due to its special problems such as highest SC population in percentage terms, long and thickly populated border with Pakistan, riverine and sub-mountainous areas and flight of industry due to concessions to neighbouring States.

## M.P. to open 1,000 cow shelters

Would check stray cattle menace, create 40 lakh man-days' job

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh government will set up 1,000 'gaushalas' or cow shelters in the State in the next four months to accommodate around one lakh stray cows and their progeny, an official said on Wednesday.

Setting up 'gaushalas' in every village panchayat was a key promise made by the Congress in its manifesto for the 2018 Assembly elections.

With this announcement, the government expects to not only tackle stray cattle menace but also create 40 lakh man-days employment.

"While reviewing Project Gaushala at the State secretariat on Tuesday, Chief Minister Kamal Nath issued directives to set up 1,000 cow shelters which would accommodate nearly one lakh stray cows and their progeny, in a period of four months," a State government official



Madhya Pradesh CM Kamal Nath paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi in Bhopal on Wednesday. ■ PTI

said. He added that the Chief Minister wanted the project to take off at the earliest.

"Mr. Nath said 'Project Gaushala' would provide relief from stray cattle menace in urban and rural areas. In addition, homeless animals will find shelter. This will also create employment opportunities in rural areas," the official said.

The Department of Rural Development will be the project's nodal agency. The project will be implemented by gram panchayats, self-help groups, the institutions empanelled with the State Board for Conservation of Bovine Animals and the organisations selected by the district-level committees,

'Ministers took dip in Sangam to wash off their sins'

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**

**BALLIA (U.P.)** Uttar Pradesh Minister and Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party chief Om Prakash Rajbhar on Wednesday took a dip at his Cabinet colleagues for taking a dip in the Sangam, saying they had gone there to wash off their sins.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and his ministerial colleagues took a dip in the Sangam on Tuesday after holding a Cabinet meeting in Allahabad.

"The Ministers in the Yogi Adityanath government had gone for a holy dip at the Sangam on Tuesday for washing their sins... going back on promises made to the public is also a sin and the Ministers have tried to wash it through a dip in the Sangam," Mr. Rajbhar said.

## Rajasthan plans separate cadre for DIETs

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
JAIPUR

The Rajasthan government is considering formation of a separate cadre for the District Institutes of Education and Training and strengthen them for imparting training to teachers.

The teachers will get training in the districts where they are posted, with the focus on improving the quality of teaching in government schools and taking care of the students' needs.

Minister of State for Education Govind Singh Dotsara

said here on Wednesday that the teachers' training would be made "more practical", while only those teachers would be sent on deputation to the projects who were committed to achieving the targets.

The Gyan Sampark portal would also be upgraded for creating more facilities in schools.

Mr. Dotsara said the number of model schools would be increased and teachers' vacancies filled up. The school textbooks were being reviewed on the basis of learning outcome, he added.

IN BRIEF



Major fire at expo grounds in Hyderabad

HYDERABAD  
A major fire broke out at Numaish, the Hyderabad Industrial Exhibition, at the city's central part of Nampally on Wednesday evening, reducing at least 200 stalls and property worth crores to ashes. "Seven fire tenders reached the exhibition grounds. No loss of life was reported. Most of the visitors were already evacuated," Hyderabad Police Commissioner Anjan Kumar told *The Hindu* over phone. It is suspected that the bursting of gas cylinders could have caused the fire.

Malayalam actor Sreenivasan hospitalised

KOCHI  
Actor, screenwriter and director Sreenivasan, 62, who was admitted to Ernakulam Medical Centre Hospital, near here, following acute breathlessness on Wednesday morning continues to remain in the Intensive Care Unit with ventilator support. The actor was dubbing for a new movie at a private studio when he developed uneasiness and was rushed to the hospital nearby at 9.45 a.m.

Student stabs classmate to death in Bengaluru

BENGALURU  
A 19-year-old pre-university student allegedly fatally stabbed his classmate in the college washroom at Bagalaguppe near here on Wednesday. The two were commerce students at Soundarya Composite PU College. The police suspect that the accused was jealous of the victim's friendship with a girl in their class. The police have registered a case of murder and produced the accused before a magistrate, who remanded him in judicial custody.

# Don't let things get out of hand, Deve Gowda warns Congress

H.D. Kumaraswamy and JD(S) supremo fire indirect salvos at Siddaramaiah

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

There seems to be no end in sight for the uneasy relationship between the coalition partners, with top JD(S) leaders on Wednesday taking turns to blame Congress leaders, including former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in an oblique way.

Amid criticism by Congress legislators over the functioning of the coalition government in the past week, both Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy and JD(S) supremo H.D. Deve Gowda accused them of tarnishing the good work done.

Mr. Gowda cautioned the Congress leadership that it should take action before things go out of hand.

"Do not talk about the coalition lightly. Otherwise

They [Congressmen] are unnecessarily tarnishing the work being done by Mr. Kumaraswamy. You [Mr. Siddaramaiah] were also Chief Minister for five years. I have not uttered a word about the work you did

H.D. DEVE GOWDA,  
JD(S) leader &  
former Prime Minister

Even today I am hurt. No one has understood me. Said I will resign. How long should I bear [the pressure]? Power is not permanent and that is why I said I will resign

H.D. KUMARASWAMY,  
Karnataka Chief Minister

things will get out of hand, which we will not tolerate," he warned.

How long will it continue?

Attacking their partner on a public platform, both made known their displeasure over Congress legislators making public statements. Both were addressing a party workers'

rally after the national council meet here on Wednesday.

Asking how long the attack on the government would continue, Mr. Gowda said: "Congress legislators are daily saying they cannot meet the Chief Minister. Despite challenges to implement the loan waiver scheme, funds are being allocated to

all schemes started by Mr. Siddaramaiah. How else is the administration to be carried out? How long will this continue?"

Without referring to Mr. Siddaramaiah, who is also the chairman of the coordination committee, Mr. Gowda said: "They [Congressmen] are unnecessarily tarnishing the work being done by Mr. Kumaraswamy. You [Mr. Siddaramaiah] were also Chief Minister for five years. I have not uttered a word about the work you did."

Mr. Kumaraswamy said: "Even today, I am hurt. No one has understood me. It is true that I said I will resign. How long should I bear [the pressure]? Power is not permanent and that is why I said I will resign."

# Long march by rural women to fight liquor hits Bengaluru

Protesters sit on roads seeking audience with Karnataka CM

STAFF REPORTER  
BENGALURU

Hundreds of women, from the elderly to some as young as 19, marched from Malleswaram Grounds to Freedom Park on Wednesday seeking a ban on liquor in the State.

January 30 marked the 12th day of their padayatra that began in Chitradurga. On an average, protesters walked around 20 km a day and covered 20 districts including Belagavi, Kalaburagi, Ballari, Koppal, Yadgir, Bidar, Haveri, Chitradurga, Raichur, Dharwad, Bagalkot, Tumakuru to arrive in Bengaluru.

They had planned to march towards Vidhana Soudha but were stopped as they approached Freedom Park. Refusing to call off their protest, the women sat on the streets. Although



Saying 'no': A rally seeking a ban on liquor in Bengaluru on Wednesday. ■ V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

Many activists, including freedom fighter H.S. Doreswamy, theatre activist Arundathi Nag and anti-corruption activist S.R. Hiremath, participated in the march.

## POCSO case against Wayanad DCC member

Accused of sexually exploiting minor

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The police have registered a case of child rape against a Congress functionary in Wayanad district on the charge of having sexually exploited a minor girl belonging to the Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Wayanad.

The police identified the suspect as O.M. George, former president of the Sultan Bathery grama panchayat, and a member of the District Congress Committee (DCC). The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) has suspended Mr. George from the party pend-

## ISRO launches Human Space Flight Centre

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU

The Human Space Flight Centre, which will be the hub of ISRO's manned missions, was inaugurated at the ISRO headquarters in Bengaluru on Wednesday, the space agency has said.

Announced on August 15 last year, Gaganyaan, the country's first crewed mission, is set to happen by 2022. A full-scale model of Gaganyaan's crew module was also unveiled as former ISRO chairman K. Kasturirangan inaugurated the new centre in the presence of ISRO Chairman K. Sivan, and others.

## Row in Kerala Assembly over forest land diversion

UDF questions rationale behind allocation to private entities, including Reliance Jio

9.59635 hectares of forestland in various districts was allotted after the Pinarayi Vijayan government came to power in May 2016.

the matter in the Assembly when Forest Minister K. Raju, citing an earlier Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report, said that the State government could recover only 4,628.55 hectares from the 11,917.89 hectares of forest land encroached on since January 1, 1977.

Leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala, citing a written reply given by Mr. Raju in the House on November 30, 2018, said that Reliance Jio had been allocated 0.02 hectares and the Anakkampoyil small hydroelectric project (SHEP), 0.25 hectares.

land was sanctioned as per provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act and the guidelines issued by the Centre," Mr. Raju said.

The total area of forest land sanctioned for various uses since May 2016 stands at 9,59635 hectares, as per Assembly documents. They include: Public Works Department (1,228 ha), Kerala State Electricity Board (6,791 ha), National Highways Authority of India (0.082 ha), District Police, Idukki (0.95 ha), District Police, Thrissur (0.07285 ha), District Police, Thiruvananthapuram (0.2023 ha) besides Reliance Jio Infocomm and Anakkampoyil SHEP.

## Paddy farming returns to Kottayam

STAFF REPORTER  
KOTTAYAM

Following the efforts by a collective of nature enthusiasts, paddy farming is staging a comeback to the heart of Kottayam in Kerala.

Vast tracts of polders near Kodimatha, which have been lying fallow for the past two-and-a-half decades, will soon be put under the plough with authorities commencing the work to restore the biggest freshwater ecosystem within the town limits.

At a brief function to be held here in the first week of February, Agriculture Minister V.S. Sunil Kumar will officially launch the initiative by sowing seeds at the 180-acre Muppakkudu-Poozhikunnu polders.

The polder network, once proposed as the venue of the now abandoned Kottayam Mobility Hub project, has now been entrusted with a collective of 35 farmers.

Besides the Muppakkudu polders, an additional 120 acres lying in the adjacent local body - Panchikkad grama panchayat - will also be restored.

Aid for farmers To undertake the farming work, the farmers are being given ₹25,000 per hectare, besides seeds free of cost.

Similarly, the 3-km-long Manippuzha canal, which connects the polder network to the Kodoor river, has been restored with the support of the Irrigation Department and the Kottayam municipality.

The restoration of the polder network took off after the present Left Democratic Front government, in an order issued last year, reversed a decision by the previous United Democratic Front government to reclaim the paddy fields for the project.

## A.P. would have achieved more had Centre been supportive: Governor

Decision not to grant SCS a major setback: E.S.L. Narasimhan

STAFF REPORTER  
VIJAYAWADA

Governor E.S.L. Narasimhan on Wednesday observed that the Central government's decision not to grant the Special Category Status (SCS) to Andhra Pradesh was a major setback to the State's development and recalled that many assurances given four-and-a-half years ago had remained unfulfilled.

He was addressing the joint session of the Legislature flanked by Speaker Kodela Siva Prasada Rao and Council Deputy Chairman Reddy Subrahmanyam at the Assembly Hall.

The achievement of an average growth rate of 10.66%, the highest in the country, reflected the spectacular performance across sectors and the 11% growth in the agriculture sector was par-

ticularly commendable. "However, had the Centre been supportive, the achievement would have been much more," he said.

Mr. Narasimhan said the State reorganisation had resulted in many issues but the government's irrevocable commitment spearheaded by an astute leadership helped in overcoming the difficulties.

"People have been look-

ing anxiously for the fulfilment of the commitments given by the Central government in the A.P. Reorganisation Act and of the assurances made by the then Prime Minister. Many requests have been made by the State to the Centre for financial and infrastructural handholding to bring our infant State to a level-playing field with its neighbours. Taking back of ₹350 crore given to the backward districts and denial of the SCS were unexpected and adversely affected the development," he said.

Mr. Narasimhan said the State reorganisation had resulted in many issues but the government's irrevocable commitment spearheaded by an astute leadership helped in overcoming the difficulties.

"People have been look-

## Grand start



Priests of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams performing 'vaastu homam' at Venkatapalem on Wednesday, ahead of the commencement of construction works of Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple at Amaravati. ■ V. RAJU

Scores of war planes, helicopters from India and around the world will be on show



Getting ready: Preparations being made for Aero India 2019, at Yelahanka Air Force Station on Wednesday. ■ MURALIKUMAR

For five days starting February 20, over a lakh visitors are expected daily at what the organisers say is Asia's biggest civil and military aeronautical spectacle.

The show will be smoother and more people-friendly than before, according to Air Commodore Ravuri Sheetal, Air Officer Commanding, Air Force Station Yelahanka.

Three times more toilets, more pocket-friendly eateries, much bigger parking

spaces with assistance; bigger viewing shelters, but pricier tickets at ₹2,750 for the exhibition area and ₹600 for just the public aerial display viewing area, Air Commodore Sheetal said at a pre-event news conference on Wednesday.

Aircraft, aerobatics and stall exhibitors were still sending in their bookings

and the final names and numbers would be clear in the coming weeks. As for security, "it would be adequate" from the Air Force, CISF, State police, and other personnel, he said.

For the exhibition crawlers, there will be two more hangars F and G in addition to A, B, C, D, E, and AB.

Preparations, which be-

gan six months ago, gathered pace after the Ministry of Defence announced the date and the venue a couple of months ago. The IAF has pressed around 2,500 officers on air show duty, some 500 of them from other stations. As on Wednesday, some 900 contract workers were said to be working day and night to put up access-controlling barricades, hangars, and other facilities. An estimated 60% of works has been completed.

The spectacle will have scores of hardened war planes and helicopters from India and around the world lined up fin to fin on the tarmac. There would be a 60-tonne giant passenger plane, the Airbus A330-900, tonne-class nanolight planes, and also tinier drones flying for the first time at the air show for prizes.

Even today, children feel shy when they buy sanitary pads. Girls hesitate to buy them from medical stores. The vending machines are

meant to popularise the use

## Sanitary pad vending machines reach Telangana govt. schools

Eight schools in Warangal district begin installing them

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
HYDERABAD

Sanitary pad vending machines, which were earlier limited to corporate offices, has now reached government schools in Telangana, as the exercise of installing them has been taken up by the government.

While Rajbhavan High School installed the machine in the middle of last year, about eight schools in Warangal district have now taken up the initiative. The machines help schoolchildren buy sanitary pads without going to a vendor.

In India, around 80% of adolescent girls still use cloth or absorbent material like ash during their menstrual cycle, said a report by the National Commission for

Women in 2018. The previous year, the commission had also sent its recommendations supporting installation of such machines, to Ministry of Human Resource Development (ASCI).

ASCI has taken up a sanitary mission in collaboration with the district administration in Warangal.

If the vending machines prove to be useful in these schools, they would be introduced at government schools in other districts too, ASCI authorities said.

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Aid for farmers To undertake the farming work, the farmers are being given ₹25,000 per hectare, besides seeds free of cost.

Similarly, the 3-km-long Manippuzha canal, which connects the polder network to the Kodoor river, has been restored with the support of the Irrigation Department and the Kottayam municipality.

The restoration of the polder network took off after the present Left Democratic Front government, in an order issued last year, reversed a decision by the previous United Democratic Front government to reclaim the paddy fields for the project.

## IN BRIEF



**Himachal CM to present budget on Feb. 9**

**SHIMLA**  
The Jai Ram Thakur government in Himachal will present its budget on February 9, Speaker Rajeev Bindal said on Wednesday. Discussion on the budget estimates would be held from February 11 to 13. PTI

**Nepalese national killed in Rajasthan accident**

**KOTA**  
A Nepalese national died after the car he was travelling in rammed into a truck in Kota district, police said on Wednesday. Maan Kumar Thapa was a resident of Gulmi district in Nepal and worked as a security in-charge at a cement factory in Modak town of Kota. PTI

**Panchayat Dept. staff caught taking bribe**

**INDORE**  
The Lokayukta police on Wednesday caught an employee of the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Department in Alirajpur district for allegedly taking a bribe of ₹30,000, an official said. A case was registered against the accused. PTI

**Congress leader killed in M.P., two detained**

**CHHINDWARA**  
A 35-year-old Congress leader from Chhindwara district in Madhya Pradesh was killed allegedly by unidentified persons, apparently over an old dispute, police said on Wednesday. Two suspects have been detained. PTI

**5 killed, 6 injured in U.P. road accident**

**SONBHADRA**  
Five persons were killed and six hurt after a speeding truck hit a bus and them rammed into a stationary truck here, police said on Wednesday. The driver of the speeding truck fled the scene. PTI

# 'Mere sloganeering cannot invite sedition'

It cannot be invoked every time, says ex-Law Commission chief in the backdrop of JNU, Assam cases

**VIJAYA SINGH**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has ruled that sedition can only be invoked when a seditious comment results in violence, former Law Commission chairman B.S. Chauhan has said, adding that the court in its various judgments has reiterated that mere sloganeering could not invite the charge.

The Assam police had on January 10 registered a case of sedition against scholar Hiren Gohain, 80, for allegedly having said at a public meeting that a demand for sovereignty might arise if the Centre ignored the voices of the Assamese people opposed to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

Similar cases were filed against Akhil Gogoi, leader of the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, and activist-journalist Manjot Mahanta, who were protesting against the Bill that seeks to provide citizenship to non-Muslims



**“The court may refuse to file charges as sloganeering has been held not to invite sedition by the Supreme Court.”**

**B.S. CHAUHAN**  
Former Law Commission chairman on JNU sedition case

Former Law Commission chairman B.S. Chauhan. ■

from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who came to India on or before December 31, 2014.

**Rethink or repeal**

The 21st Law Commission, the Centre's topmost advisory body on legal reform, headed by Mr. Chauhan had last year published a consultation paper recommending that it was time to rethink or even repeal the provision on sedition (Section 124A) from the Indian Penal Code. He demitted office on Septem-

ber 1, 2018, and a new Law Commission has not been constituted since then.

Asked about the JNU sedition case, Mr. Chauhan told *The Hindu* that it all depended on what was argued before the court. “The court may refuse to file charges as sloganeering has been held not to invite sedition by the Supreme Court,” he said.

On January 14, the Delhi police filed a 1,200-page chargesheet in a case pertaining to 2016 when “anti-India” slogans were allegedly raised on JNU campus at an event to mark the anniversary of the hanging of Parlia-

ment attack convict Afzal Guru.

Mr. Chauhan said the working paper on sedition was brought after a reference by the Supreme Court. “The Commission had conducted seminars, invited people to speak on the subject... many people said it should be removed and many said the provision should be made more stringent. We wanted comments from people. There are many other statutes where all such activities are covered,” he said.

Recalling that sedition had earlier been scrapped by the Punjab and Haryana High Court and the Allahabad High Court, Mr. Chauhan said in 1962 the Supreme Court had, however, upheld the law.

“The SC has always said that unless violence follows, charge of sedition should not be invoked. We were of the opinion that charges of sedition cannot necessarily be framed in every case,” he

said.

As per the Centre's reply to Parliament, during 2014-2015 as many as 112 cases of sedition were registered across the country and 36 people were charged. However, police secured convictions in only two cases during the period.

