

IN BRIEF



SC to hear fresh plea on forest dwellers today

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court will hear on Monday a fresh plea seeking a direction to authorities not to evict any forest dweller. A bench comprising Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Sanjiv Khanna had on March 5 taken cognisance of the plea, filed by Chhattisgarh-based Tarika Tarangini Larka against forcible eviction of tribals. PTI

Army reaches out to war widows in Pathankot

NEW DELHI
The Army has reached out to widows of veterans of the Pathankot region to resolve their grievances, including those related to pension, and to provide medical aid. A statement issued on Sunday said that the interaction with the widows was organised by the Black Arrow Brigade on Saturday. PTI

Fire breaks out at Bokaro power plant

BOKARO
A fire broke out at the Bokaro power plant on Sunday in Jharkhand. Fire tenders rushed to the spot soon after the incident took place, officials and eye-witnesses said. The blaze has been put under control. ANI

5 sailors return home after stint in Greek jail

MUMBAI
Five Indians, who spent over 14 months in a Greek jail after their cargo ship was detained on charges of carrying explosive material on board, arrived in Mumbai on Sunday. *MV Andromeda* was detained by the Greek Coast Guard on January 9, 2018. Although it was established that the cargo in question was only a raw material for firecrackers, the crew had to languish in jail for over a year. PTI

Army's carbine procurement held up

The matter is pending with Defence Ministry even after completion of cost negotiations

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The fast-track procurement of 93,895 Close Quarter Carbine (CQB) rifles for the Army has been delayed even after the completion of cost negotiations as the case is pending with the Defence Ministry, according to defence sources.

“Cost negotiations have been completed, and the file has gone to a three-member oversight committee where it has been held up without a decision,” a defence source said.

The status of the case was on the agenda of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) meeting held last week.

In January 2018, the DAC approved the purchase of 72,400 assault rifles and 93,895 carbines for ₹3,547 crore through the fast-track

Gunning for glory

The Army has been looking to replace the indigenous INSAS (Indian National Small Arms System) rifles in use with a modern rifle

- In January 2018, Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) approved purchase of 72,400 assault rifles and 93,895 carbines for ₹3,547 crore through Fast Track Procurement
- Sig Saur of the U.S. emerged as the lowest bidder for assault rifles and UAE based Caracal for carbines

- Last month, defence ministry signed a deal with Sig Saur for SIG 716 assault rifles for frontline infantry soldiers
- These two deals are to meet immediate requirements of the Army to lend muscle to its armoury and will equip frontline soldiers



A Caracal CAR816 carbine, which was shortlisted for procurement. ■ CARACAL

procurement (FTP) mode. After evaluation, Sig Saur of the U.S. emerged as the lowest bidder for the assault rifles and the United Arab Emirates-based Caracal for the carbines.

Last month, the Defence Ministry signed an agreement with Sig Saur for SIG 716 assault rifles meant for front-line infantry soldiers deployed in operational areas.

The oversight committee consists of members of the Army, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Defence Ministry. It had received questions on the company's

capability to deliver the entire volume in time. “The case has been held up by objections from the DRDO official on the committee,” said a second official with knowledge of the matter.

The committee was supposed to give its comments in three days, but it had taken longer, and had not given any reason for the delay, another defence source said.

The carbine should have an effective range of 200 m and weigh less than 2 kg. Under the FTP process, there is no elaborate general staff evaluation, and the exercise is expected to be completed in a year. The evaluation is based on the operational requirements, and deliveries should be completed in a year of the contract having been signed. The deal is estimated to cost ₹1,800 crore.



A file photo of Olive Ridley turtles at the Rushikulya beach in Ganjam district of Odisha. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

Rushikulya waits for Olive Ridelys

Climate could be a reason for delay

STAFF REPORTER
BERHAMPUR

Even after waiting for almost a month, Olive Ridley turtles have not yet arrived for mass nesting at Odisha's Rushikulya rookery and Devi river mouth. The reasons are not fully understood yet.