**Antiquated provision**

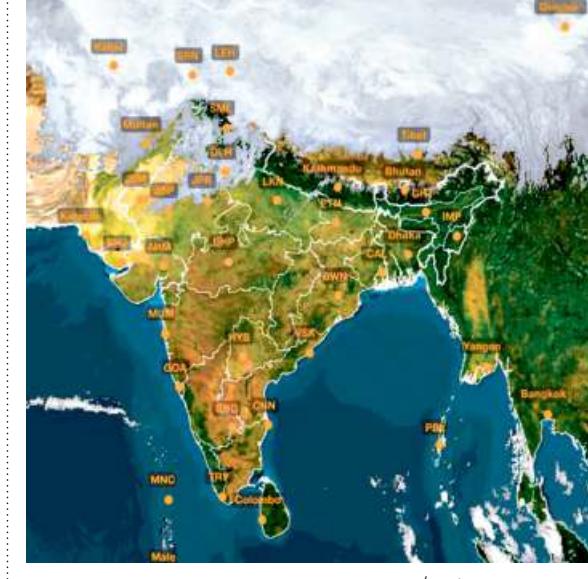
The Commission had invited public opinion on the prospect of either redefining or doing away with Section 124A in the “largest democracy of the world, considering that right to free speech and expression is an essential ingredient of democracy”.

“Why should India retain sedition when the British, who introduced sedition to oppress Indians, have themselves abolished the law in their country,” the panel asked.

Sedition attracts imprisonment from three years to life.

## WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

**Forecast for Thursday:** Heavy rain/snow is likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. Thunderstorm accompanied by hailstorm likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, Punjab, Delhi, west Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Cold wave conditions likely in isolated pockets over east Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh and Odisha

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	24.0	9.3	Kozhikode	—	36.0	23.4
Ahmedabad	—	27.6	9.0	Kurnool	—	10.7	30.0
Aizawl	—	28.0	—	Lucknow	—	22.9	7.6
Allahabad	—	25.1	6.0	Madurai	—	33.4	22.4
Bengaluru	—	29.0	17.2	Mangaluru	—	35.0	21.0
Bhopal	—	24.3	5.0	Mumbai	—	31.9	15.4
Bhubaneswar	—	26.8	10.8	Mysuru	—	29.0	18.2
Chandigarh	—	17.5	9.7	New Delhi	—	20.9	5.2
Chennai	—	29.4	22.2	Patna	—	23.8	8.3
Coimbatore	—	31.2	21.5	Port Blair	—	30.3	22.7
Dehradun	—	19.6	6.6	Puducherry	—	29.8	21.2
Gangtok	—	15.2	3.6	Pune	—	30.2	8.2
Goa	—	34.8	20.7	Raipur	—	24.5	10.1
Guwahati	0.2	24.6	11.6	Ranchi	—	22.2	6.2
Hubballi	—	29.0	17.0	Shillong	0.2	14.4	2.8
Hyderabad	—	28.0	9.3	Shimla	—	9.5	2.2
Imphal	0.5	23.6	6.5	Srinagar	0.8	3.4	-0.3
Jaipur	—	22.0	6.6	Trivandrum	—	33.5	22.5
Kochi	—	32.4	24.2	Tiruchi	—	32.0	22.0
Kohima	2.6	15.0	5.6	Vijayawada	—	29.1	16.9
Kolkata	—	24.6	12.2	Visakhapatnam	—	26.8	21.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

Yesterday

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>x</sub>	CO	PM <sub>2.5</sub>	PM <sub>10</sub>	CODE
Ahmedabad	70	103	26	....	97	—
Bengaluru	.5	29	54	.155	....	■
Chennai	41	.17	32	.75	....	■
Delhi	45	100	89	.389	.352	■
Hyderabad	37	.74	28	.122	.114	■
Kolkata	19	103	10	.291	.191	■
Lucknow	.4	.46	19	.285	....	■
Mumbai	20	—	92	.93	.157	■
Pune	63	.34	46	.190	.142	■
Visakhapatnam	—	—	49	—	—	—

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)  
SO<sub>2</sub>: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, 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<sub>x</sub>: 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<sub>2.5</sub> & PM<sub>10</sub>: 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

## Second HC judge recuses from Virbhadrappa assets case

Justice Waziri expresses displeasure at former CM's counsel

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister, was busy in another court.

As Mr. Singh's counsel persisted, Justice Waziri said there was no urgency in the matter as personal liberty of the couple had not been affected and that it can be heard on another date.

**Don't throw names**

“Do not throw names at me. Why should I hear it today? What is so special about it? It is not a matter about personal liberty... Counsel should know what to say and what not to say. I will not hear the

matter. List before another Bench,” Justice Waziri said.

**New Bench**  
The judge listed the case before another Bench on February 6. The Congress veteran and his wife Pratibha Singh have challenged a trial court order to frame charges against them in the case.

The case came up before Justice Waziri on Wednesday for the first time after Justice Mukta Gupta had recused from hearing the matter on January 24 without specifying any reason.

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation has registered five cases against a senior manager of the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and others for allegedly causing a loss of more than ₹1.86 crore, in which the same modus operandi was used by accused persons, while in the third case they allegedly siphoned off ₹1.71 crore.

The agency has alleged that Bhaben Maitra, Senior Manager (Finance) at HAL's office in Odisha, siphoned off the funds in conspiracy with other employees by using forged documents between 2013 and 2017.

The first case pertains to alleged misappropriation of ₹13.11 lakh by the accused of fiscal in 2013, in league with two contractual workers and two private contractors. Another case involves ₹1.86 crore, in which the same modus operandi was used by accused persons, while in the third case they allegedly siphoned off ₹1.71 crore.

In October last year, the agency had registered a case against Mr. Maitra for alleged embezzlement of ₹5 crore using forged bills, work orders and invoices.

IN BRIEF



Hazare begins hunger strike over Lokpal

PUNE  
Rebuffing the Maharashtra government's pleas for restraint, veteran anti-graft activist Anna Hazare on Wednesday commenced an indefinite hunger strike at Ralegan Siddhi, his village in Maharashtra's Ahmednagar district, over the Centre's failure to appoint a Lokpal.

Pakistani singer served notice for FEMA violation

NEW DELHI  
The Enforcement Directorate has served a show-cause notice on Pakistani singer Rahat Fateh Ali Khan and others for alleged violation of foreign exchange rules involving ₹2.61 crore, in connection with the seizure of undeclared U.S. currency at Delhi airport in February 2011.

Plan to use detonators to demolish Nirav's house

NAVI MUMBAI  
Detonators to be most likely used for the demolition of Nirav Modi's bungalow in Alibag. The demolition work was stalled owing to the difficulty in bringing down the structure. Experts from Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Technical University have suggested the use of detonators for controlled blasting.

Goa Shipyard to build two Talwar stealth frigates

NEW DELHI  
The Navy has signed a contract with Goa Shipyard Ltd. for construction of two stealth frigates scheduled to be delivered in June and December of 2026. These are part of the four Talwar stealth frigates from Russia under an Inter-Governmental Agreement.

13 booked for firing shots at Gandhi's effigy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
LUCKNOW  
The police on Wednesday registered cases against 13 persons, including a woman leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, in Aligarh for firing at an effigy of Mahatma Gandhi with an air pistol, a senior police official said.

"Today on the occasion of the 71st death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, workers of the Hindu Mahasabha fired at the effigy of Mahatma Gandhi."

The incident took place in a house in Naurangabad locality of the city. Later, the video of the event went viral on social media," Senior Superintendent of Police of Aligarh Akash Kulkarni said.

A case was registered against 13 persons associated with the Hindu Mahasabha, including a woman leader Pooja Shakun Pandey, the SSP said.

No arrests have been made so far, the police said. The police are conducting raids to nab the accused persons.

# Centre hikes scholarships

But research scholars unhappy, say 25% raise too low, want increase to be 56%

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Centre has hiked its popular research scholarship – called the Junior Research Fellowship – to ₹31,000 per month, a roughly 25% increase from the existing ₹25,000.

For months, research scholars across India have organised protests demanding that the scholarship be hiked as the stipend hadn't been revised since 2014.

A Wednesday communiqué from the Department of Science and Technology, which was coordinating the exercise, said that the Senior Research Fellowships (SRF), given to research students two years into their doctoral studies, had been hiked to ₹35,000 per month. Stipends for Research Assistants (who are pursuing post doctoral studies and have at least three years of research experience) would range

## Money matters

The rise in monthly stipends for research scholars over the years

Year	2019	2014	2010
JRF	₹31,000*	₹25,000	₹16,000
SRF	₹35,000	₹28,000	₹18,000
RA-1	₹47,000	₹36,000	₹22,000
RA-2	₹49,000	₹38,000	₹23,000
RA-3	₹54,000	₹40,000	₹24,000

\*Amount in ₹

JRF: Junior Research Fellowship, for qualified candidates beginning Ph.D

SRF: Senior Research Fellowship, for qualified candidates after 2 years of Ph.D studies

RA: Research Assistantship provided to post-doctoral fellows



the hikes, said from next year there would be a system in place to ensure that stipends are revised annually.

### Protest to continue

But research scholars said they would continue their protests. "We were promised by various authorities that the hikes would at least be in sync with previous years. That is, a ₹9000 increase or a 56% increase (from 2010-2014). This is unacceptable and we will continue our protests," said Nikhil Gupta, a representative of the protesting scholars and a doctoral student at the Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute, Lucknow.

"The hikes were recommended based on inflation. We'd made a recommendation but the final numbers are a result of discussion among the Human Resources Development, Science and the Finance Ministries," Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Sharma, who headed a committee to recommend

point forced to confess to something he did not do after being threatened that his family would also be arrested.

"It is a fact that he used a towel. Many players do. There was no criminal intent or foul play. Too much is being read into it. The court discharged him finally," Mr. Khurshid argued.

At one point, Justice Bhushan intervened and said his conduct was no doubt bad. "Now, the only thing you can argue is, please lift the life ban... The five years he has already

served is enough... please proceed on this basis."

### Additional documents

But Mr. Khurshid relied on certain additional documents and phone transcripts to show that Sreesanth was never approached by anybody for anything. The mere fact that a person had money with him did not mean he was into fixing.

"If they want to prove there was a pay-off, they should produce some evidence... there was no evidence," he argued.

The incident happened at St. Dominic Savio Mission's church in West Garo Hills district.

The ransacking was similar to the attack on three other churches across the Garo Hills, the police said.

## Masked men attack priests in Meghalaya

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI

A group of 20 masked men on Wednesday assaulted two priests in a Meghalaya church before ransacking the premises and fleeing with ₹1.25 lakh, the police said.

The incident happened at St. Dominic Savio Mission's church in West Garo Hills district.

The ransacking was similar to the attack on three other churches across the Garo Hills, the police said.

## No evidence to back spot-fixing charge against me, says Sreesanth

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Banned cricketer S. Sreesanth told the Supreme Court on Wednesday that there was no evidence to back the claim that he was involved in spot-fixing while playing for Rajasthan Royals during the IPL in 2013.

Arguing before a Bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and K.M. Joseph, senior advocate Salman Khurshid, for the cricketer, submitted that his client suffered "continuous torture" at the hands of the Delhi police. He was at one

point forced to confess to something he did not do after being threatened that his family would also be arrested.

"It is a fact that he used a towel. Many players do. There was no criminal intent or foul play. Too much is being read into it. The court discharged him finally," Mr. Khurshid argued.

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## States may have to fund for MGNREGA wages

Central funding unlikely to last'

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ

NEW DELHI

States struggling to pay workers under a national employment guarantee scheme have received additional funds from the Centre to meet their pending liabilities, but the money is unlikely to be sufficient for the rest of the financial year. They may have to use their own funds to meet unpaid wages for the next two months, says the Centre.

The financial statement of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) scheme shows that as on January 30, 19 States and Union Territories were in the red. Nationally, the scheme shows a negative net balance of ₹4,101 crore.

The Rural Development Ministry received a supplementary additional allocation of ₹6,084 crore this week and approved disbursement to States based on their liabilities.

Having paid off liabilities, the scheme will now be left with less than ₹2,000 crore



The Rural Development Ministry wants to ensure that labourers get paid on time. ■ FILE PHOTO

## RS to screen Hindi films for non-Hindi speakers

SOBHANA K. NAIR

NEW DELHI

On recommendation of two south Indian leaders, Vice-President and Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu and its former Deputy Chairman P.J. Kurien, the Upper House is going to screen a series of popular Hindi films to acquaint non-Hindi speaking members and staff with the language.

An invitation issued by the Rajya Sabha secretariat, signed by additional director and chairman of the Rajya Sabha secretariat Employees' Recreation Club J.M. Bhardwaj, says,

"The honourable Chairman Rajya Sabha has desired to show good Hindi movies to promote Hindi language among non-Hindi speaking members and staff."

The first movie to be screened, incidentally, features former Rajya Sabha member Nargis: *Mother India*. It will be shown on February 1.

## SC begins automatic listing of fresh cases

Hearing within three to seven days

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday launched its new system of automatic listing of fresh cases within three to seven days in a bid to do away with the system of mentioning of matters for urgent listing every day.

Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi had on January 23 said the Supreme Court was devising a mechanism to do away with the process of mentioning of pleas and to ensure automatic listing of fresh cases for hearing soon after being filed.

"Fresh matters verified on Friday in the post lunch session, Saturday, Monday and Tuesday in the pre-

lunch session i.e. up to 1 p.m. shall be listed on Friday in the same week and those verified on Tuesday in the post lunch session, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday in the pre-lunch session i.e. up to 1 p.m. be listed on Monday in the next week," said a circular.

**From February 4**  
The new mechanism will come into effect on February 4. The circular further said that final cause list of cases for Monday shall be published/uploaded on the website on prior Friday.

It said the list of business for Friday would be uploaded on Tuesday in the same week.

land was acquired for projects like industrial corridors, expressways, highways, etc.

Petitioners like activist Medha Patkar, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, had said the States allowed land acquisitions without social impact assessment, participation of representative local bodies in social impact assessment study, expert appraisal processes, public hearing, objections.

The petitions alleged that the amendments violate the "core spirit" of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013.

## Bovine twist

**Ammonia:** Cattle and buffaloes were the largest contributors for ammonia from manure, accounting for 56.1% and 23.6% of emissions respectively

**Nitrous oxide:** Cattle contributed the highest proportion (42.3%) of nitrous oxide emissions followed by buffalo (28.1%), goats (15.5%), sheep (9.5%) and other species (4.6%)



Degradation threat  
30% of India's geographical area (or about 96.4 million hectares) is degraded, according to a 2012 satellite study by the Indian Space Research Organisation

Top ammonia-emitting States
Uttar Pradesh (12.7%)
Madhya Pradesh (8.7%)
West Bengal (8.4%)
Top nitrous oxide-emitting States
Uttar Pradesh (13.1%)
Madhya Pradesh (8%)
Maharashtra (7.5%)

## Study says cow urine may be adding to global warming

Degraded pastures emitted significantly more nitrous oxide

JACOB KOSHY

NEW DELHI

Cow urine – a minor fount of research in India for its medicinal benefits – may also contribute to global warming. The urine from the ruminant is a source of nitrous oxide emissions (N<sub>2</sub>O), a gas that is 300 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.

In spite of being a leading scientific power in terms of research publications, India spends only about 0.7% of its GDP on research and development, which is much lower than countries of comparable scientific prowess.

Most times, when cow urine is used in degraded pastures, which are also seen in vast tracts of land in India, N<sub>2</sub>O emissions are tripled, says a study conducted in Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua, Trinidad and Tobago, and published in the latest edition of the peer-reviewed *Scientific Reports*.

### Less understood

That cattle and livestock are a significant source of methane, a greenhouse gas, and therefore a contributor to global warming, is well-known.

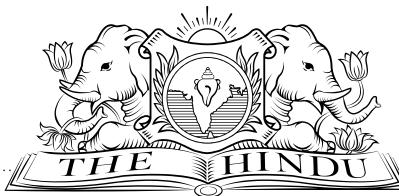
However, the role of cow urine is less understood. For the study, researchers collected urine from cattle and spilled 500 millilitre samples on paired cattle fields classified as de-

graded or healthy, which was determined by vegetation coverage. In six of the seven test sites, degraded pastures emitted significantly more N<sub>2</sub>O – sometimes up to three times as much. The study was conducted by the International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), Colombia.

Dung and urine are commonly mixed together for manure in Indian fields. Since, India also hosts the world's largest livestock population, as well as significant tracts of degraded land, the findings may have a bearing on nitrogen emissions from Indian fields. A 2012 satellite study by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said that about 30% of India's geographical area (or about 96.4 million hectares) is degraded.

"In that sense, studies like these are probably needed and useful for Indian livestock emission studies. We have very limited research on this," said N. Raghuram, Department of Biotechnology, IIT Madras, and Chairman, International Nitrogen Initiative. "According to an expert in India, India had estimates for dung and urine production per cow or buffalo or other livestock animals as well as their overall estimates for their populations as per 2012 livestock census, but the exact contribution of cow urine to the total nitrous oxide emission from India are not estimated precisely."

"This study adds to the case for land restoration. Degraded pastures not only affect food security and the livelihood of farmers today, but affect the livelihood of future farmers because they emit more gases that cause global warming," said Ngogo Chirinda, a CIAT researcher and the study's lead author said in a statement.



## An unnecessary move

Handing back land to the Ram temple trust has no justification at this juncture

The Centre's request to the Supreme Court to allow it to return the "superfluous land" it had acquired around the disputed site in Ayodhya in 1993 is not innocuous; nor is it justified at this juncture. The court had ordered that the *status quo* be maintained on the entire extent of 67.7 acres acquired in the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Behind the apparently equitable argument that an extent of land not in dispute can be given back to its original owners is a barely concealed political motive. BJP leader Ram Madhav has said, "In view of the strong popular sentiment attached to the Ram Mandir, it is the least that the government could do." The sense of anxiety among the supporters of the Mandir cause over the delay in the adjudicatory process is palpable; but it is also indicative of an unreasonable expectation that the government should somehow facilitate the construction of a Ram temple regardless of what the court's decision is. It is to address this anxiety and mollify elements that are unhappy with the progress of the judicial process that the government wants the court to vacate its *status quo* order. It is a move fraught with the risk of reigniting communal passions at a time when the appeals against the Allahabad High Court's verdict in the title suits have reached the final stage of adjudication before the Supreme Court. The Centre's argument is that the Supreme Court, in *Ismail Faruqui* (1994) had itself said that once the objectives of the acquisition have been achieved, the superfluous area should revert to its owners. It has also contended that the *status quo* was required only till the disposal of the suits, which ended in 2010 when the Allahabad High Court decided them.

Is the issue really so simple? The court had noted that the adjacent area had been acquired so that the party that succeeds is not denied the fruits of its success by those in the adjacent areas through denial of access. It had said the *status quo* was required to avoid "reigniting communal passions detrimental to the spirit of communal harmony". Further, the trial court's decision in favour of a three-way partition of the land has not satisfied any of the parties, and the entire suit is once again open for adjudication. The time is hardly ripe for altering the *status quo*. Beyond all this, the idea of giving back 42 acres of land to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, a trust dedicated to the cause of constructing a temple to Ram on the site where the demolished Babri Masjid stood, will be needlessly provocative. The trust had obtained its lease in 1992 in the run-up to the campaign to demolish the mosque, from the Kalyan Singh government, whose actions were demonstrably anti-secular. There is a case for reconsidering the lease, but nothing at all for this organisation to be given the opportunity to gather its resources in the vicinity of the disputed site.

## Gold rush

Tightening monetary policies in the West and supply factors led to the spurt in gold prices

Gold is shining once again. The price of gold in the Indian market reached its highest-ever level, hitting the ₹33,800 mark in Mumbai on Tuesday in the midst of increasing demand from buyers and lagging supply in the global market. And it is not just the rupee that is witnessing a fall in value against gold. A similar trend has been seen in the price of other major emerging market currencies as well when their worth is measured against the yellow metal. In fact, many emerging market currencies have already hit, or are quite close to hitting, historic lows against gold. Against the U.S. dollar, however, gold is still priced well below its all-time high of over \$1,500 that was reached in 2012 even as it has shown some appreciation against that currency in the last few months. The increase in the price of gold worldwide should be seen against the backdrop of rising uncertainties that threaten to derail the global economy. Western central banks have been tightening their monetary policy stances for a while now, leading to increasing fears that this could put an end to the decade-long recovery since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. The U.S. Federal Reserve has been at the forefront of the current tightening cycle. The resulting flow of capital from emerging markets to the West has put further pressure on various emerging market currencies. The rupee, for instance, has depreciated significantly in value against the U.S. dollar in the last year alone. This probably explains the divergence in the performance of the dollar *vis-à-vis* other emerging market currencies against gold. The U.S.-China trade war and the lowered rate of Chinese economic growth have added to fears of a global economic slowdown. Furthermore, as stock markets around the world continue to trade sideways with increased volatility, investors seeking financial safety have turned to gold and boosted its price. Many central banks have been trying to hold gold to restore confidence in their currencies.

Apart from these short-term influences, there are probably other long-term secular factors at play as the price of gold looks to shoot up towards new highs. The fall in price after 2012 led to a fall in capital spending by gold miners, which has meant that supply has failed to keep up with growing demand. This is typical of all commodities that see years of oversupply that lead to a price slump followed by years of under-supply that leads to a jump in prices. The depreciation in the value of national currencies against gold is also an indication of the increase in inflationary pressures across the globe. What could put a premature end to gold's rally is the easing of policy by global central banks. While this will restore investor confidence in the global economy, it carries with it risks linked to debt-fuelled growth.

# Stormy weather awaits India in 2019

The country faces a difficult external and internal situation. It needs to show more dexterity on the diplomatic front



M.K. NARAYANAN

**A**s India prepares for the general election this year, all signs point to 2019 being a difficult year. Whether this would directly impact the poll outcome is uncertain, but the country needs to remain alert to unexpected developments.

As we enter 2019, the world outlook looks gloomy. Global disorder is the dominant imperative. A global leadership vacuum is leading to chaos concerning rules governing the international order. U.S. President Donald Trump's utterances and actions are provoking strong counter-reactions, especially from China and Russia. U.S. Vice President Mike Pence's attack on China, in October 2018, has signalled, according to many world leaders, the beginning of a new Cold War. Mr. Trump has threatened to pull out of a major arms control treaty with Russia. Russia has also been talking of building stronger deterrence. Cold War 2 seems for real now.

### On different trajectories

Nations are today working at cross-purposes across the globe. Russia is vigorously pursuing its pivot to Asia and for greater influence in Eurasia. It has deepened its partnership with China, and enhanced relations with Japan and South Korea. Growing tensions in the Sea of Azov (following Russia's seizure of Ukraine's ships) could well lead to a major conflagration between Russia and the West.

China is consolidating its position in Asia. In addition to its strategic partnership with Russia, China has mended fences with Japan. Its Belt and Road Initiative has become the most potent weapon in China's armoury, with Vietnam

and Japan endorsing this concept. India finds itself increasingly isolated in Asia as a result.

Economic portents during 2018 for most of the world proved highly daunting. The most challenging was the spectre of an all embracing U.S.-China trade war. This had triggered highly unsettled conditions, and the situation was further aggravated by signs of a weakening Chinese economy. At the beginning of 2019, it is amply evident that politics is conflicting with business across the world. Hence, normal economic calculations are getting disrupted.

A decline in Britain's financial assets and of the pound sterling following Brexit, as well as signs of increasing fragility of China's economy, are newer concerns. The likelihood of the U.S. moving into a period of slower long-term growth, one that is likely to continue for a fairly long time, is aggravating this situation. India cannot hope to remain insulated from these trends.

### Ties with Russia, Japan

Coming to India's foreign policy concerns, relations with Russia and Japan could see a reset. The strengthening of the Russia-China strategic relationship and the recent warmth in China-Japan relations could impact India's relations with both countries. Notwithstanding the warmth displayed in public by the leaders of India and Russia, and India and Japan, the character of our relations with these two countries could undergo a change. To what extent, is yet to be seen. What is evident, however, is that India will need to expend a great deal of its diplomatic capital to ensure that relations do not decline to any considerable extent.

Managing relations with China will be India's top priority. India-China relations are marked by a surface calm, but this masks an intrinsic struggle for influence in Asia and even beyond. The Wuhan Spirit, notwithstanding, little has

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO



changed as far as India-China relations are concerned, except that there has not been any major Chinese incursion across the disputed India-China border.

### China's outreach

In 2018, China had initiated certain moves to create a China-Myanmar Economic Corridor on the lines of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The Chinese Navy is also poised to challenge India's position in the Indian Ocean. Chinese submarines already outnumber India's here. China is preparing to outflank India by seeking control of the Kyaukpyu Port on the Arakan Coast in Myanmar, and planning a canal (the Kra canal), connecting the Andaman Sea with the Gulf of Thailand. Together with China's existing control over the Gwadar (Pakistan) and Hambantota (Sri Lanka) Ports, if China were to succeed in its attempts, it could give it a stranglehold across the Indian Ocean Region. India's capacity to counter such moves in 2019 appears extremely limited.

This year could see a further consolidation of the 'all weather friendship' of China-Pakistan. During 2018, Pakistan facilitated China's involvement in Afghanistan (and also succeeded in co-opting Russia to be a party to talks with the Afghan Taliban). The CPEC having weathered quite a few storms in 2018, seems well set to progress this further in 2019.

The prospects of India-Pakistan relations improving on the other hand, are extremely limited.

Cross-border terror attacks are likely to continue, as also sponsorship of terror groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed. Where India will face even rougher weather, is in Afghanistan, where the Afghan state is perilously close to imploding. India has been kept out of talks with the Afghan Taliban by all countries concerned, including the U.S., China, and Russia, apart from Pakistan. This is making India's position here highly invidious.

### Mixed challenges for India

The outlook for India in the rest of South Asia is also mixed. Towards the end of 2018, India could retrieve its position in the Maldives. It also succeeded in re-establishing its influence in Bhutan. The return of Sheikh Hasina as Prime Minister after the general elections in Bangladesh has been a welcome relief. Yet, India will need to work harder in 2019 to check China from weaning away its neighbours, including Nepal as also Bangladesh, with offers of economic and military aid. India will also need to use all its resources to assist Bangladesh to limit the influence of radical Islamist groups there.

Internal security, for the better part of 2018, remained on a relatively even keel. There were fewer Pakistan-sponsored terror attacks, but this is hardly an index of what lies ahead in 2019. Left extremist violence went up marginally in 2018, but the movement remained circumscribed within a core area in Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Jharkhand. Ideologically, the movement has remained vibrant, and in 2019, both ideological and militant aspects will need deft handling.

The more challenging internal security problems will be Kashmir and the Northeast. In 2018, the situation in Kashmir sharply deteriorated, and the year witnessed some of the highest levels of violence since 1989. There was again a sharp spurt in the number of se-

curity forces personnel being killed, alongside targeting of their families.

The deadlock between the Jammu and Kashmir administration and militants is unlikely to be resolved. President's rule has made little headway in sorting out the conflict-prone situation. Militant outfits, the JeM and the Hizbul Mujahideen, appear energised by the turn of events and can be expected to become still more active. More educated locals are joining militant ranks. Disclaimers notwithstanding, the presence of the Islamic State is also in evidence. The consequences of this as far as 2019 is concerned could be considerable.

The other major internal security threat that India faces in 2019 is the resurgence of ethnic sub-nationalism in the Northeast. This has been simmering for some time, but now threatens to boil over, following the enactment of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. The Bill has given rise to fears that it would drastically alter the status quo in the region. The Amendment has helped unite vast segments of people across the entire Northeast. The divisive potential of the recently enacted Act, will have special resonance in an election year. It will demand sensitive and careful handling in 2019.

Two other issues that kept the nation on the edge in 2018, i.e. farmers' and Dalit unrest, still remain unattended as 2019 begins. Both can ignite fires, specially in an election year. There is little evidence, however, that the causes for the unrest are receiving careful consideration.

Considering the difficult external and internal situation, peace in 2019 may prove elusive. On the diplomatic front, India will need to be more dexterous. The internal situation will require to be dealt with far greater understanding.

M.K. Narayanan is a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal

## Behind Trump's retreat

It is unlikely the U.S. will go through another crippling shutdown as the President has limited options on border security



SIRRAM LAKSHMAN

Last Friday morning as the U.S. federal government shutdown entered its 35th day there were reports of mounting flight delays in New York City's LaGuardia airport, as an unusual number of air traffic controllers had called in sick. If the government had been open, they would normally have received their paychecks on Friday, but for weeks their representatives and union leaders had warned that they were distracted at work – worried about how to put food on the table. Delays spread to other airports, including to the Washington DC area and to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, one of the world's busiest.

The tension – and now danger – in the air was captured that morning by the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, who tweeted: "Stop endangering the safety, security and well-being of our nation. Re-open government now!"

Shortly after 2 p.m., Mr. Trump announced that the government would be re-opened for three weeks, until February 15, by which

time, he said, the sides would have either agreed on a deal or he would declare a national emergency and build a wall on the Mexico border.

While we may never know exactly why Mr. Trump flipped and the moment it happened, unless he tells us (this assumes he knows it himself), one can posit that a combination of several factors in decreasing order of importance made him blink in this war of attrition.

### The politics and more

First, and most importantly, the President saw that his plans were losing appeal to Republicans in Congress. Two Bills that were tested back to back on the floor of the Senate on Thursday last week failed to get the required 60 votes on the floor (where Republicans have a 53-47 majority). The first Bill had \$5.7 billion in border wall funding and the second, which was Democrat backed, had no funding.

Just prior to the vote, Republican Senators reportedly met with U.S. Vice President Mike Pence to air their frustrations over the shutdown. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell was reported to have said that the government should not have been closed in the first place – a change from his initial position of not wanting to forward any bills to the Senate floor that the President would veto.

There was an increase of about 5 points in the percentage who blamed Mr. Trump since the earliest polls after December 22 when the shutdown began, and a 2-point increase in the percentage who blame Congressional Democrats.



Also on Thursday, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross did a television interview in which he said he did not "understand" why furloughed workers were heading to food banks. His comments, along with those of Mr. Trump's daughter-in-law Lara Trump, who had also asked workers to "stay strong", painted a picture of an administration increasingly removed from and insensitive to everyday realities faced by many American workers. These are also likely to be some of the same struggles faced by Mr. Trump's core support base.

In addition to Congressional Republicans starting to tug at the rug under the President's feet, were his falling approval ratings. This is likely to have been a second factor that caused the President to change tack.

There was an increase of about 5 points in the percentage who blamed Mr. Trump since the earliest polls after December 22 when the shutdown began, and a 2-point increase in the percentage who blame Congressional Democrats.

Yet building a wall is one of Mr. Trump's foundational promises to his constituents and so he is likely

Republicans on the Hill fare better – with a 3-point decrease in the percentage of those who blame them according to statistical analysis website [fivethirtyeight.com](http://fivethirtyeight.com).

Importantly, independent voters, a key component of Mr. Trump's victory in 2016, were increasingly (by 7 percentage points) blaming him for the shutdown.

Clearly, the President had painted himself into a corner by Thursday evening last week. After the two Senate Bills failed, he made an offer for a prorated down-payment on the wall to keep the government open for three weeks; this was rejected by the Democrats.

Friday morning's flight delays were a high profile event in a high profile city which also happened to be Mr. Trump's hometown. Understaffed air traffic control was also putting people's lives at risk: LaGuardia may have been the straw that broke the camel's back.

### What next

It is unlikely the government will shut again on February 15 – that has proved to be an expensive exercise, costing the economy some \$1 billion (as per the Congressional Budget Office) and approval ratings for some parties to the stand-off. Bills are also being introduced to fund the government in the event a deal is not reached.

an aeon.

to do whatever he can to deliver on that.

Lynn Sweet of the *Chicago Sun-Times* told CNN on Sunday about a recent luncheon Ms. Pelosi had attended. According to Ms. Sweet, Ms. Pelosi, gesturing at flowers on the table said, "President Trump could look at these [planted along the border] and he would say, 'This is a wall.'"

However Ms. Pelosi meant it, the statement provides a hint as to how the next three weeks may go.

Mr. Trump has already attempted to back away from the need to have a 2,000-mile physical wall, for instance by talking about a "smart wall" – a concept floated on the Hill by House Majority Whip (Democrat) James Clyburn. That Democrats are willing to spend on border security and surveillance cameras, drones, and funding for more border agents may be where the compromise is found. For that compromise to take place, Mr. Trump will have to convince himself and his core supporters that this is indeed the "wall" he promised. If he does not take that way out, he may resort to declaring a national emergency – and that is almost certain to be challenged in court, where he may or may not win. Time will tell how things pan out. If a week is a long time in politics then three weeks is an aeon.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### George Fernandes

With the passing of George Fernandes, India has lost a very sincere politician who dedicated his life to the cause of the nation. He was frank and forthright and, at the same time, very simple. There are many political anecdotes to prove that he stood by his principles. He will be missed.

K.V. SEETHARAMAIAH,  
Hassan, Karnataka

instrumental in the Konkan Rail project becoming a reality.

M. PRADYU,  
Kannur, Kerala

■ Goodbye George. With his passing, an era ends where politicians were sincere, simple and accessible. His tenure as Union Defence Minister will remain etched in our minds. In the end, George Fernandes was simple to the core and always accessible to the common man. It would be no exaggeration to call him the poor man's politician.

R. SEKAR,  
Visakhapatnam

■ It can be rightly said that he was the last true socialist leader our country has

produced. He was also a self-made man, with a number of anecdotes to prove this. His strong principles and values will be remembered for long.

K.M. DIVAKARAN,  
Kannur, Kerala

■ George Fernandes has left an indelible mark on public life with his dedication and selflessness, outstanding political acumen, administrative abilities and sagacity. As a brilliant and veteran parliamentarian and a true leader of the people, he fought for the rights of the underprivileged. He enriched parliamentary proceedings with his passionate espousal of public causes. In his

# The case for minimum basic income

It will address inequality, alleviate rural distress and include the urban poor



Puja Mehra



"Rural distress is largely a consequence of policy failures." A parched paddy in Tezpur in Sonitpur district of Assam in 2006. ■ RITU RAJ KONWAR

The Modi government will present its last Budget tomorrow. Conventionally, the Budget presented in an election year is a vote on account, aimed at providing funds for the government to function until the formation of new government. However, in recent times, the convention has been followed loosely. In 2014, for instance, the Manmohan Singh-led government's interim Budget announced the One Rank, One Pension scheme and allocated ₹500 crore for its rollout. By no means was this an emergency measure that could not have waited until the completion of the election. The Budget also announced cuts in excise duties on some items, including small cars and capital goods, in the hope of reviving consumption and investments. Therefore, it won't be surprising if the Modi government announces an income support scheme to mitigate rural distress in its interim Budget, in response to Congress President Rahul Gandhi's promise of providing minimum basic income to the poor, if voted to power.

## Some encouraging results

The cynicism over the avant-garde policy tool of minimum income seems overblown. A pilot project conducted between 2010 and 2013, covering 6,000 beneficiaries in Delhi and Madhya Pradesh, yielded encouraging results. It confirmed that at high levels of impoverishment, even the smallest income supplement can improve nutrient intake, school enrolment and attendance of female students, and reduce incidence of indebtedness. The study showed that consumption of pulses went up by 1,000%, fresh vegetables by 888%, and meat by 600% among the beneficiaries. This evidence challenges the commonly held views that welfare payments are an affront to the dignity of the beneficiaries and that they are used for questionable purposes, such as for buying alcohol.

There are other questions, too: Why income support and why now?

What are the operational and design imperatives? And how much fiscal space can be opened up in a sustainable and serious way? Let's look at these concerns.

### Why income support?

The reforms since 1991 have largely bypassed agriculture and other segments of the economy that engage poor and rural Indians. While incomplete economic liberalisation and technological advances have led to growth in national income, all individuals have not gained equally. The disproportionate share of gains from the reforms have gone to middle-class and rich Indians. This unevenness in development calls for a superior economic growth model. Until that happens, redistributive policy interventions such as income transfers can improve equity. Income transfers are not to be confused with doles or unemployment benefits. They are unconditional income supplements to compensate for policy failures and ease the economic anxieties of the less advantaged. In the West, economists are advocating universal basic income to fight inequality and slow wage growth, allay fears that immigrants will take away jobs, and advance automation.

Besides equity, there's also an urgent need to address rural distress, which is largely a consequence of policy failures such as ineffective procurement and perverse trade and pricing policies that have in times of bumper harvests led to gluts, depressed market prices, and aggravated farmer losses. So, it is only fair

that the government pays reparations to farmers in some form.

At least two States, Telangana and Odisha, are already experimenting in a limited way with income support schemes, focused on the farm sector. In Telangana, the government is providing farmers income support payment at the rate of ₹10,000/ha (₹4,000/acre). However, this model, the Rythu Bandhu, benefits the biggest landowners the most, including those who lease out their land. Tenants, sharecroppers and landless labourers, the most vulnerable, are out of its coverage. Its success depends on reliable land records.

Odisha's recently notified KALIA (Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Assistance) irons out these creases. It proposes to transfer ₹5,000 in cash per season (₹10,000 per year for double-cropped land) to the State's 30 lakh marginal farmers, leaving out the two lakh large farmers. It promises cash grants of ₹12,500 each to the State's 10 lakh landless households. The hope is that they will use this money to rear goats or poultry and farm mushrooms or honey. Fisherfolk are covered too, and will receive the investment support for buying fishing nets and allied equipment.

Last year, the Budget had promised compensatory payments to farmers equal to the gap between depressed market prices and the minimum support prices (MSPs) announced. But MSP-based payments distort price signals to farmers on what to produce and how much in the subsequent season.

Rythu Bandhu and KALIA are superior policy interventions. Plus, they do not suffer from the moral hazard and limited reach of farm loan waivers. Waivers penalise farmers who repay loans on time and benefit only borrowers from banks.

The advantage of a minimum income guarantee is that it will also cover the urban poor, who are not covered in these schemes. While job guarantee programmes, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, lock up beneficiaries in low-productivity work, income supplements allow them to continue to look for better employment options.

### Opening up fiscal space

And are these schemes feasible politically, operationally and fiscally? Income supplements can be transferred into Jan Dhan or Post Office accounts. Beneficiaries can be selected through the Socio-Economic Caste Census (the last round was conducted in 2011), the results of which were released in July 2015.

Increasing the fiscal deficit hurts the poor, for it sparks off inflation and cannot be the way to fund income transfers. Is there really a paucity of funds or judiciousness in spending? In 2017-18, the Centre and the States collected more than ₹5 lakh crore through various taxes, royalty payments and dividends from producers and consumers of petroleum products. Streamlining distortionary and demerit subsidies, such as on urea (₹70,000 crore annually), can open up significant fiscal space. Healthcare, education, water conservation, environment and other merit subsidies need to be preserved and improved and should not be reduced to fund income transfers.

If the wealth tax that the government had abolished in 2015 is reintroduced as a fair and easy-to-collect levy on the super-rich, selling politically to the middle class an income support scheme for the poor will be easier. Taxpayers must realise that agri-prices, and therefore farm incomes, are not free market-driven.