Mass nesting has already occurred at the Gahirmatha coast of the State.

Wildlife Institute of India's (WII) scientist Bivash Pandav said it could not be said for sure whether mass nesting would occur or not at the Rushikulya rookery this year. According to Mr. Pandav, who has studied mass nesting along the Odisha coast over the past decades, mass nesting of Olive Ridelys can occur up to any time till the end of April.

Berhampur Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Ashis Behera said that, till now, lakhs of impregnated female Olive Ridelys are continuing to congregate in the sea near the Rushikulya rookery, but they aren't approaching the beach for mass nesting. “Sporadic nesting is continuing at this coast since February. Till now, over 1,000 mother

turtles have nested at the Rushikulya rookery,” said Mr. Behera.

“Although it is held that climatic parameters as well as beach conditions decide mass nesting at a coast, we are still not sure how these parameters affect their decision-making,” said Mr. Pandav.

The Forest Department has readied six artificial hatcheries to incubate eggs resulting from sporadic nesting. The beach has been cleaned up. A metal net fences a stretch of over five kilometres from Gokharkuda to Prayagi – this fencing is expected to protect Olive Ridelys and their eggs from predators and human intervention. CCTV cameras continue to keep a watch on the nesting beach.

This year, the Forest Department also prepared a three-km-long coast near the Bahuda river mouth, from Sunapur to Anantpur, as an alternative mass nesting site, about 20 km to the south of Rushikulya.

However, except for few occurrences of sporadic nesting, mass nesting has yet not occurred at this new beach.

Rising sea levels to affect water table in T.N.

Fresh water will be replaced with saline water over time: study

K. LAKSHMI
CHENNAI

The fragile water table in the city's coastal areas, particularly along East Coast Road, is under threat of severe sea-water intrusion due to anticipated rise in sea levels in the next few decades, according to a study by the Department of Geology, Anna University.

There is a rise in sea level by 2mm every year based on a report by the Indian Network for Climate Change Assessment under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

The increasing sea level would also force the water table along the coastline to move upwards. But it would slowly replace the freshwater at the bottom of the aquifer.



Around 1.5 sq km of land along the coastline will be lost by 2100, particularly in Thiruvanniyur and Palavakkam.

The study, published in the Journal of Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, has forecast the impact of sea level rise on the coastal aquifer in the coming years, till 2100.

L. Elango, Professor, Geology Department, Anna University, said given the rate of increase in sea level, the water table would witness an incursion of sea water to the extent of 2-3mm every year. The volume of fresh water would gradually reduce in

the coastal areas.

Rapid urbanisation and indiscriminate drawal have already led to salt water intrusion in areas from the Adyar river to Palavakkam.

Residents are heavily dependent on other resources, including private water tankers.

“The sea would also be moving closer to the land by 0.5 m every year because of the increase in sea level.

“We would lose 1.5 sq. km of land along the coastline by 2100, in Thiruvanniyur and Palavakkam, as the beach there is flat,” he said.

The water table along ECR is considered fragile as it is surrounded by the sea, the Adyar river, and Buckingham canal.

CBSE looks to AI, yoga as new subjects

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The CBSE will introduce artificial intelligence (AI), early childhood care education and yoga as new subjects in school curriculums from the upcoming academic session, an official said.

“The CBSE is introducing artificial intelligence as an optional 6th subject at Class IX from the session 2019-2020 onwards. To enhance the multidisciplinary approach in teaching learning and also to sensitise the new generation, it was decided that schools may start AI “inspire module” of 12 hours in Class VIII itself,” the senior board official said.

Hot spot



Rescue mode: A firefighter runs past a burning tree and wooden packaging material after a fire broke out at a woodstore in Ahmedabad on Sunday. Officials said the fire has been brought under control. ■ REUTERS

Purification row: Cong. blames RSS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PANAJI

The Congress on Sunday waded into the row over the alleged purification of the Kala Academy where late Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar's mortal remains were kept to allow the public to pay their respects. The party said the actions were an outcome of the RSS' ideology which promotes of superstition.