They are kept artificially low, through pricing policy instruments, so that inflation does not erode the rest of the population's purchasing power. Will Mr. Modi bite the bullet?

Puja Mehra is a Delhi-based journalist

# Getting back on track

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's visit to India helped further strengthen bilateral ties



Rajiv Bhatia

curity, joint training exercises on sea and land, and provision of training facilities.

Despite promotion, bilateral trade and investment are yet to show robust and speedy expansion. A continuous process is under way to identify inhibiting factors. Some of them relate to the small size of the South African economy and its slow rate of growth. Lack of direct air connectivity and South Africa's rigid business visa regime are seen as discouragements. Mr. Ramaphosa agreed to reform the visa regime. He also identified a few sectors where India's investment would be most welcome, such as agri-processed goods, mining equipment and technology, financial sectors and defence equipment.

### Multilateral groupings

India-South Africa cooperation in multilateral groupings came up for a close review, especially the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) forum and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). New momentum is being imparted to IBSA, which has been 'displaced' by the larger grouping, BRICS, in recent years. The fact that Mr. Ramaphosa's talk was portrayed as one of the select events marking 15 years of IBSA

and that he met the Brazilian president just before his arrival in Delhi indicates that India may be willing to host the much-delayed IBSA summit this year. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Ramaphosa agreed on measures to further strengthen IORA. A specific decision was to enhance cooperation to harness the potential of the Blue Economy within the IORA framework.

The two leaders also witnessed the exchange of two new agreements of cooperation. These formally linked the Research and Information System for Developing Countries, a policy research institute in Delhi, and two premier South African think tanks – the Institute for Global Dialogue and the South African Institute of International Affairs. The three institutions have been entrusted with the task to conduct joint research and dialogue in 1.5 track format (i.e. involving officials and experts) on "areas to further promote practical cooperation with Africa."

In sum, the President's visit was a notable plus in the Modi government's record of deepening relations with Africa. As to the visitors, the Delhi sojourn should have sharpened their awareness of the desirability to pursue a more balanced Asia policy, factoring in the complex dynamics between India and China.

Rajiv Bhatia is Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House and former High Commissioner to South Africa

## SINGLE FILE

### A leader of the workers

George Fernandes' passionate trade union work helped mute violent conflict in democratic India

DEVIKA JAIN



George Fernandes was one of the most vivid characters in the Indian political landscape from the 1960s onwards. He was a passionate believer in worker unions and in the socialist order. Among the cohort of laid-back political activists those days, Fernandes was a fireball – articulate, courageous and outspoken. While some of that passion got diluted with increasing engagement in formal politics, his commitment to old-fashioned democracy and socialism could never be dampened. He was a workers' man, who, along with unionised hotel waiters, hawkers, and workers from the transport sector, could bring Bombay to a halt. In 1974, Fernandes famously led the largest railway strike that India has ever seen, which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi responded to by arresting or detaining thousands of trade unionists.

Fernandes was also a fearless dissenter. He was an anti-Emergency crusader. He spent the Emergency years in prison and even contested the 1977 elections from there. He won by a huge margin. The Janata Party was then elected to power and he was made Industries Minister in the government led by Morarji Desai.

But power corrupts. His induction into formal politics did not sit well with his personality or his actions. As Defence Minister, Fernandes was embroiled in the Kargil coffin scam. The *Tehelka* expose on the murky defence deals of the National Democratic Alliance forced him to resign.

But his downfall is not how we should remember Fernandes. We should remember him because he belonged to an era where leaders represented economic groups rather than castes or families. We should remember him because while at present there are many political and social leaders who may term themselves as being of the people, Fernandes was truly a man of the people.

And we should remember him because the worker in India today, whether in the formal or informal sector, is under threat. Unions face challenges right from getting themselves registered. The recent proposal to amend the Trade Unions Act of 1926 was met with protests – unions said that the government was trying to interfere in their functioning. In this era, we should remember stalwarts like Fernandes who understood that unless workers, like other professionals, are able to assert and organise power and negotiate the terms of their employment, there will be feudalism.

Worker unions were not only a vital institution for democratic India to thrive, but it was due to their propagation, aided by people such as Fernandes, that violent conflict was muted. His passing should be a reminder to support existing unions and build more unions.

The writer is an economist



## FAQ

### GST revenues going off target

With tax rates being cut regularly, experts fear collections will fall further

TCA SHARAD RAGHAVAN

#### What is the problem?

Even though the official data for Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections in January will be released on February 1, several news agencies have been reporting that the GST collection for January 2019 will come in at ₹94,000-96,000 crore, which is lower than the year's average and far lower than what experts estimate the government should be getting. The average collection between April and December was ₹96,782 crore. The collections crossed the ₹1 lakh crore mark only twice in the nine months under consideration. Even this was lower than the ₹1.1 lakh crore tax analysts say the government should be collecting.

Naturally, a reducing number of items in the 28% slab will result in lower collections. The way to offset lower rates is to increase the number of people paying tax. That is, compliance has to increase. However, given that the GST Council cut rates on a number of items and services in its December 22 meeting,

the likelihood of January's revenue being even lower than December's low of ₹94,726 crore is very high. If this is the case, it would mark the third consecutive month of falling GST revenue.

Why is this happening? The GST Council, in its 31st meeting on December 22, cut rates on almost 20 categories of goods and a number of services. As a result, only one common-use item – cement – was left in the highest tax slab of 28%. The reason for the creation of the 28% slab was to offset the lower collections from the items that were made exempt from GST or put in the lowest slab of 5%.

Naturally, a reducing number of items in the 28% slab will result in lower collections. The way to offset lower rates is to increase the number of people paying tax. That is, compliance has to increase. However,

analysis by *The Hindu* of GST data has shown that compliance has, in fact, been falling. The data show that while the number of people required to file monthly returns has grown 32% from July 2017 (when GST was implemented) to about 98.5 lakh in November 2018, the number of people not filing these returns has grown 167% during that time. In other words, the number of non-filers is growing faster than the tax base itself.

The government seems to have identified another reason for falling revenues: businesses generating fake invoices to claim higher input tax credits than they should be receiving. The tax officials are now starting to look at this in a deeper manner and examining how to plug the leaks.

The root of this problem is that the government doesn't have an easy and accessible way to match the invoices of sellers and buyers and catch discrepancies. That system will likely be rolled out from April 2019 onwards, but there is no official clarity on what it will involve.

Why is this worrisome? Falling GST revenues themselves are a worrisome prospect because they put pressure on government finances, and especially on other sources of revenue. Direct tax collections have been growing at a robust rate for most of this financial year. But this also means that the government will be hard pressed to reduce personal income tax rates in the General Budget of 2019-20.

Weak GST revenues also limit the government's ability to provision enough resources for any budgetary support it might decide to give the agricultural sector or to small and medium businesses.

## FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 31, 1969

Recovery for Annadurai after set-back

Mr. C.N. Annadurai, Chief Minister, whose condition continues to cause anxiety, made a miraculous recovery from a near-crisis condition which set in shortly before 6 p.m. yesterday [January 31, Madras]. Mr. Annadurai had to be given artificial respiration at 6-15 p.m. when he was near collapse. Rumours were spread that his end was near and the people became agitated. These rumours were, however, set at rest by a bulletin issued at 7-15 p.m. which said the Chief Minister was rallying and responding to treatment. A bulletin issued at 3 a.m. said: "The Chief Minister's condition is better now than what it was at 9 p.m. (yesterday). His blood pressure is sustained at a satisfactory level. Other physiological recordings are all much better. Yet his condition causes a certain amount of concern."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 31, 1919

The Sedition Bills.

Commenting on new repressive legislation, the 'Maharashtra' (Nagpur) exhorts all-Indian members to remember the history of the Press Act and the Defence of India Act. The Press Act was expressly intended for the suppression of anarchist propaganda. Mr. Gokhale and others replying on the solemn official promises supported the Act, but repented afterwards when it was too late. Promises were broken and the Act was abused. The Defence Act was a war measure undertaken to suppress enemy plots and secret intrigues. Was it not used against Mrs. Besant and many others engaged in peaceful constitutional agitation. Who can guarantee that the new laws will not be similarly abused. We cannot sell our liberties and birthright for a hundred Montagu Schemes. The paper publishes the names of Indian members and urge the people to hold protest meetings everywhere and pass resolutions appealing to the Indian members severally and collectively to oppose the measure tooth and nail.

## CONCEPTUAL Beveridge curve

ECONOMICS

This refers to a graphical representation that shows the relationship between the unemployment rate (on the horizontal axis) and the job vacancy rate (on the vertical axis) in an economy. It is named after British economist William Beveridge. The Beveridge curve usually slopes downwards because times when there is high job vacancy in an economy are also marked by relatively low unemployment since companies may actually be actively looking to hire new people. By the same logic, a low job vacancy rate usually corresponds with high unemployment as companies may not be looking to hire many people in new jobs.

## MORE ON THE WEB

Can India handle more tigers?

<http://bit.ly/HandlingTiger>

M ND-NDE

FROM PAGE ONE

## Ten get life for 2008 Assam serial blasts



NDFB chief Ranjan Daimari being taken to the special CBI court in Guwahati on Wednesday. • PTI

On Monday, the court convicted 14 people and acquitted Mridul Goyari for lack of evidence. His brother Rajendra Goyari, though, was found guilty and awarded life imprisonment on Wednesday along with the NDFB-R chief and the others.

"Ranjan Daimari, George Boro, Ajay Basumatary, Kharigowar Basumatary, Rajendra Goyari and Onsai Boro, who had hatched the conspiracy to cause the serial bomb explosions with the active help and assistance of the other convicts (Lokra Basumatary, Indra Brahma, Baishagi Basumatary and Raju Sarkar), have to be condemned to death as per the rarest of rare case rule laid down by the honourable Supreme Court," Judge Aparna Chakraborty, hearing the CBI case at the special court, observed.

"Considering the entire facts and circumstances of the case, I sentence them to undergo rigorous imprisonment for life and to pay a fine of ₹10,000 only, each,

on each count for committing the offences punishable under Sections 120-B and 302 IPC, Sections 3(b) of the Explosives Substances Act, 1908, and Sections 10 (b) (i) and 16 (l) (a) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967," the judge ruled.

The judgment did not go down well with Daimari's supporters.

"We expected such a judgment, as we knew we would be discriminated against in Assam," said Anjali Daimari, the extremist leader's sister.

### To go on appeal

Manas Sarania, Daimari's counsel, said: "The special court has wrongly punished them. We will file an appeal in a higher court."

The survivors of the victims of the serial blasts too were not satisfied with the verdict. "They should have got capital punishment for mass killing," said Kamal Choudhury, whose auto-driver husband Rajesh Choudhury was killed in one of the blasts.

## ICICI Bank sacks Chanda Kochhar

The bank board, which discussed the report on Wednesday, decided to treat the separation of Ms. Kochhar from the bank as a 'Termination for Cause', with all attendant consequences, which included revocation of all her existing and future entitlements, like any un-

paid amounts, unpaid bonuses or increments, unexercised stock options, and medical benefits, and requires the clawback of bonuses from April 2009 until March 2018. The bank said there are no implications of the report on its published financial statements.

## Ministries flouting norms, says EC

Writing to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) or the Election Commissioners (EC) is not permitted, except in rare "important cases" where the head of a department feels that something has to be brought to the personal notice of the CEC or ECs.

"During general election to the State Legislative Assemblies of Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh, references from the Ministry of Civil Aviation and the Ministry of Human Resource Development, for grant of No Objection under the Model Code of Conduct were received in the form of an office memorandum," Deputy Election Commissioner Sandeep Saxena said in the letter sent to the Cabinet Secretary on December 18, 2018.

The Commission decided not to consider the said references and returned them

to the Ministries. Moreover, during the recent polls in five States, a Joint Secretary in the Environment, Forest and Climate Change Ministry made a reference directly to the Chief Election Commissioner of India "by name", the Deputy EC pointed out.

### Adhere to norms

Taking note of the EC's complaint, the Cabinet Secretariat has urged Secretaries to all Ministries to ensure strict adherence with the norms in communications to the EC and other Constitutional authorities.

Some Ministries, it pointed out, are still writing to the Commission in a "routine manner", addressing semi-official letters to the CEC or EC, in spite of clear instructions regarding the form and procedure to be followed.

## Modi warns against coalition regime

Mr. Modi told the conclave: "The government with a full majority is accountable to the electorate, and today anybody can ask me, 'What have you done in the last four-and-a-half years?'

"If it was a coalition government, I could have made excuses," he said.

Mr. Patel hit out at the Prime Minister for running down coalition governments. He said his speech was an "admission that he cannot run a coalition go-

vernment." By saying that he can't function in a coalition government, has the Prime Minister confirmed that if the BJP gets less than 272 seats, it will sit in the Opposition and not try to form the government," he asked on Twitter.

### Worst growth

In another tweet, he said, "In the last 15 years, the worst economic growth has been under the BJP's absolute majority government."

## Too many PMs: Shah on Opposition

If voted to power, the grand alliance would have different leaders on alternate days of the week'

**OMAR RASHID**  
LUCKNOW

Taking a dig at Opposition parties for not presenting a prime ministerial face against Narendra Modi, BJP president Amit Shah on Wednesday said that if voted to power, the proposed grand alliance would have different PMs on alternate days of the week, except for Sunday when the country would "be on leave".

Only Mr. Modi-led BJP could give the country a *mazboot* (strong) government, he said, while members of the grand alliance wanted a *mazboor* (helpless) one, Mr. Shah said. The Opposition parties wanted a government run by "dealers", while the BJP offered one with a "leader".

If a government of the alliance was formed in 2019, Mr. Shah said, BSP chief Mayawati would be Prime Minister on Monday; Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday; West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday; NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Thursday; JD(S) chief Deve



**Big push:** Amit Shah with Yogi Adityanath and other BJP leaders in Lucknow. • RAJEEV BHATT

Gowda on Friday and DMK president Stalin on Saturday.

### Appeal to BJP cadre

Addressing booth-level members of the party in Kanpur, Mr. Shah said BJP workers were prepared to contest the "fight for 50%" vote in Uttar Pradesh, exuding con-

fidence that even if the Congress and the RLD joined the SP-BSP alliance it would make no difference. He appealed to BJP workers in the State to work to increase the party's tally from 73 in 2014 to 74 in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. "Just win us these

polls in 2019, you won't see either *bua* [Ms. Mayawati] or *bhatija* [Mr. Akhilesh Yadav] in Uttar Pradesh for 25 years," Mr. Shah said in another meeting in Lucknow, addressing booth members of the Awadh region.

Mr. Shah said the anti-BJP alliance was not one of principles, but an alliance of

"crime, corruption and casteism," and of "selfish politics."

### Politics of dynasty

"Those who engaged in politics of dynasty and casteism all their life have come together to defeat nationalism and to stop the development of Uttar Pradesh," he said.

The BJP chief said that while the four Bs of the BJP stood for "Badhta Bharat, Banta Bharat," the Opposition Bs only referred to "Bua, Bhatija, Bhai aur Behen," attacking the top leadership of the SP, BSP and the Congress. He reminded party workers that despite the SP and Congress forming an alliance in 2017 Assembly polls, the BJP [and allies] had secured a thumping majority of 325 seats.

Mr. Shah heaped praise on the Modi government for the "surgical strikes" conducted by the Army in 2016 and the Centre's application filed in the Supreme Court on returning the "superfluous" land acquired around the 0.313-acre disputed land in Ayodhya.

## Saudi Crown Prince to visit in February

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed Bin Salman is expected to undertake his first visit to India in February, sources have confirmed.

The visit comes months after the Crown Prince had sought dialogue between India and Pakistan. He is expected in the third week of February. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has sent out positive messages to Delhi.

At the annual cultural event of Janadriya, the Kingdom chose India as the 'Guest of Honour' in 2018. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj participated in the festival. The upcoming visit is noteworthy as it will take place in the same month that Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, another important partner of India in the volatile West Asia region, is expected to visit.

## Conditional nod for Karti to go abroad

**LEGAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed Karti Chidambaram, son of former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, to travel to the United Kingdom and France in February and March this year.

A Bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi however directed him to appear before the Enforcement Directorate on four days – March 5, 6, 7 and 12 – in connection with the investigations in the INX Media and Aircel-Maxis cases. It ordered Mr. Karti to "co-operate with the investigating agencies in every manner." The court laid down conditions, which includes a deposit of ₹10 crore with the Secretary-General of the Supreme Court, to be returned on his return.

## Modi, Shah to visit northeast

Tour comes amid raging controversy over the introduction of Citizenship Bill

**NISTULA HEBBAR**  
NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday summoned the Pakistani envoy and warned that continued contact between leading figures of the Imran Khan government in Islamabad and Kashmiri separatists will have 'implications'.

The warning came hours after Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Foreign minister of Pakistan, telephoned Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, the chief of All Parties Hurriyat Conference in Kashmir.

"The Foreign Secretary conveyed that this deplorable act has violated all norms for the conduct of international relations even by Pakistan's own standards. The Pakistan Foreign Minister's actions are tantamount to direct interference in the internal affairs of its neighbour," an MEA release stated.

Amid a raging controversy in the northeastern States over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah will be visiting Assam in the next 10 days.

While Mr. Modi will be in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh between February 10 and 12, Mr. Shah will be in Assam on February 12, to address public meetings and more significantly hold cluster meetings with different interest groups in the State.

### Defusing panic

Senior BJP sources told *The Hindu* that Mr. Shah's visit was planned as part of his travel programmes related to preparations for the Lok Sabha election, but the timing was of course significant. "The visit was planned as

per the country-wide travel plan for Mr. Shah, but yes, this issue is significant in Assam and we hope that the cluster meetings will be helpful in explaining the Bill and the party's position on it, and defuse some of the alarm over the issue," said

the source. The government has also been moving fast on issues of granting autonomy to tribal bodies and recognition of tribal groups and rights. On January 8, the Union Cabinet approved Schedule Tribe status to six Assam communities: Tai

the source. The government has also been moving fast on issues of granting autonomy to tribal bodies and recognition of tribal groups and rights. On January 8, the Union Cabinet approved Schedule Tribe status to six Assam communities: Tai

last few months," the Ministry added. "The Ministry not only places a high regard for the Commission but also values its advice and on which appropriate action is taken."

It added that the National Sample Survey Organisation was processing the quarterly data of the labour force survey for the period July 2017 to December 2018 and that the report would be released thereafter.

*The Hindu* had learnt that the delay in releasing this data, once it was approved by the NSC, was one of the reasons why the two members resigned. The other reason was the manner in which the back series GDP data was released, since it was seen to have sidelined the NSC in favour of NITI Aayog.

## Pak. to extend helping hand to PoK woman

Divorce has left her 'Stateless'

**PEERZADA ASHIQ**  
SRINAGAR

Pakistan's High Commission in India has approached legal experts in New Delhi to help Pakistan-occupied Kashmir's (PoK) resident Kubra Gillani, 27, who has become "Stateless" after her husband, a former militant, divorced her in the Kashmir valley in November last year.

Sources said Pakistan has engaged a Delhi-based lawyer to study the case. Ms. Gillani is a resident of Doda area in PoK capital Muzaffarabad.

"I am stranded without a permanent place now. I am hopeful both India and Pakistan will address my issue. I just want to be with my family [in PoK again]," Ms. Gillani told *The Hindu*.

Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq has appealed to India and Pakistan to "see the case through the prism of humanity".

Despite applying a number of times, Ms. Gillani failed to get either a passport or permanent resident certificate in J&K. Now, after

her divorce, she can't travel to her home in PoK as she does not have travel documents.