Goa Congress chief spokesperson Sunil Kawthankar said this ideology was being endorsed by the ruling BJP.

The Congress spokesperson also said that following the episode, the State government must come up with a comprehensive policy over the performance of religious rituals and practices in government offices as well as official functions.

Protect ocean ecosystem, tap blue economy: Venkaiah Naidu

‘Initiate programmes to harness ocean reserves sustainably’

PRAKASH KAMAT
PANAJI

Vice President of India M.Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday cautioned against the further degradation of oceans and their ecosystem. He was visiting Goa.

“India should fully tap the enormous potential of the blue economy to achieve higher growth and initiate appropriate programmes for sustainable harnessing of ocean reserves,” Mr. Naidu told students and officials at the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) here.

Precautionary measures

“However, every effort must be made by all the stakeholders to prevent further degradation of the ocean and its ecosystem,” he said, adding, “Precautionary mea-



Venkaiah Naidu

tion of minerals from the sea.

“NIO should also undertake research and development of drugs from the sea. Focus in some of the ocean research areas such as minerals from the ocean, and energy from the ocean, can make India a global leader,” he told students.

Switching to his favourite topic of mother tongue and Indian languages, Mr. Naidu said that India, on account of its size and traditional culture and wisdom, managed to withstand attempts by Western colonisers to destroy its indigenous culture.

Unlike India, Latin American countries have lost touch with their respective mother tongues because of Spanish colonisation, he said.

Transfer Bedi, CPI(M) urges EC

RAJESH B. NAIR
PUDUCHERRY

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has urged the Election Commission of India to transfer Lt. Governor Kiran Bedi for interfering in the Thattanchavady byelection process.

Code of conduct

In a written complaint to the Election Commission, veteran leader of Communist Party of India (Marxist) T. Murugan said by referring a representation submitted by the disqualified Thattanchavady MLA Ashok Anand to the President, Ms. Bedi had violated the Model Code of Conduct and had questioned the judgment given by the Supreme Court on disqualification of convicted law makers.

Holes in J&K custodial death case

Magisterial inquiry not handled by administration where the death occurred

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

The sequence of events following the custodial death of a 28-year-old teacher, Rizwan Asad Pandit, from south Kashmir's Awantipora area points to the gaping holes in the police theory.

Three days after the death of Pandit on March 19 in police custody at Srinagar's special counter-insurgency cell, Cargo, an FIR was lodged against the deceased for “an attempt to escape from a police vehicle” on the way to a location in south Kashmir.

Of the three main police stations of the Awantipora police district, comprising Awantipora, Pampore and Tral police stations, the “bid to escape case” has been lodged in the Khrew police station, not hooked up to the Crime and Criminal Track-



Rizwan Asad Pandit

the police case was lodged in Khrew and not by the Srinagar district administration where the death occurred.

The police also claimed that Pandit was rounded up for “a militancy-related case” that occurred at Pantha Chowk in Awantipora apparently last year. However, the name of “Pandit does not figure in the police's ‘roznamcha’ (daybook), according to the police records accessed by *The Hindu*.

The preliminary autopsy report compiled by the Government Medical College, Srinagar, suggested that the death took place “at least 12 hours” prior to the autopsy on Tuesday afternoon. It inferred that Pandit died on Monday evening, a day after he was picked up on February 17, and the family was intimidated on Tuesday morning

about the death.

The GMC report confirmed “excessive bleeding caused by deep wounds on his body” and “excessive bleeding can lead to fatal shock.”

“External wounds have been suspected to be caused by some sharp object,” the GMC report suggested. It ruled out any ‘internal injury’ but pointed out “some injuries were found to be older than others.”

A number of trader bodies on Saturday urged Governor Satya Paul Malik “to set up an independent special commission of inquiry in the custodial death.” “Till the time the commission submits its report, it would serve the ends of justice if all persons associated with it are put behind bars”, they said in a joint statement.