"I am stranded without a permanent place now. I am hopeful both India and Pakistan will address my issue. I just want to be with my family [in PoK again]," Ms. Gillani told *The Hindu*.

The Mirwaiz said Ms. Gillani should be provided a "permit" to travel.

## 'NSC members aired no concerns'

Ministry says it values advice of National Statistical Commission

## Panel died of negligence

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Two days after the two remaining members of the National Statistical Commission (NSC) resigned allegedly in protest of the sidelining of the body, the Ministry of Statistics has issued a clarification saying the members did not express these concerns to the Ministry.

P.C. Mohanan and J.V. Meenakshi tendered their resignations from the NSC on Monday, leaving the body with only NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant, who serves as an ex-officio member, and Chief Statistician of India Pravin Srivastava.

"In the wake of resignation by the two members of the National Statistical Commission including release of the labour force survey results and the back series of

GDP," the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) said on Wednesday.

"These concerns were not expressed by the members in any of the meetings in

the interim budget. According to sources, Speaker Sumitra Mahajan told members that the session should be made memorable and everyone should be given time to speak without disruptions.

### Congress position

Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge said if a full-fledged Budget was presented or any policy decisions announced, his party would stridently oppose it.

## Speaker wants smooth LS session

Appeals to parties not to disrupt proceedings, but TDP refuses to commit itself

**SOBHANA K. NAIR**  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the last Parliament session of the Narendra Modi government, Speaker Sumitra Mahajan appealed to all parties to ensure that it remained without disruptions. The AIADMK has agreed to halt its protests on the Mekadatu Dam while the Telugu Desam Party, which has been agitating for special status for Andhra Pradesh, refused to make any commitments.

The session begins on Thursday and will go on till January 13.

By all indications, the Opposition is ready to corner the government on farmer's distress and also on expect-

"Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Water Resources has assured us that the government will not allow Karnataka to construct the dam in Mekadatu. Also, we have many other issues to raise including the rehabilitation following Gaja cyclone," AIADMK floor leader Venugopal Ponnamsetty told *The Hindu*. The Telugu Desam Party said that the government had not delivered on its promises for Andhra Pradesh so their protests would continue.



**APPEAL**  
I, Gokula Kannan aged 8 years need your support to bring a lasting change and a new hope to my life. I suffer from Thalassemia Major and require Rs.10,00,000/- towards Bone Marrow Transplantation sent by Ch.D.F. favouring Menakshi Mission Hospital & Research Centre, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India. The donations sent through Ch.D.F. NEFT Transfer (Syndicate) Bank, Nungambakkam Branch, A/c No. 6018210063310, IFSC No. SYNB0006018, favouring WOMEN'S WELFARE SYNDICATE is exempted under 80G IT. Please give us your e-mail ID.

All correspondence is done through WWS, Regd. Public Charitable Trust, Flat No.GF 1, Cordell Apartments, O.N.O. 13, N.No.29, Pyrocks Garden Lane, Chennai-600006, Ph: 044-2137401/2825324 E-Mail ID: womenswelfaresyndicate@gmail.com Website: www.womenswelfaresyndicate.org.

Gokula Kannan

# Centre's Ayodhya plea turns Supreme Court's logic on its head

Court upheld the land acquisition to protect Muslim community's right

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The application filed by the Centre to return the 'superfluous' excess area acquired by it under the Ayodhya Act of 1993 to owners including the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas turns the logic of the Supreme Court's 1994 Constitution Bench judgment on its head.

The apex court's ruling in the Ismail Faruqui case upheld the acquisition of the acres adjacent to the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid (RJBM) area from its owners to protect the Muslim community's right of enjoyment and access to the disputed

land in case they finally won the title dispute. This was the very justification the Centre had given at the time to the Bench for acquiring the entire 67.703 acres.

**'Protecting the rights'**  
"The justification given for acquisition of the larger area, including the property respecting which title is not disputed, is that the same is necessary to ensure that the final outcome of adjudication should not be rendered meaningless by the existence of properties belonging to Hindus in the vicinity of the disputed structure in case the Muslims are found entitled to the disputed site," the court observed in the Faruqui verdict.

The court noted that the government had found it necessary to acquire the large tracts of land from the Hin-

dus in the neighbourhood of the disputed area for the simple reason that Muslims, if they "succeed in the adjudication of the dispute should not be thwarted by denial of proper access to, and enjoyment of rights in, the disputed area by exercise of rights of ownership of Hindu owners of the adjacent properties."

Thus, the Bench found that the acquisition of the adjacent land was "incidental to the main purpose and cannot be termed unreasonable." In short, both the legislature through the Ayodhya Act and the Supreme Court were particular that the Muslims, in case they won the case, experienced the "proper enjoyment of the fruits of success on the final outcome of the adjudication."

"Even though, *prima facie*,

The justification given for acquisition of the larger area, including the property respecting which title is not disputed, is that the same is necessary to ensure that the final outcome of adjudication should not be rendered meaningless by the existence of properties belonging to Hindus in the vicinity of the disputed structure in case the Muslims are found entitled to the disputed site

SUPREME COURT IN THE ISMAIL FARUQUI JUDGMENT OF 1994

cite, the acquisition of the adjacent area in respect of which there is no dispute of title and which belongs to Hindus may appear to be a slant against the Hindus, yet on closer scrutiny it is not so since it is for the larger national purpose of maintaining and promoting communal harmony and in consonance with the creed of secularism," the Supreme

wounds; to look forward with hope, and not backwards with fear; to reconcile reason with faith."

The government is right to point out in its January 28 application that the court had also made it the duty of the State to return superfluous land to the owners, at a "later stage", after determining the "exact area acquired which is needed" for the winner of the Ayodhya title dispute to access and enjoy the disputed area. It had also given the owners liberty to challenge if the government failed to revert such superfluous land.

Nine years later, on March 31, 2003, another Constitution Bench separately intervened to prescribe status quo across the entire span of 67.703 acres. The Bench's judgment, authored by Justice Rajendra Babu, in Mohd.

Aslam @ Bhure case for the Constitution Bench came at a time in 2003 when the title suits were in the final stages of adjudication by the Allahabad High Court.

Justice Babu said it was not advisable to disturb the state of affairs as regards the acquired property, observing that the status quo had already been in place since 1992.

"It is well known that preservation of property in its original condition is absolutely necessary to give appropriate relief to the parties, on the termination of the proceedings before the courts and, therefore, we do not think that this is one of those cases in which it becomes necessary to disturb that state," the court cautioned. The Bhure ruling made clear that the two acquired lands – the disputed

RJBM area and the adjacent acquired land – were "intrinsically connected with one another".

Now, a Constitution Bench is poised to finally hear the appeals in the case of the Ayodhya title suits. The situation is quite similar to when the Bhure decision was pronounced when adjudication before the high court was in its final throes.

Justice Babu's words that the 'present state of affairs should not be disturbed' when a court is seized of the matter, are therefore particularly germane. Besides, a question may come up in court on why the government chose to file the application to vacate/modify the Bhure decision at this point of time and not after the Allahabad High Court had pronounced its judgment in the title suits matter in September 2010.

## IN BRIEF



Mamata denies charge on painting sales

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said in Birbhum on Wednesday that BJP supporters attacked physically challenged people and vehicles carrying students after a rally in Purba Medinipur on Tuesday. The Chief Minister denied charges levelled by BJP chief Amit Shah that chit fund owners had bought her paintings for huge sums. "Modi babu [Prime Minister Narendra Modi], I challenge you to prove that I have taken a single penny," she said.

### Bansal stakes claim to ticket from Chandigarh

CHANDIGARH  
Four-time MP and senior Congress leader Pawan Kumar Bansal on Wednesday formally staked claim to the party ticket for the Chandigarh Lok Sabha seat. The former Railway Minister, along with his supporters, went to the Congress office here and submitted an application for the ticket. "I am confident that the party will repossess confidence in me once again," he said. PTI

### Seer says temple work will begin on February 21

ALLAHABAD  
Swami Swaroopanand Saraswati said here on Wednesday that a ceremony to start work on the temple in Ayodhya would be held on February 21, even braving bullets. A *dharamadesh* issued by the Dwarka Peeth Shankaracharya after a "Dharam Sansad" here urged Hindus to reach Ayodhya carrying four bricks each. Sadhus would begin a march to Ayodhya from Allahabad on February 10. PTI

## Strongman politics is on the rise, says Cameron

Democracies must ensure rule of law: former British PM



David Cameron, former U.K. Prime Minister, in conversation with N. Ram, Chairman of The Hindu Publishing Group, in Chennai on Wednesday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

rule of law. The question is where do you want to be. You want to be up here? You want to fight corruption? You want transparency? Honesty? Or you want to be down here, with [Russian President Vladimir] Putins and [Philippines President Rodrigo] Dutertes. And I think India has this golden opportunity to say strongly that yes, we are the largest democracy in the world. That's what makes us stand out.

Mr. Cameron was introduced by N. Sankar, chairman of the Sanmar Group. The speech was followed by a conversation between Mr. Cameron and N. Ram, Chairman of The Hindu Publishing Group.

Asked if India is also facing a rise of authoritarian politics, the former British Prime Minister said it's an opportunity for India to reassess its democratic credentials.

"India's strength is that it's the biggest democracy in the world. Our democracies are based on free press, free expression, independent courts, strong institutions,

side. I want India to have its position in multilateral organisations. I want India to take its permanent seat in the UN Security Council."

Mr. Cameron said both India and the U.K. suffered from terror and "we work together in tackling it."

"We must recognise the ideology of terror. Terrorists are against every religion. They target Christians, Jews, Muslims... everyone who doesn't agree with their view will be targeted. And we need moderate Islam on our side in this fight."

Mr. Cameron said Brexit could be good and bad for India. "The bad thing is that Britain in the European Union has been a voice for trade with India and better relations with India. The good news is that Britain after Brexit will have to make friends, partnerships, and I think India is a natural partner. We need investments. Indian companies have made investments in U.K. Indian companies make the best steel for us. We will have to work harder."

### Four challenges

Mr. Cameron said the world faces four key challenges – the crisis in globalisation, the rise of great nations, extremist terrorism and climate change – and called for urgent action to tackle all these. He said he is a big supporter of globalisation and free trade which has changed the world over the past several decades, taking millions out of poverty.

He added that he supports the rise of new powers like India. "Countries have to work together side by

## Agusta bribery case accused brought to India from Dubai

Saxena was owner of firm involved in funds laundering; ED

DEvesh K. Pandey  
NEW DELHI



port," read a statement released on his behalf.

In India, Mr. Saxena is being represented by Ms. Luthra, Shivan Luthra Lohiya and Prateek Yadav as his lawyers. He is expected to be produced before a special court on Thursday.

According to the ED, Mr. Saxena was a beneficial owner of Interstellar Technologies Limited (Mauritius), a firm allegedly involved in the laundering of funds. It is alleged that AgustaWestland had paid more than € 58 million as kickbacks through Tunisia-based Gordian Services Sarl and IDS Sarl.

## SC refuses to stay amended SC/ST Act

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to stay the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act of 2018 which nullified a controversial March 20 judgment diluting the stringent provisions of the Dalit protection law.

A Bench led by Justice U.U. Lalit posted the petitions for hearing on February 19. The government brought in the amendments as the Scheduled communities faced the same social stigma, poverty and humiliation which they had been subjected to for centuries.

## 'S-400 deal a proof of India-Russia ties'

Envoy says relationship between the two nations is not into a straitjacket

STANLY JOHNY  
CHENNAI

The S-400 missile defence system, which India is acquiring from Russia in a multi-billion dollar deal, is a proof of the special nature of the partnership between the two countries, Nikolay R. Kudashov, the Russian Ambassador to India, says.

"This would be a valuable contribution to the security of the Indian air space and, this is also a proof of the special nature of the ties between India and Russia," Mr. Kudashov said in an interview with *The Hindu*. The deal was on track, and the first batch of delivery was expected in 2020, he added.

Last year, India and Russia signed the \$5.2-billion deal for the S-400 system despite pressure from the U.S. and threats of sanctions. The S-400 is a highly advanced surface-to-air missile defence system that can shoot down hostile jets and missiles.

Asked if American sanctions would create hurdles for the payment of the sys-



Indo-Russia relationship is a living formula for the rest of the world

NIKOLAY R. KUDASHOV  
Russian Ambassador

tem, Mr. Kudashov said both India and Russia recently came together to develop a practical solution, involving banks of two sides and national currencies, to overcome this challenge. "So as far as the problem is concerned, it's no more there. Rather, it is about building the experience, the habit of payments in national currencies."

He said Indo-Russia relationship was a living formula for the rest of the world. "Our relationship is not into a straitjacket. Our relationship is a living formula enriching the two of us. We are making the multipolar world stronger." Asked about Russia's growing ties with Pakis-

tan in recent years, the Ambassador said Russia's partnership with India and its ties with Pakistan were incomparable. "Our relationship with India is a special strategic partnership. We share with India unique confidence... Our relationship with Islamabad is minuscule. The aim of our ties with Pakistan is very much similar to yours – we need a stable government, predictable, we need a government which fulfils its obligations, to fight terror, drugs and crime," Mr. Kudashov said.

**Kudankulam plant**  
He added that the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu was being developed successfully. "Block one and two are very much on. Three and four, construction activity started. For five and six, the legal issues are settled. We are looking for a second site – six more blocks. The Indian government should offer the site to us."

For interview, log on to [bit.ly/NikolayInt](http://bit.ly/NikolayInt)

Asked if America's growing ties with the U.S. were a matter of concern for Moscow, he said, "We trust each other." "We feel that it is more or less natural for a country of India's size, influence and power to develop normal

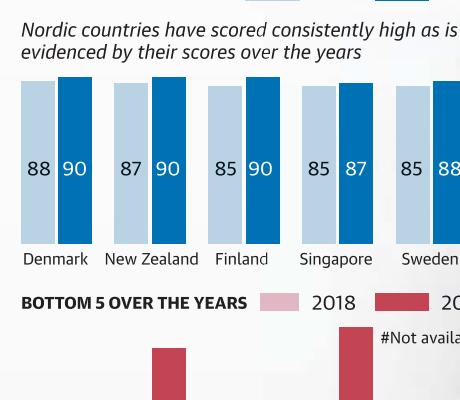
## The grip of graft

Transparency International's report for 2018 reveals that countries have not made much progress in dealing with graft. There were not many significant changes in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) scores compared to 2017

**RANKING SYSTEM**

- 180 countries are ranked by their perceived levels of public sector corruption
- The higher the score, the less corrupt a nation

### TOP 5 OVER THE YEARS



### BOTTOM 5 OVER THE YEARS



Oman and Gambia were the biggest gainers in the year, while the U.S. was among the biggest losers

Country	2018	2017	Gain/loss
Oman	52	44	8
Gambia	37	30	7
Seychelles	66	60	6
Solomon Islands	44	39	5
Tajikistan	25	21	4

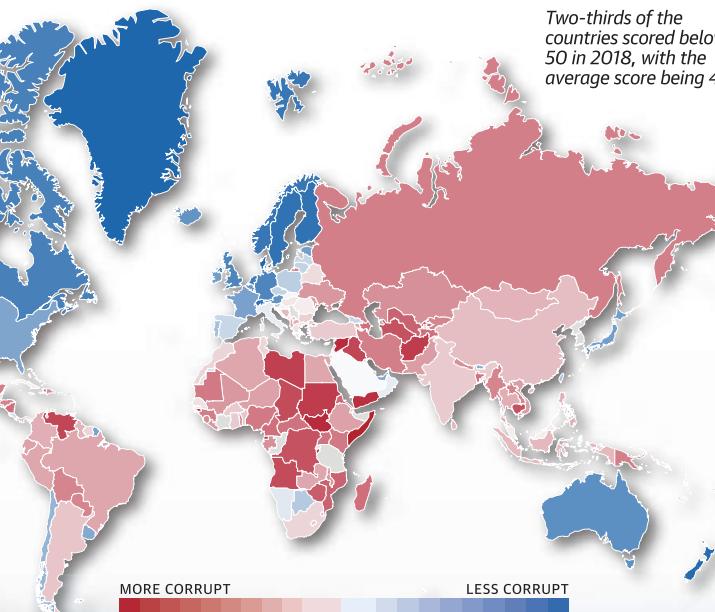
Country	2018	2017	Loss
North Korea	14	17	-3
USA	71	75	-4
Bolivia	29	33	-4
Burundi	17	22	-5
Azerbaijan	25	31	-6

Source: Transparency International

### KEY FINDINGS

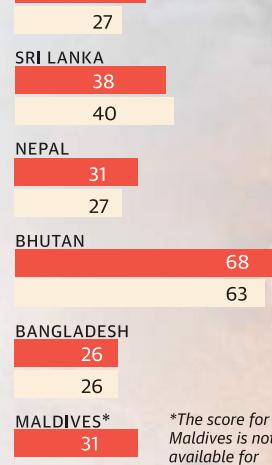
- From 2012 to 2018, only 20 countries have significantly improved their scores
- Sixteen countries have recorded a significant decrease
- U.S. and Brazil have been marked as "countries to watch out for"
- Western Europe, with an average of 66, was the top scoring region, while Sub-Saharan Africa scored the lowest

Two-thirds of the countries scored below 50 in 2018, with the average score being 43



### SOUTH ASIA WATCH

India and its neighbouring countries have shown a steady improvement. While India has gained five points between 2012 and 2018, Pakistan and Nepal have also registered gains. Bhutan, the top-ranked country in the region, is ranked on par with the West European nations



\*The score for Maldives is not available for 2012

An anti-corruption protest in Basra, Iraq, earlier this month. AFP

# MPs back May to renegotiate Brexit deal but EU says 'no'

Non-binding amendment passed to rule out U.K. leaving without a Brexit deal

VIDYA RAM  
LONDON

British Prime Minister Theresa May has said that she will return to talks with the European Union (EU), and will attempt to renegotiate Britain's withdrawal agreement, after MPs narrowly voted to endorse a plan to renegotiate the controversial Irish backstop.

However, with the EU firmly insisting that the withdrawal agreement is not open to negotiation, the path ahead remains unclear. The Labour Party has also agreed to hold talks with the government over Brexit after MPs supported a non-binding resolution that opposes Britain leaving the EU without a deal, even as one resolution that would have given Parliament the means to rule out 'no deal' was rejected. Ms. May has insisted that crashing out without a deal remains on the table.

**Breaking the impasse**  
The developments came in a series of amendments to Ms. May's withdrawal plans on Tuesday evening as MPs sought to break the political impasse over the direction of Brexit, after voting by a substantial majority earlier this month to reject her deal as it stood.

The key victory for the government came in the support for an amendment by Sir Graham Brady, who heads the Conservative Par-



Dealing with it: A pro-Brexit activist, left, arguing with an anti-Brexit demonstrator, right, on Tuesday in London. ■ AFP

ty's 1922 backbench committee. The amendment calls for an alternative to the Irish backstop.

The backbench amendment, which calls on the government to return to the negotiating table with the EU and exact substantive changes, was backed by the government in the end and won by 317 to 301 following an afternoon of heated debate.

Speaking in Parliament on Wednesday, Ms. May said that Parliament – in calling for her to return to talks and renegotiate the backstop – had done what the EU had consistently asked for, which was to indicate what it wanted, rather than what it did not. Among the options being considered by the U.K. is pushing for the backstop to include a unilateral exit mechanism or a time limit.

However, despite the government's public proclamations, it remains highly uncertain what concessions Britain can get and whether they will be enough to satisfy MPs when the deal is voted on again in coming weeks. Should no substantial changes be obtained, the MPs who on Tuesday gave Ms. May the benefit of the doubt could return to opposing the deal.

Following the vote, the European Council president Donald Tusk insisted that the withdrawal agreement "is and remains the best and only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom", and that the backstop and withdrawal agreement were not open for renegotiation.

A similar response came from the Irish government, while the German Foreign Minister Heiko Mass said

Germany and the EU would stand by Ireland on the backstop.

However, hard-Brexit supporters remained adamant that change was possible. When it came to the EU, amending the backstop was "no skin off their nose", former Foreign Secretary and arch-Brexiteer Boris Johnson told the BBC.

**Not without a deal?**  
While the government won on the crucial Brady amendment, it suffered a significant defeat when an amendment by Conservative MP Caroline Spelman was passed by the House, stating that Britain would not leave without a deal.

However, despite the government's public proclamations, it remains highly uncertain what concessions Britain can get and whether they will be enough to satisfy MPs when the deal is voted on again in coming weeks. Should no substantial changes be obtained, the MPs who on Tuesday gave Ms. May the benefit of the doubt could return to opposing the deal.

Following the vote, the European Council president Donald Tusk insisted that the withdrawal agreement "is and remains the best and only way to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom", and that the backstop and withdrawal agreement were not open for renegotiation.

On Wednesday, Ms. May continued to refuse to take no-deal off the table. "The House did vote to reject no deal, but that cannot be the end of the story," she insisted. "You cannot just vote to reject no deal; you have to vote for a deal, otherwise you leave with no deal."

## India could see communal violence as polls near

SRI RAM LAKSHMAN  
WASHINGTON

There is an increased risk of communal violence around the elections in India if the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stresses Hindu nationalism, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats said in a statement titled 'Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community' on Tuesday.

Mr. Coats testified along with CIA Director Gina Haspel, FBI Director Christopher Wray and other intelligence chiefs before the Senate's Select Committee

on Intelligence in connection with the intelligence community's annual global risk assessment.

"BJP policies during [Narendra] Modi's first term have deepened communal tensions in some BJP-governed States, and Hindu nationalist State leaders might view a Hindu-nationalist campaign as a signal to incite low-level violence to animate their supporters," the report said, adding, "Increasing communal clashes could alienate Indian Muslims and allow Islamist terrorist groups in India to expand

their influence."

Regarding India-Pakistan ties, the assessment was that "continued terrorist attacks and cross-border firing in Kashmir have hardened each country's position and reduced their political will to seek rapprochement". Opportunities for improving ties will be constrained as a result of "political manoeuvring" around the elections, the report said.

**India-China ties**  
The report also warned of tense ties between India and China. Chinese President Xi

Jinping and Prime Minister Modi did not address border issues during their summit in 2018 (a reference to the Wuhan Summit), the report said, adding that "misperceptions of military movements or construction might result in tensions escalating into armed conflict."

The other assessments in the South Asia region include a stalemate in Afghanistan – where neither the government forces nor the Taliban will gain an advantage in 2019 if coalition support levels remain the same, the report said.

## Trump calls spy chiefs 'naive' for contradicting him

REUTERS

WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump on Wednesday called top U.S. intelligence chiefs "extremely passive and naive" on Iran and dismissed their assessments of the threat posed by North Korea, a day after they

contradicted his views during congressional testimony.

Leaders of the U.S. intelligence community told a Senate committee on Tuesday that the nuclear threat from North Korea remained but that Iran was not taking steps toward making a nuclear bomb, differing with Mr. Trump's views on those countries. "The Intelligence people seem to be extremely passive and naive when it comes to the dangers of Iran. They are wrong!" Mr. Trump said in a Twitter post. He said Iran was "coming very

close to the edge" and suggested, "Perhaps Intelligence should go back to school!" The U.S. intelligence officials told the Senate Intelligence Committee that Iran was not developing nuclear weapons in violation of the nuclear agreement.

## Facebook paid teenagers to mine smartphone data

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
WASHINGTON

Facebook paid users, including teens, to track their smartphone activity as part of an effort to glean more data that could help the social network's competition efforts, said a new report.

An investigation by the online news-site TechCrunch said the effort, which had been known as the 'Onavo Project' and later baptised as 'Facebook Research', was used to gather data on usage habits.

The news could be a further embarrassment for Facebook, which has been under heightened scrutiny over failing to crack down on manipulation of its platform. The program paid users ages 13 to 35 up to \$20 a month for "root" access to their devices to track their location, app usage, spending habits and other activity.

According to a statement to TechCrunch, Facebook claimed there was nothing secret about the effort and that it obtained parental consent for teens where required.

## Trump wants to get me killed, alleges Maduro

REUTERS  
CARACAS/MOSCOW

President Nicolás Maduro accused U.S. President Donald Trump of ordering his assassination while his main global backer Russia called on Wednesday for mediation in a stand-off deepening geopolitical splits.

In an interview with Moscow's RIA news agency, Mr. Maduro said Mr. Trump had ordered neighbouring Colombia to murder him. "Donald Trump has without doubt given an order to kill me and has told the government of Colombia and the

Colombian mafia to kill me," he said. Russia called on Opposition leader Juan Guaidó to drop his demand for a snap election and instead accept mediation.

Mr. Maduro, who still has the military's backing, reiterated he was ready for talks with the Opposition, but rejected calls for a snap election as blackmail. "I won legitimately," he said. "If the imperialists want a new election, let them wait until 2025," he said. He also expressed "pleasure and gratitude" for Russian President Vladimir Putin's help.

## Arctic chill sweeps over U.S. Midwest

Temperatures in many States are forecast to be the coldest in a generation



Not business as usual: A vehicle travelling on a snowy road in Palo Alto, Pennsylvania, on Tuesday. ■ AP

and low maximum temperatures from the Upper Midwest to the Great Lakes and Ohio Valley." The cause is a swirl of Arctic air that broke away from the polar vortex that usually encircles the North Pole.

The National Weather Service forecast temperatures between -23 to -40°C by Wednesday across the Midwest. Chicago, America's third largest city, was expected to be colder than parts of Antarctica. Authorities in Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin put emergency measures in place to handle the frigid weather. Some 160 warming centres were opened in Chicago, where temperatures could potentially equal or exceed the all-time record of -27 degrees Fahrenheit.

### Asia Bibi expected to leave Pakistan soon

ISLAMABAD

A call by Pakistani religious hardliners for protests fell flat on Wednesday as Asia Bibi was expected to leave the country, having cleared a last legal hurdle. Speculation is rampant that she will seek asylum in a North American or European country, and unconfirmed reports suggest her children have already fled to Canada. ■ PTI

### Bangladesh to file suit over cyberheist

DHAKA

Bangladesh on Wednesday was set to file a lawsuit in New York against a Philippine bank over its involvement in a cyberheist, the country's Central Bank Governor said. Unidentified hackers stole \$81 million from the Central Bank's account with the U.S. Federal Reserve in New York in February 2016. ■ AFP

CM YK

**MARKET WATCH**

	30-01-2019	% CHANGE
Sensex	35,591	0.00
US Dollar	71.12	-0.01
Gold	34,070	0.95
Brent oil	62.46	1.73

**NIFTY 50**

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Ports	338.15	-11.10
Asian Paints	1390.40	-2.90
Axis Bank	690.95	30.20
Bajaj Auto	2499.70	-67.95
Bajaj Finserv	6247.20	14.15
Bajaj Finance	2595.50	79.95
Bharti Airtel	303.70	-4.15
BPCL	342.70	-2.20
Cipla	505.80	0.75
Coal India	225.20	2.65
Dr Reddys Lab	2665.40	-1.05
Eicher Motors	18919.15	41.90
GAIL (India)	321.60	-2.00
Grasim Ind	725.00	-8.50
HCL Tech	1018.40	29.95
HDIL	1885.80	-36.50
ICICI Bank	2034.70	-22.90
Hero MotoCorp	2611.00	-22.30
Hindalco	205.80	6.25
HPCL	231.15	-4.15
Hind Unilever	1733.35	-23.35
Indiabulls HFL	672.90	-25.70
ICICI Bank	365.90	19.05
IndusInd Bank	1476.10	14.25
Bharti Infratech	290.30	-7.05
Infosys	725.90	-2.00
Indian Oil Corp	134.55	-2.80
ITC	275.50	-2.95
JSW Steel	268.90	-2.05
Kotak Bank	1222.20	-29.20
L&T	1294.45	16.40
M&M	678.65	9.00
Maurti Suzuki	6548.25	21.30
NTPC	138.70	0.20
ONGC	139.70	-1.35
PowerGrid Corp	187.10	1.50
Reliance Ind	1195.70	-14.95
State Bank	287.45	6.85
Sun Pharma	417.95	-4.45
Tata Motors	174.60	1.00
Tata Steel	467.45	23.65
TCS	1981.40	-1.35
Tech Mahindra	714.60	-16.90
Titan	968.90	2.80
UltraTech Cement	3442.20	32.55
UPL	767.35	7.05
Vedanta	194.10	1.45
Wipro	363.25	3.85
YES Bank	199.50	-3.40
Zee Entertainment	388.85	11.45

**EXCHANGE RATES**

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	70.92	71.24
Euro	81.10	81.47
British Pound	92.88	93.31
Japanese Yen (100)	64.81	65.10
Chinese Yuan	10.56	10.61
Swiss Franc	71.11	71.43
Singapore Dollar	52.51	52.75
Canadian Dollar	53.61	53.86
Malaysian Ringgit	17.27	17.35

Source: Indian Bank

**BULLION RATES CHENNAI**

January 30 rates in rupees with previous rates in parentheses

Retail Silver (1g) 43.8... (43.6)

22 ct gold (1 g) 3161... (3145)

# ICICI Bank third quarter profit slips 2.7% on rise in provisioning

Net non-performing asset ratio falls to the lowest in three years

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

MUMBAI

Private sector lender ICICI Bank reported a 2.72% year-on-year decline in its net profit to ₹1,605 crore for the October-December quarter mainly due to rise in provisioning.

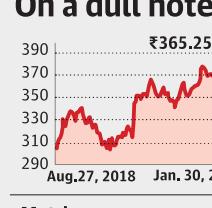
The bank had made provisions of ₹4,244 crore during the reporting period compared with ₹3,570 crore in the year-earlier period.

This helped the lender to lower the net NPA ratio from 3.65% in September to 2.58% at December – the lowest in 12 quarters.

The bank said addition to NPAs during the quarter was ₹2,091 crore, the lowest in 14 quarters. Gross addition to NPAs was ₹3,117 crore in the July-September quarter. The bank's gross NPA ratio as at end December was 7.75% compared with 7.82%.

The provision coverage

**On a dull note**





Metrics	Q3 FY19	Q3 FY18	% growth
Net interest income (₹ cr.)	6,875	5,705	20.5
Net profit (₹ cr.)	1,605	1,650	-2.72
Earnings per share (EPS ₹)	2.49	2.57	-
Net NPA (%)	2.58	4.2	-

ratio on non-performing loans, including technical write-offs, increased by 690 basis points sequentially to 76.3% in December.

"Recoveries, upgrades and resolution of non-performing loans through sale were ₹4,063 crore in Q3-2019," the bank said.

While the results were announced after the market

hours, the stock rose 5.3% to close the day at ₹365.25 in anticipation of improvement in asset quality.

Net interest income increased by 20.5% year-on-year to ₹6,875 crore while net interest margin also improved to 3.40% compared to 3.33% in Q2 of 2018-19.

Treasury income was ₹479 crore during the reporting

period compared with ₹66 crore.

**Kochhar's termination**

Responding to the bank's termination of her contract following findings by a panel that she violated the bank's code of conduct, former MD and CEO Chanda Kochhar said, "I have served ICICI for the last 34 years with all my dedication and hard work. I have never shied away from taking tough decisions whenever required to be taken in the best interest of the organisation. This decision from the bank has caused me immense hurt and pain."

"I have pursued my career as an independent professional with utmost honesty, dignity and integrity. I continue to have faith and belief in my conduct as a professional and I am certain that truth will ultimately prevail," she said.

DHFL shares fall for third day, tank 5%

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**

NEW DELHI

Shares of Dewan Housing Finance Corporation Ltd. (DHFL) continued to fall for the third consecutive day, falling nearly 5% on Wednesday, after the company reported a 36.7% decline in net profit for the December quarter.

Besides, a claim by a portal on alleged diversion of loans by DHFL impacted trading sentiment.

DHFL stock plunged 4.97% to close at ₹161.60 on the BSE. Intraday, it tumbled 9.73% to ₹153.50 – a 52-week low.

On the NSE, shares fell by 4.86% to close at ₹161.45.

In last three days, its stock has plummeted by 22.75%.

According to the expose, the Mumbai-based company, through layers of shell companies, allegedly siphoned off ₹31,000 crore out of total bank loans of ₹97,000 crore.

Promoters may approach NCLAT on Essar Steel

NCLT rejected their bid for the firm

**PIYUSH PANDEY**

MUMBAI

Essar Steel promoters are likely to approach the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) against the order of the Ahmedabad bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), rejecting the Ruia's plea to repay the entire debt of the company to regain control of the firm, sources said.

"We are still awaiting a copy of the full NCLT order.

Arcelormittal is waiting for the NCLT to approve its offer submitted by the Essar Steel Committee of Creditors (CoC).

A majority of operational creditors of Essar Steel are against the ArcelorMittal offer as it is lower by more than ₹12,000 crore compared with the offer by Essar Steel promoters. In a separate order, the NCLT on Wednesday rejected an appeal by Essar Steel's operational creditors seeking recovery of ₹800 crore.

Offer by ArcelorMittal. ArcelorMittal is waiting for the NCLT to approve its offer submitted by the Essar Steel Committee of Creditors (CoC).

"We are still awaiting a copy of the full NCLT order. We will approach the NCLT against the NCLT order only after thoroughly going through it," a source in the know of the development told *The Hindu*.

According to Essar Steel promoters, its stock has plummeted by 22.75%.

According to the expose, the Mumbai-based company, through layers of shell companies, allegedly siphoned off ₹31,000 crore out of total bank loans of ₹97,000 crore.

## E-way bill data to flow into sales returns

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**

NEW DELHI

Businesses supplying goods worth more than ₹50,000 will have option to include details of e-way bills generated while filing the final monthly sales return under GSTR-1, a move aimed at curbing tax evasion.

The gross refining margin (GRM) fell substantially in the third quarter to ₹1.15 per barrel from ₹12.32 per barrel in the third quarter of the previous year. The figure stood at ₹5.83 per barrel in the first nine months of the year, down from ₹7.42 per barrel in the previous year.

Excluding inventory losses/gains, GRM stood at ₹5.12 per barrel in Q3, down from ₹7.42 in the previous year.

Domestic sales stood at 21,545 million tonnes in Q3.

GST Network (GSTN) said.

## Supreme Court dismisses petition against 63 Moons

HC order staying attachment of assets was challenged

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

MUMBAI

The Supreme Court has dismissed the special leave petitions of NSEL Investor Action Group (NIAG) and the Maharashtra government, while declining to interfere with the Bombay High Court order staying the attachment of assets of 63 Moons Technologies under the Maharashtra Protection of Interest of Depositors (MPID) Act.

Matching of invoices of e-way bills with the sales shown in GSTR-1 will help taxmen in assessing whether the supplies have been accurately shown in sales return and GST paid on the same, tax experts said.

"GSTN has provided a facility to taxpayers, where month's e-way bill data is shown in format, which is required by a taxpayer to fill up the form GSTR-1," GST Network (GSTN) said.

in this space in the fourth quarter." The rise in profits were reported on 20% growth in revenues and EBITDA to ₹2,492 crore and ₹809 crore respectively.

The fuel cost for the quarter increased by 24% to ₹1,447 crore, as rupee depreciation further exacerbated by increase in imported coal prices. Finance costs declined to ₹295 crore from ₹341 crore in the corresponding quarter of the previous year due to proactive prepayment/repayment/re-financing of borrowings.

The company's board on Wednesday reappointed Mr. Sajjan Jindal as the chairman of the company.

## NTPC net almost flat at ₹2,385.41 cr.

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**

NEW DELHI


**'Pushing FDI deadline will have repercussions'**

**NEW DELHI** Traders' body CAIT has written to the government opposing any move to extend the February 1, deadline for online marketplaces to comply with FDI rules, as such an action will compel small businesses to launch a national campaign which may have "political repercussions." CAIT's position is in contrast to that of Amazon and Flipkart, who have sought extension of the deadline PTI

**No extension of levy on Chinese paracetamol**

**NEW DELHI** The government will not extend anti-dumping duty on imports of Chinese paracetamol, used in medicines, as the domestic industry has failed to provide evidence that the expiry of the levy would result in dumping. After concluding its probe, the Commerce Ministry's investigation arm for dumping of goods, DGTR, has said that it does not recommend continuation of the anti-dumping duty on the imports of paracetamol from China. PTI

**Cholamandalam net profit rises 39%**

**CHENNAI** Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Co. Ltd. net profit rose 39% to ₹304 crore for the quarter ended December 31. Total income grew 32% to ₹1,831 crore. Assets under management grew 32% to ₹52,868 crore. Disbursements rose 13% to ₹7,644 crore. Disbursements for vehicle financing grew 11% to ₹6,240 crore. The firm attributed the slowdown in the vehicle segment to 'stagnation in industry volumes during Q3.'



# iPhone sales see 15% decline

Apple services see sharp growth; phone prices may be reduced in some markets

**REUTERS**

Apple Inc. reported sharp growth in its services business on Tuesday and chief executive Tim Cook said trade tensions between the United States and China were easing, helping boost the company's shares after hours even though iPhone sales dipped in the holiday shopping quarter for the first time.

Apple said sales for the current quarter would most likely be lower than what Wall Street expected, a signal that it continues to face weak demand for the iPhone, especially in China, the world's biggest smartphone market.

Mr. Cook said there were signs of a detente in trade tensions with China, which may have depressed sales of its phones.



**Big byte:** Apple said it has 1.4 billion active devices, an increase of 100 million from last year. ■ GETTY IMAGES

Apple said revenue from services, which investors are counting on to fuel growth, reached \$10.8 billion. Services gross margin hit 63%, up from 58.3% a year ago.

The company said it has 360 million subscribers to

both its own and third-party services, and set a goal to expand that to 500 million by the end of 2020. It said it has 1.4 billion active devices, an increase of 100 million from last year, and that 900 million of those are iPhones.

Apple's iPhone revenue declined 15% year-over-year to \$51.9 billion. Mr. Cook said China's economic weakness hurt iPhone sales there.

**Forex impact**

Mr. Cook said that Apple is rethinking how it prices the iPhone outside the U.S.

In markets with currencies that weakened considerably against the dollar over the last year, iPhone price increases were obviously more," Mr. Cook said.

"And so as we've gotten into January and assessed the macroeconomic condition in some of those markets, we've decided to go back to more commensurate with what our local prices were a year ago in hopes of helping the sales in those areas," Mr. Cook said.

The proceeds would be used to further reduce Airtel Africa's existing net debt, the company added. The transaction will not involve any sale of shares by existing shareholders, the company said.

## Qatar fund to invest \$200 mn in Airtel Africa

Proceeds to be used to reduce debt

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
**NEW DELHI**

Airtel Africa on Wednesday said that the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), the sovereign wealth fund of the State of Qatar, will be investing \$200 million through a primary equity issuance in the company.

The transaction will not involve any sale of shares by existing shareholders. The transaction will not involve any sale of shares by existing shareholders.



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Airtel is present in 14 countries across Africa, including Nigeria, Chad, Congo B, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Madagascar, Niger, Kenya, Malawi, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Rwanda.

## Nissan officials scuppered Renault deal

**REUTERS**  
**TOKYO**

Carlos Ghosn said Nissan executives opposed to his plans for closer ties with automaking partner Renault SA resorted to "plot and treason" to disrupt them and were behind the financial misconduct allegations against him.

Speaking to the Nikkei newspaper, Mr. Ghosn said he had discussed plans to integrate the firms with Nissan CEO Hiroto Saikawa. But Nissan executives employed "plot and treason" to uproot those plans, Mr. Ghosn said. He had pushed for a deeper tie-up between Nissan and Renault, including possibly a full merger, despite strong reservations at the Japanese corporation.

**INTERVIEW | CHANDRESH NIGAM**

## Elections may not have long-term bearing on the stock market'

As the shadow of the IL&FS saga and NBFC liquidity crunch recedes, 2019 is likely to be a better year for debt, says Axis Mutual Fund's MD & CEO

**ASHISH RUKHAIYAR**

*The current year will be one of selective bottom-up stock-picking, especially for companies with strong fundamentals in the mid-cap and small-cap segment, says Chandresh Nigam, MD and CEO, Axis Mutual Fund, in an interview. Excerpts:*

Last year was quite good for the mutual fund industry in terms of fund flows. How do you see the trend going ahead this year?

Till last year, the [mutual fund] industry was growing at around 25% year-on-year over the last three years. This year, over the last nine months, the growth has come down to 9% in AUM (assets under management). Flows in equities have come down by 30% at gross levels, since the market isn't giving much return, such that cer-

tain pockets like mid-caps, etc. have given negative double-digit returns. Next 2-3 months will be uncertain considering elections are coming up, and it doesn't seem likely that investors will commit to equities just before the elections. Yet, evolved and long-term investors, family offices and so on, that are committed to regular investing, continue to invest in mutual funds. Maybe after the elections, when there is more clarity, we would see better flows coming in. Fixed income, as a ca-

tory, also hasn't seen very good flows because interest rates started to rise and one-year returns of credit funds are not looking that great.

Do you think occurrences like IL&FS affect the overall investor perception towards mutual funds?

Bonds in India have frequently been upgraded and downgraded as part of their periodic re-evaluations by credit rating agencies. Few and far in between, we see instances like the IL&FS issue hurting investor sentiment materially.

Investors have taken this as a learning experience. Retail investors moving to debt funds have entered such funds without understand-



**Fiscal position may remain an overhang as GST collections are lower than budgeted estimates**

ing credit risk. While a small portion of investors have been hurt by the recent spate of downgrades, by and large, investors have made higher tax-efficient returns as compared to traditional fixed sav-

ings instruments. Investors in today's debt market have to keep risk in mind while evaluating credit products offered by the industry and pay conscious heed to the fund houses' investment processes and risk mitigation strategies.

What is your outlook for the markets this year?

The year 2019 is going to be a year for selective bottom-up stock picking, especially in mid and small-cap segment where the fundamentals are strong, raw material costs are favourable and those seeing a pick-up in demand resulting in operating margin expansion and better profitability. Elections have historically led to con-

sumption jumps on account of populism and rural focus.

Having said that, historically elections doesn't seem to have significant long-term bearing on the stock market. On the debt side, we do not believe that there is a material risk of financial instability and hence, the RBI is likely to continue to focus on inflation trajectory.

We don't see significant moves on the repo rate front for the rest of the financial year. As the shadow of the IL&FS saga and the NBFC liquidity crunch recede, 2019 is likely to be a better year for debt against the backdrop of lower crude and stable macros.

However, the fiscal position is likely to remain an overhang given that current

GST collections are far lower than budgeted expectations and non-tax revenue growth continues to remain tepid.

Do you see any specific impact of elections on the market?

Volatility is part and parcel of equity markets. Short-term events have always played with market sentiments affecting investor perception. In the long run, fundamentals have driven domestic markets and given the strong corporate earnings that we have seen, we remain optimistic for the new year. Elections are likely to drive markets in the short term and market volatility is likely to persist over the course of the year.

# Another coveted 'double' awaits skipper Rohit

India eyes biggest series victory in New Zealand, could field a few youngsters in fourth ODI

## INDIA IN NZ

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

HAMILTON  
Skipper Rohit Sharma will be eager to make his 200th appearance for India a memorable one with a solid performance against a below-par New Zealand in the fourth ODI here Thursday.

With the series already sealed, Rohit, who has a good record as stand-in captain, would aim to put it across New Zealand in what could be another batting-friendly track at Seddon Park.

A 4-0 lead will be India's biggest series win (across formats) in its 52 years of touring New Zealand, having first visited the country back in 1967.

For India, the two remaining matches give the side an ideal platform to once again test the bench strength and give the younger men a feel of match situations.

### Will Dhoni play?

The status of Mahendra Singh Dhoni's hamstring injury is not known but according to team sources, there is nothing much to worry about.

A decision on Dhoni's availability will be taken before the toss on Thursday.

In case Dhoni is available



**In the mix:** Having clinched the series, India might well test the bench strength in the Hamilton game. ■ COURTESY: BCCI

and the team management avoids tinkering with the combination, he will walk in as Virat Kohli's replacement. Kohli has been rested for the remainder of the tour.

**Gill likely in XI**  
However, if the visitors opt for a like-for-like replacement, then Indian fans could

get a glimpse of the immensely talented Shubman Gill in the senior team jersey.

In case both Gill and Dhoni are included, Dinesh Karthik could well be rested.

The bowling department also looks settled with Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal accounting for 14 wickets so far in the series.

But Mohammed Shami, who has won back-to-back Man of the Match awards, could be given some rest as he has been playing non-stop since the start of the Australia Test series.

In case Shami is rested, Khaleel Ahmed or Mohammed Siraj could be given another chance to stake their

claim for the reserve pacer's slot available in the World Cup squad.

For New Zealand, everything seems to have gone haywire since the start of the series and skipper Kane Williamson has agreed that they have been completely outplayed by India.

Williamson has got starts

but has not been able to convert them with scores of 64, 20 and 28 so far. Martin Guptill, an otherwise dangerous player, has also not been able to survive the new ball.

Tom Latham and Ross Taylor have performed occasionally but none has made an impact consistently enough to change the complexion of the game.

In the bowling department, the incisive Trent Boult has lacked support and Lockie Ferguson is far from a finished product. His was considered a USP but has been his biggest weakness in the series.

With all-rounder Jimmy Neesham added to the squad, he could well feature in the playing XI.

**The squads: India:** Rohit Sharma (Capt.), Shikhar Dhawan, Ambati Rayudu, Kedar Jadhav, M.S. Dhoni (wk), Dinesh Karthik, Hardik Pandya, Kuldeep Yadav, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohammed Shami, Yuzvendra Chahal, Shubman Gill, Khaleel Ahmed, Mohammed Siraj, Ravindra Jadeja.

**New Zealand:** Kane Williamson (Capt.), Todd Astle, Trent Boult, Colin de Grandhomme, Lockie Ferguson, Martin Guptill, Matt Henry, Tom Latham (wk), Colin Munro, Jimmy Neesham, Henry Nicholls, Mitchell Santner, Tim Southee, and Ross Taylor.

Match starts at 7.30 a.m. (IST).



## Stat attack

■ In the last three ODIs at Seddon Park, scores of over 260 and under 290 have been chased down successfully

■ Rohit Sharma will play in his 200th ODI. He will become the 79th player to reach the milestone

■ Only two players had scored more runs at the same point in their careers than Rohit's tally of 7799 runs - Virat Kohli (8767 in 199 ODIs) and A.B. de Villiers (8520)

■ Rohit will become the 15th Indian to figure in 200 ODIs

■ Sachin Tendulkar (463), Rahul Dravid (344), M.S. Dhoni (337), Mohammad Azharuddin (334), Sourav Ganguly (311), Yuvraj Singh (304), Anil Kumble (271), Virender Sehwag (251), Harbhajan Singh (236), Jagaval Srinath (229), Suresh Raina (226), Kapil Dev (225), Virat Kohli (222), Zaheer Khan (200)

## Rahul in India-A squad, Bawane to lead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Opener K L Rahul will be playing for India-A in the first 'Test' against England Lions to be held at Wayanad from February 7 to 10.

Rahul has already played two one-day games for India-A after his and Hardik Pandya's interim suspension was revoked by the BCCI last week.

The 14-member squad, led by Maharashtra's Ankeet Bawane, also features Jharkhand fast bowler Varun Aaron.

Aaron with 25 wickets from seven Ranji Trophy matches, hasn't had an exceptional season but as per sources close to the selection committee, the Jharkhand speedster will be monitored in order to broaden the fast bowling pool.

**The squad:** Ankeet Bawane (Capt.), K.L. Rahul, Abhimanyu Easwaran, Priyank Panchal, Ricky Bhui, Siddhesh Lad, K.S. Bharat (wk), Jalaj Saxena, Shahbaz Nadeem, Mayank Markande, Navdeep Saini, Shardul Thakur, Avesh Khan, and Varun Aaron.

## South Africa clinches series with emphatic win

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
CAPE TOWN

South Africa overpowered Pakistan by seven wickets with 10 overs to spare in the fifth and final One-Day International at Newlands here on Wednesday to clinch the series 3-2.

Opener Quinton de Kock slammed a quickfire 83 off 58 balls, while skipper Faf du Plessis and Rassie van der Dussen scored an unbeaten 50 each to seal the match and series for the hosts.

This team under Virat Kohli and now with Rohit Sharma as captain has played some of its best (ODI) cricket in last three years," he exuded confidence.

crease, Pakistan was on course for a big total. He was fourth out after a 73-ball innings when the total was 128 in the 25th over.

But the scoring rate slowed after his dismissal, with only 49 scored in the next 15 overs.

Imad Wasim, batting at No. 8, gave the innings late impetus, hitting 47 not out off 31 balls. He hit sixes off Dale Steyn and Kagiso Rabada in the last two overs.

**The scores:** Pakistan 240 for eight in 50 overs (Fakhar Zaman 70, Shoaib Malik 31, Imad Wasim 47 n.o.) lost to South Africa 241 for three in 40 overs (Q. de Kock 83, R. Hendricks 34, F. du Plessis 50 n.o., R. van der Dussen 50 n.o.).

**Toss:** South Africa.

## Every player needs to be match-ready: Sridhar

The fielding coach is happy that all pieces are falling in place



**Thinking ahead:** India fielding coach R. Sridhar says the reserves should be given game time. ■ FILE PHOTO

crucial game during World Cup.

That is what the team management will be thinking I am sure," Sridhar said.

The former first-class cricketer from Hyderabad feels that New Zealand is the closest that Indian team can get in terms of match simulation keeping English conditions in mind.

"There is no better place than New Zealand to simulate

the conditions of England in June.

So we would like to surely create a situation where we give game time to our re-

lationships," Sridhar said.

"All the pieces are falling together. It's quite an experienced unit and if you see the top six players, they have all been there from 2013 Champions Trophy (in England)," said a visibly satisfied Sridhar.

"India was always a fabulous batting country but now bowlers have started picking wickets throughout different phases of the match. Whether it's Bhuvneshwar Kumar and (Mohammed) Shami or the leggies (Kuldeep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal), they have done it in South Africa, against Australia and now here," Sridhar said.

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## Inclusion of star shuttlers in TOPS ratified

KAMESH SRINIVASAN  
NEW DELHI

The inclusion of some of the leading badminton players K. Srikanth, P.V. Sindhu, Saiyna Nehwal in an overall list of 23 athletes for support through the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) was ratified in the meeting chaired by the Director General of Sports Authority of India (SAI), Neelam Kapur, on Wednesday.

The SAI provided a list of players included for TOPS for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics, apart from athletes kept in the developmental teams for the 2024 Olympics.

A list of athletes, in various disciplines, kept under watch for possible inclusion in future was also released.

**The list: Badminton:** Kidambi Srikanth, Sameer Verma, H.S. Prannoy, P.V. Sindhu, Saiyna Nehwal, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty; Ashwini Ponnappa & Sikki Reddy; Pranav Chopra & Sikki Reddy. **Watch list:** Manu Attri, Sumeeth Reddy, Meghana Jakkampudi, Poovirush Ram.

**Cycling:** Developmental group: Eswor Alben, Ronaldo Singh, James Singh, Rojith Singh.

**Para athletics:** Varun Bhati, Sharad Kumar, Sandeep Chaud-

hary, Sumit, Sundar Singh Gurjar, Rinku, Amit Saroha, Virender, Jayanti Behera.

**Watch list:** T. Mariyappan, Deepa Malik, Devendra Jhajharia, Sandeep Singh Mann, Mithan, Amit, Rampal Chahar, Dharambir, Ekta Bhan, Karamjyoti Dalal, Radha, Rakshita.

**Para shooting:** Manish Narwal, Singhraj, Deepender, Avani Lekhara.

**Watch list:** Rubina Francis, Pooja Aggarwal, Sonia Sharma.

**Para swimming:** Watch list: Suyash Narayan Jadhav, Niranjani Mukundan, Swapnil Patil, Chetan Giridhar Raut, Shridhar Nagappa Malagi, Devanshi Satija, Kanchanmalala Pande, Sharath Gayak

## TV PICKS

**NBA:** Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 6.30 a.m.  
**New Zealand vs India:** 4th ODI, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 a.m.  
**PWL:** Sony Six (SD & HD), 7 p.m.  
**ISL:** Star Sports 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.  
**West Indies vs England:** 2nd Test, Sony Ten 1 (SD & HD), 7.30 p.m.  
**Australia vs Sri Lanka:** 2nd Test, Sony Six (SD & HD), 5 a.m. (Friday)

## IN BRIEF

Tied Test umpire  
Dotiwala passes away

MUMBAI  
Dara Dotiwala, one of the on-field umpires in the tied Test between India and Australia in Chennai in September 1986, passed away at the Parsee General Hospital on Wednesday. He was 85. He officiated in six Tests, nine ODIs and over 50 First Class matches. Dotiwala was elected to the managing committee of the MCA in the late 90s and was the secretary of the association's Board of Umpires. He was a standby umpire for the 1987 Reliance World Cup matches in Pakistan.

## BFC quells the NEUFC challenge

The visitors fail to cash in on their opportunities

## ISL

**ASHWIN ACHAL**  
BENGALURU  
Bengaluru FC (BFC) managed to ride out the North-East United FC storm and emerged a 2-1 winner in their ISL outing at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium here on Wednesday.

NEUFC came out firing in the second half, first pulling level at 1-1, and then threatening to hammer in a few more. BFC was in danger of sinking, but a combination of good luck and perseverance saw it stay afloat. The gritty show helped BFC (30) jump to the top of the table, three clear of Mumbai City. NEUFC (23) stayed third.

## Poor finish

NorthEast United had two clear chances to take a 2-1 lead, but skipper Bartholomew Ogbeche and Panagiotis Triadis were guilty of poor finishing. In the 62nd minute, Ogbeche did well to outmuscle his marker Albert Serran and find a clear path to the goal. The Nigerian striker, however, could not find his way around BFC custodian Gurpreet Singh.

Gurpreet was called into action again a few minutes later. Triadis broke through

## Viability of the new order, only time will tell

One of the first qualifiers will be held at the Calcutta South Club from Friday

## DAVIS CUP

N. SUDARSHAN  
KOLKATA

Ever since the International Tennis Federation (ITF) passed radical reforms to turn Davis Cup into a one-week, 18-team, single-venue event, there has been much consternation among tennis fans.

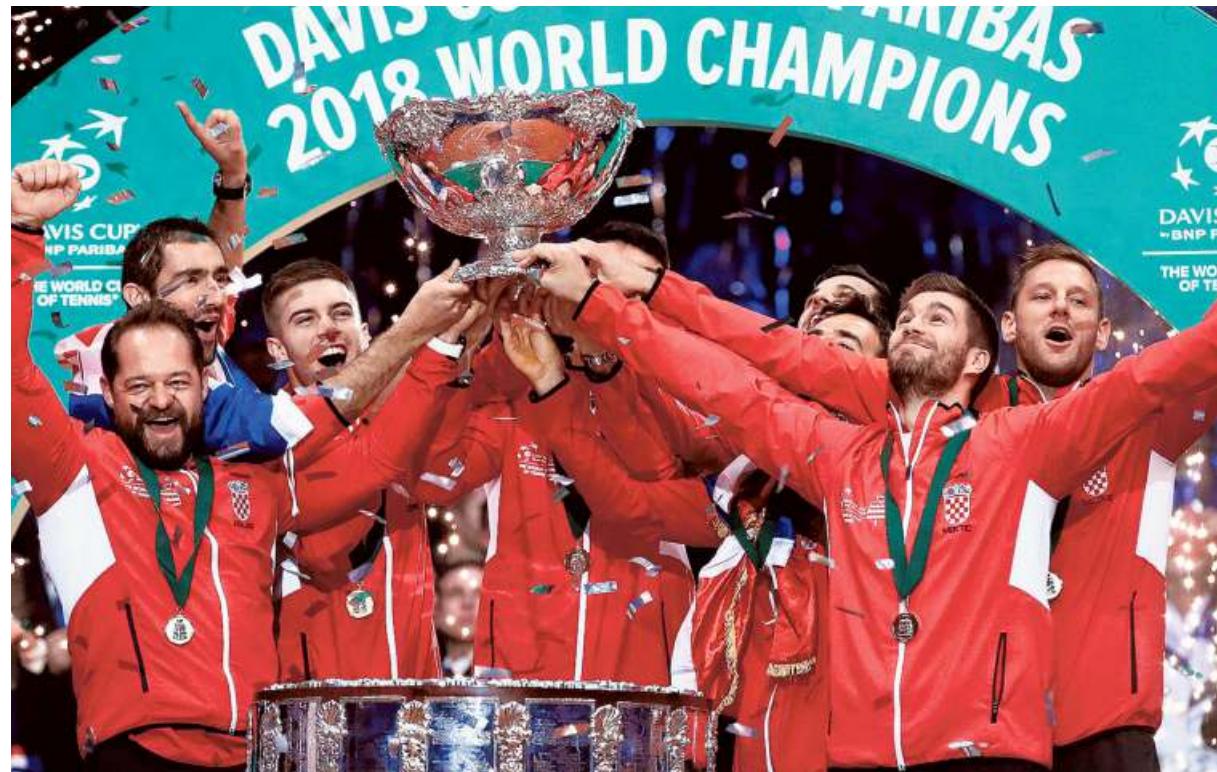
While nearly all stakeholders agreed that changes were indeed required, not many expected them to be this far-reaching.

For the purists, a Davis Cup stripped of all the characteristics that made it great – home-court advantage, raucous and partisan crowds, best-of-five sets with no tie-breaks in the decider – held no appeal.

**Gamble worth taking**  
For those who wanted the competition to move with the times, be mindful of the television audience, it was a gamble worth taking.

As the Davis Cup qualifiers to decide the 12 teams which will join six others in the grand finale in Madrid in late November get underway from Friday, the ITF will hope it is not a false start.

"The Davis Cup was antiquated and did not appeal to those outside the tennis community," Paul Annacone, former coach of Pete Sampras and Roger Federer,



**End of an era:** Team Croatia was the winner of the final edition of the Davis Cup in its old format. ■ REUTERS

told *The Hindu*.

"In a competitive global sports landscape, you have to evolve."

"This may not be 'the' answer, but it is important to be open to trying and finding the optimal format."

It was widely felt that for an event which called itself The World Cup of Tennis, Davis Cup lost momentum constantly. A single competition played across four weekends

in a nine-month window struggled to maintain spectator interest.

## Following other sports

"They are now trying to get it closer to other sports like the F1 World Cup," said Prajesh Gunnswaran, India No. I.

"Obviously it is not going to be that big but getting everybody at one place can make it easier for fans and

sponsors. The success of it really hinges on the top players coming and competing."

But the timing may not be conducive, that's what they [players] have stated."

The ITF also sold its idea with the promise that the revamp – bankrolled to the tune of \$3 billion over 25 years by investment group Kosmos of which Barcelona football star Gerard Pique is

a founder – will ensure more funding for countries. Not many are impressed though.

"There has been a substantial increase from ITF [in money], but at the same time, there has been a proportionate increase in the prize money, payments to the officials etc., evening things out," said Hironmoy Chatterjee, secretary-general of the All-India Tennis Association (AITA).

"Also, there is no state which can boast of a surplus after hosting Davis Cup because the ITF norms make it very costly. So I don't see much money for development."

## Biggest threat

But the biggest threat may well come from the ATP World Team Cup to be launched from January 2020 in Australia. Unlike Davis Cup, the ATP tournament will offer ranking points and has the attractive start-of-the-season slot.

"Until something dramatic happens, I don't see the Davis Cup surviving," warned Chatterjee.

It is then ironic that one of the first qualifiers of the brand-new Davis Cup will be held at the grass courts of Calcutta South Club, a place synonymous with India's rich Davis Cup history.

On Wednesday, both India and Italy had their first hits on the centrecourt even as flex boards printed with words 'La Liga' [Spanish football league where Pique plays] stood witness.

"We're getting run by a Spanish football player and a soccer league is the main sponsor of the Davis Cup!" lamented Lleyton Hewitt, the Australian Davis Cup captain, the other day.

A disruptive or constructive move, only time will tell.

Bhupathi bats for right-left combo



Bhupathi. ■ DEBASISH BHADURI

## SPORTS REPORTER

KOLKATA

Having a right-left singles combination in the form of Ramkumar Ramanathan and Prajesh Gunnswaran is a captain's dream, Mahesh Bhupathi said here on Wednesday.

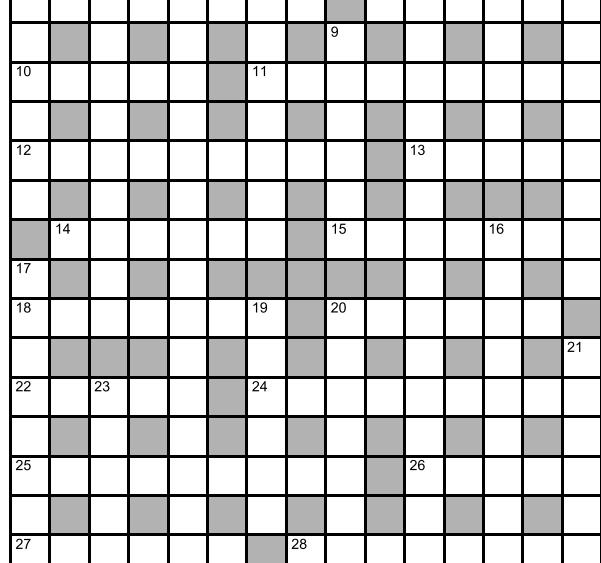
"Like in cricket when the opening combination is left-right, I am going with left-right on day one, and it is a great variation to have," Bhupathi said. "The bonus is that Prajesh is full of confidence. We can rest a lot of hopes on him."

The skipper was, however, wary of the Italian doubles duo, likely to be Andreas Seppi and Simone Bolelli.

"If I had to pick a team, I would pick them but if I had to pick a team for grass, I would choose ours."

Bhupathi also dead-batted a question on whether Leander Paes' absence in his backyard will be a disadvantage. "No, it is not," he replied.

## THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12537



## ACROSS

- Renegade mafia head caught leaving nation (8)
- Dead snake outside sanctuary (6)
- Is ABC perhaps? (5)
- Like Lady Macbeth in the act? (3-6)
- Shoot around study and scatter (6,3)

13 Because of couple's performance, a little overcrowded (3,2)

14 A skin problem? We'd like you to get in touch (6)

15 Rushed to fire rifle (7)

18 Massacre! Save songstress (7)

20 Foolishly dares to trap many snakes (6)

22 Cold heartless beauty rejects superstar (5)

24 Drunk about to bother inexperienced driver! It makes one see red? (9)

25 They reduce tension when sloppy amateur gets involved in rifts (9)

26 Life-giving source of tincture in ampoule (5)

27 Give up unnatural diets involving shakes principally (6)

28 Envy move trapping rook say in front (8)

## DOWN

- Time left for a bit of bowling! Declare, taking the most optimistic view (2,4)
- Drunk consuming large pegs finally rises and falls (5)

## SUDOKU

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7								
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			2	1	9			

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

## Solution to puzzle 12536

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

## Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

## FAITH

## Acts of generosity

One of the most admirable qualities that we should aspire to possess is the quality of generosity, said Malayaman in a discourse. When we are wealthy, we do not spare a thought for the poor. But we can lose our wealth and then we would also have to seek help from others. The Tamil work Narunthokai clearly points this out. So, it is best to remember this when we are capable of helping others and to use our riches to alleviate their misery. Manimekalai had the amudasurabhi, which would never run out of food. She used it to feed the hungry. Nalvazhi advises us to give food and water to those who need them. Naladiyar says that even a young man's thoughts should turn towards benevolent acts. One should not wait till one gets old to start being generous.

Naladiyar says that the help rendered may be small. But when it is given at the right time and to the right person, it seems bigger than even the sky. Acts of generosity bless a place where generous people reside. Purananooru says that Uraiur became a famous city because of the generosity of its inhabitants. Thirikadugam says that when people are generous, the rains never fail. Namadikkadigai says that if you give to those in need, then the merits you get will continue into the next birth too. There were also those who gave without seeking merits through charitableness. Naladiyar talks of a person who gave to people, without some merits in his next jamma. So here, totally selfless giving is witnessed.

Providing food is not the only way to do good for others. Sirupanchamoolam says building temples, constructing roads too are meritorious acts. There are said to be 32 types of daana. Some of them are donating to those who recite the name of God, supplying medicines for eye ailments and so on.

## Sowjanya falls to Paige

SPORTS BUREAU  
JODHPUR

Sowjanya Bavissetti was beaten 7-5, 6-3 by Paige Hourigan of New Zealand in the first round of the \$25,000 ITF women's tennis

tournament at the Sardar Club, Ratanada, on Wednesday.

Two-time National champion Mahak Jain also bowed out in the first round, beaten 6-4, 6-4 by Fatma Al Nabhani of Oman.

### The results:

**First round:** Paige Hourigan (Nzl) bt Sowjanya Bavissetti 7-5, 6-3; Mihaela Djakovic (Srb) bt Vaidehi Chaudhari 6-3, 6-3; Fatma Al Nabhani (Oma) bt Mahak Jain 6-4, 6-4; Valeriya Strakhova (Ukr) bt Sai Samitha 6-4, 6-1.

**Doubles (pre-quarterfinals):** Sofia Shapatava (Geo) & Emily Webley-Smith (GBR) bt Sai Samitha & Sathwika Sama 6-2, 6-3; Jennifer Luikham & Mihika Yadav bt Riya Bhatia & Zeel Desai 7-5, 3-6, [13-11]; Mihaela Djakovic (Srb) & Verena Meliss (Ita) bt Soha Sadiq & Avika Sagwal 6-2, 6-4; Hiroko Kuwata (Jpn) & Diana Marcinkewica (Lat) bt Farhat Aleen Qamar & Aayushi Tanwar 6-0, 6-2.

## Sriram-Hans Hack duo in last eight

SPORTS BUREAU  
CLEVELAND (USA)

Sriram Balaji and Hans Hack Verdugo of Mexico made the quarterfinals with a 7-5, 6-1 victory over Gonzalo Escobar and Roberto Maytin in the \$81,240 Challenger tournament.

**The results:** \$81,240 Challenger, Cleveland, USA; **Doubles (pre-quarterfinals):** Hans Hack Verdugo (Mex) & Sriram Balaji bt Gonzalo Escobar (Ecu) & Roberto Maytin (Ven) 7-5, 6-1.

**\$25,000 ITF men, Sharjah El Sheikh, Egypt: First round:** Adrian Andrezczuk (Pol) bt Rishab Agarwal 6-2, 6-2.

**Doubles (pre-quarterfinals):** Enrico Dalla Valle & Francesco Forti (Ita) bt Oleksi Krutyn (Ukr) & Rishab Agarwal 3-6, 6-1, [10-6].

**\$25,000 ITF men, Palmanova, Spain: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals):** Sergi Perez Contreras & Benjamin Winter Lopez (Esp) bt Jake Hersey (GBR) & Adil Kalyanpur 6-7(3), 6-3, [10-5].

**\$15,000 ITF men, Monastir, Tunisia: First round:** Aryan Goveas bt Matteo Martineau (Fra) 6-2, 4-1 (retired).

**Doubles (pre-quarterfinals):** Robert Strombachs (Ger) & Aryan Goveas bt Alessandro Procopio & Lorenzo Seroddi (Ita) 6-2, 6-0.

## It's more than a dream, says Rashid Khan

Young Afghanistan leg-spinner raring to play Test in Australia

ANI  
MELBOURNE

Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan is all pumped up ahead of their first Test fixture against Australia which is scheduled for next year. The bowler admitted that being the newest Test-playing nation, it is more than a dream for Afghanistan to play Test cricket against Australia in Australia.

The 20-year-old said that they have played a lot of T20 cricket here but playing Test matches on big bouncy wickets would be an entirely different experience.

"From Afghanistan, playing Test cricket against Australia in Australia, it's more than a dream. "Afghanistan got the full membership and last we played against India in India and now we're playing against Ireland in India and then Australia here," Cricket.com.au quoted Rashid as saying.

### 'Means a lot'

"Being a player, it means a lot. Against Australia, play-

## ONGC's firepower to the fore

Douses the challenge of Indian Oil in both finals

### BADMINTON

RAKESH RAO  
GREATER NOIDA

Results followed expected lines with Oil and Natural Gas Corporation sweeping the team titles at the expense of Indian Oil Corporation in the PSPB inter-unit badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

The might of defending champion ONGC came to the fore in the men's team final when H. S. Prannoy, B. Sai Praneeth and Sourabh Verma pulled off the three singles in the 3-1 verdict.

Indian Oil could only manage the doubles, where ONGC fielded a scratch combination of Sai Praneeth and Prannoy against specialists M. R. Arjun and Chirag Shetty.

**Ajay disappoints**  
For Indian Oil, for the second successive day, Ajay Jayaram proved a big let-down.

On this day, Sai Praneeth trounced him 21-13, 21-11 in a



**Double delight:** ONGC topped the charts in both categories. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

one-sided contest to win a crucial match for ONGC.

In the women's team final, Rituparna Das failed to live up to her billing but that did not hurt ONGC.

**Hitting back**  
After Indian Oil took the lead through the young Sai Utte-

jitha Rao who beat Rituparna in three games, ONGC hit back through the pair of Ashwini Ponnappa and Rutuparna Panda.

In the deciding tie, the experience of P. C. Thulasi, once ranked third in the country behind Saina Nehwal and P. V. Sindhu, proved

too much for Tanvi Lad in three games.

**The results:**  
**Team championship (final):**  
**Men:** ONGC bt Indian Oil 3-1 (H. S. Prannoy bt P. Vishnuvardhan 21-16, 21-19; B. Sai Praneeth bt Ajay Jayaram 21-13, 21-11; B. Sai Praneeth & H. S. Prannoy lost to M. R. Arjun & Chirag Shetty

16-21, 24-22, 14-21; Sourabh Verma bt Priyanshu Rajawat 21-19, 20-22, 21-15).

**Women:** ONGC bt Indian Oil 2-1 (Rituparna Das lost to Sai Uttejitha Rao 19-21, 21-17, 13-21; Rutuparna Panda & Ashwini Ponnappa bt Aparna Balan & Sikki Reddy 21-18, 21-17; P. C. Thulasi bt Tanvi Lad 14-21, 21-12, 21-9).

match-fitness, and experience different match situations.

"We will be up against a group of players who have played together for a considerably long time," said India's coach Baljeet Singh.

**'Exposure'**  
"Our players will get the much-needed exposure and this challenge will help us in developing these players for bigger challenges that the team is going to face in the future, including the eighth women's junior Asia Cup."

**The squad:**  
**Goalkeepers:** Bichu Devi Kharibam, Khushboo.

**Defenders:** Phelicia Toppo, Gangadeep Kaur, Salima Tete, Priyanka, Suman Devi Thoudam, Ishika Chaudhary.

**Midfielders:** Mahima Choudhary, Prabhleen Kaur, Mariana Kujur, Reet, Baljeet Kaur, Preeti.

**Forwards:** Lalremsiami, Sharmin Devi, Mumtaz Khan, Jiwan Kishori Toppo, Ajmina Kujur, Jyoti.

## Hammers too good for Sultans

Take on Punjab Royals in the summit clash today

### PWL

Y.B. SARANGI  
GREATER NOIDA

points in the second round and outclass Parveen Rana 9-0 in a men's 74kg bout.

Experienced hand Rajneesh Dalal lived up to his potential to beat Ukrainian Olympian Andrey Kvitkovski in a men's 65kg bout in Haryana Hammers' impressive 6-3 win over Delhi Sultans in the semifinals of the Pro Wrestling League at the Gautam Buddha University indoor hall here on Wednesday.

Dalal's 9-3 victory helped Hammers pocket the tie with two bouts to spare. Hammers will take on Punjab Royals in the final on Thursday.

### Bright start

Ravi Kumar maintained his fine form to beat Pankaj 7-1 and gift Hammers a bright start.

Commonwealth Games bronze medalist Kiran stole

four points in the final 20 seconds to register a 6-1 victory over European under-23 champion Anastasia Shustova and make it 2-0.

Former World champion Khetik Tsabalov narrowed the margin. The Russian exhibited his excellent leg attacks to notch up eight

## Udit stuns Krish; Preerna survives

SPORTS BUREAU  
INDORE

Udit Gogoi knocked out top seed Krish Patel 7-6(6), 7-5 in the boys' pre-quarterfinals of the ITF grade-5 junior tennis tournament at the Indore Tennis Club courts on Wednesday.

In the girls' section, Prerna Vichare, the Khelo India

Youth Games under-17 champion, bounced back after a slow start to tame Ishita Singh 3-6, 7-5, 6-4.

**The results (pre-quarterfinals):**

**Boys:** Udit Gogoi bt Krish Patel 7-6(6), 7-5; Kartik Saxena bt Thomas George Brun (Sui) 6-2, 2-6, 6-3; Nikhil Niranjani (US) bt Vansh Kapoor 6-1, 6-4; Ajay Malik bt Prasanna Pravin Ba-

gade 4-6, 6-3, 6-2; Nishant Dabas bt Aditya Vishal Balsekar 6-4, 7-5,

Denim Yadav bt Heerak Vora 6-4, 6-4; Ishan Sethi bt Bopathi Sakthivel 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (3); Kabir Hans bt Girish Chougle 6-1, 6-3.

**Girls:** Priyanshi Bhandari bt Prerana Koirlala (Nep) 6-0, 6-1; Sanjana Sirimalla bt Vaishnavi

Adkar 6-4, 6-2; Archita Mahawal bt Divya Bhardwaj 6-2, 6-3; Preerna Vichare bt Ishita Singh 3-6, 7-5, 6-4.

Jagmeet Kaur Grewal bt Vi-pasha Mehra 6-2, 6-2; Gargi Pawar bt Reshma Chalarapu 6-3, 6-2.

Shreya Gulia bt Shriya Atturu (US) 2-6, 6-2, 6-1; Sarah Dev bt Chandrika Joshi 6-0, 6-1.

## Valencia rides on Rodrigo's treble

Stuns 10-man Getafe and makes the last-four stage

### COPA DEL REY

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
MADRID

Rodrigo scored a hat-trick as Valencia staged a stunning late fightback at the Mestalla to stun ten-man Getafe 3-2 on aggregate to reach the Copa del Rey semifinals on Tuesday.

Valencia went into the game looking to fight back after a 1-0 first-leg defeat and keep alive its hopes of winning a first major title since lifting the Copa del Rey 11 years ago. And Rodrigo's treble, including two injury-time strikes, sent Marcelino's men into a semifinal clash with either Real Madrid and Girona after a thrilling 3-1 second-leg victory.

"We have shown impressive character," Rodrigo told

BeIN Sports.

"We believed until the end, because of the support of the fans and because we were superior on the pitch, which is where football matters."

The home side's hopes

were dashed inside the very first minute as Jorge Molina, who scored the only goal of the first game last week, put the visitor ahead.

Needing to win by two clear goals to progress, Valencia gave itself hope of a



**Unstoppable:** Rodrigo's treble included two injury-time strikes. ■ AFP

comeback as Rodrigo levelled just after the hour mark, before Getafe centre-back Djene Dakonam was dismissed for a second yellow card with 16 minutes still to play.

Spain striker Rodrigo was on a one-man mission to pull Valencia through, netting again in the 92nd and 93rd minutes to stun Getafe.

The match dragged into a ninth minute of added time, but Valencia held on to close out a barely believable win.

"It's a great night for Valencia," said Marcelino. "We pinned the opposition back in the first half and continued it in the second."

**The result (quarterfinals, second-leg):**

Valencia 3 (Rodrigo 61, 90+2, 90+3) bt Getafe 1 (Molina 1); (Valencia won 3-2 on aggregate).

## Cheema edges Naruka

SPORTS BUREAU  
JAIPUR

Amrinder Singh Cheema pipped Anantjeet Singh Naruka 56-55 in men's skeet in the second National shooting selection trials here on Wednesday.

Anantjeet had topped qualification with an impressive 123, along with Olympian Mairaj Ahmad Khan, who eventually placed fourth.

National champion Anand Vir Singh Bajwa shot 116 for the ninth place. Ganemat Sekhon topped both the women's and junior women's skeet ahead of National champion Maheshwari Chauhan and Khelo India Youth Games champion Darshana Rathore respectively. Other leading shooters like Rashmi Rathore, Simranpreet Kaur Johal and Saniya Sheikh missed qualification for the women's final.

**The results:** **Skeet: Men:** 1. Amrinder Singh Cheema 56 (117); 2. Anantjeet Singh Naruka 55 (123); 3. Mohd. Sheeraz Sheikh 42 (120).

**Junior men:** 1. Abhay Singh Sekhon 55 (114); 2. Gurnihal Singh Garcha 51 (118); 3. Arjun Thakur 44 (116).

**Women:** 1. Ganemat Sekhon 53 (113); 2. Maheshwari Chauhan 50 (112); 3. Areeba Khan 42 (114).

**Junior women:** 1. Ganemat Sekhon 54 (113); 2. Darshana Rathore 52 (107); 3. Kartiki Singh Shaktawat 36 (112).



Rashid Khan. ■ AFP  
ing Test matches is a huge achievement and me and the players are really looking forward to it.

"We played here (in T20 games) a lot but Test cricket is very different. Pretty excited to face the quick bowlers here, big bouncy wickets," he added. Giving an instance of recently-concluded India-Australia Test series, the right-arm bowler said that the wickets here are very tough to bat on and that he is hoping to not get a bouncy track like Perth.

"Being a player, it means a lot. Against Australia, play-