

NEARBY



8 killed as bus rams truck on Yamuna Expressway

JEWAR
Eight passengers were killed and 29 sustained injuries after a private bus rammed a moving truck on the Yamuna Expressway in Greater Noida on Friday morning.

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Will implement NRC in Bengal: Amit Shah

ALIPURDUAR
Bharatiya Janata Party president Amit Shah on Friday began his election campaign in West Bengal with a promise to introduce the National Register of Citizens in the State if the Narendra Modi government was voted back to power.

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Increase in VVPAT numbers will delay counting by six days: EC

Poll body uses report given by Indian Statistical Institute to defend its stand in SC

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The 2019 Lok Sabha election results will be delayed by six whole days if the Opposition parties' demand to increase the counting of VVPAT slips by 50% becomes a reality, the Election Commission indicated to the Supreme Court on Friday.

"The 50% Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slip verification in each Assembly segment of a parliamentary constituency or Assembly constituency, on an average, shall enlarge the time required for counting to about six days," it said in an affidavit. The current confidence level in EVM-VVPAT accuracy is 99.9936%. Any increase in the sample size of verification of VVPAT slips would only lead to a "very

'A lengthy process'

The time implication of conducting 50% slip count is as follows:

- Total number of polling stations: **10.35 lakhs**
- Total number of Assembly constituencies (AC)/segments (AS): **4,125**
- Average number of polling stations per AC/AS: **250**
- Average time taken for VVPAT slip count of 1 polling station: **1 hour**
- Average time taken for 50% slip count: $250/2 \times 1 = 125$ hours = **5.2 days**
- Further, since VVPAT slip count is taken up after the round-wise control unit (CU) count, another 10-12 hours would be required
- Total time required: **6 days**

Source: ECI affidavit filed on March 29, 2019 in the Supreme Court

negligible gain in the confidence level."

The EC said the adoption of a particular percentage as

a sample for VVPAT slip verification was devoid of scientific logic or statistical basis. In fact, it was rather otiose.

The EC made its stand clear despite the court's recent strong observations in favour of an increase in the sample VVPAT slip counting for the forthcoming elections.

With this, the EC has also chosen to stand firm against a plea by 21 Opposition parties that moved the court challenging the poll body's guideline that VVPAT slip counting would take place only in one polling station in an Assembly constituency or each Assembly segment in the Lok Sabha election. The EC banked on a March 22, 2019 report of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) to buttress its case against increasing the VVPAT slips' counting.

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MPs reject Brexit deal for third time

EU convenes summit for April 10

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LONDON

British MPs on Friday rejected Prime Minister Theresa May's EU divorce deal for a third time, opening the way for a long delay to Brexit – or a potentially catastrophic "no deal" withdrawal in two weeks.

Lawmakers in the House of Commons defied Ms. May's plea to break the deadlock and defeated her withdrawal agreement by 344 votes to 286. It is yet another blow to a Prime Minister who has all but lost control of her government and the Brexit process – particularly after she offered to quit if MPs backed the deal.

Britain was due to leave the EU on Friday, the long-heralded March 29 'Independence Day', but faced with chaos in Westminster,



Theresa May in Parliament on Friday. ■ REUTERS

Ms. May asked European leaders last week for a little more time.

The EU has set a deadline of April 12 for a decision, with two options: Britain leaves with no deal at all, or agrees to a lengthy extension to allow time for a new approach. The EU summoned leaders to a summit on April 10, warning that Britain is "likely" to crash out of the bloc on April 12.

TALKS TO CONTINUE ► PAGE 10

PM's speech didn't violate code: EC

DEVESH K. PANDEY
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission said on Friday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation on the successful demonstration of the anti-satellite missile capability on Wednesday did not violate the model code of conduct.

It arrived at the decision on the basis of a report submitted by a committee of officials.

In a letter to the CPI(M), which had raised the issue, the EC said the committee had written to Doordarshan and All India Radio to find out the source of feed of the speech. Doordarshan (News) Director-General Mayank Kumar Aggarwal informed the EC that Mr. Modi's message was telecast from the feed provided by ANI.

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'Kartarpur talks only if Pak. concedes demands'

Scrap fee, lift cap on pilgrims: India

VIJAJTA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The next round of discussions on the Kartarpur corridor will be held only if Pakistan responds to India's earlier demands that the number of visitors not be capped and no fee be imposed on pilgrims, a senior government official said on Friday.

Pakistan's foreign office spokesperson Mohammad

Faisal said the last-minute postponement, without seeking the views of Pakistan, was "incomprehensible."

India also summoned Pakistani Deputy High Commissioner Syed Haider Shah on Friday and shared its stand on key proposals put forward at the March 14 meeting in Attari.

FEARS OF MISUSE ► PAGE 8

SC upholds life sentence of T.N. hotel chain proprietor

Santhakumar was strangled and his body dumped in a forest by Rajagopal's henchmen

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday upheld the life imprisonment awarded to P. Rajagopal, proprietor of the popular Saravana Bhavan hotel chain, for murdering an employee 18 years ago.

Santhakumar was strangled and his body dumped in the Tiger-Chola forest area by Rajagopal's henchmen.

Rajagopal wanted to make Santhakumar's wife,



A file photo of Saravana Bhavan owner P. Rajagopal at a court in Chennai.

Jeevajothi, his third wife. The court concluded that the steadfast testimonies of

Jeevajothi and her family, the circumstantial evidence, recovery of personal items such as the wallet and a gold chain of the victim, along with forensic techniques like the superimposition test to identify the body, undoubtedly pointed to the guilt of Rajagopal and his henchmen.

All of them had appealed in the Supreme Court after the Madras High Court convicted and sentenced them to life imprisonment.

A Bench of Justices N.V. Ramana, Mohan M. Shantagoudar and Indira Banerjee dismissed their appeals.

"The prosecution has proved the complicity of all the appellants in murdering Santhakumar by strangulating him and thereafter throwing the body at Tiger-Chola," the Bench of Justices N.V. Ramana, Mohan M. Shantagoudar and Indira Banerjee held.

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Hardik may not be able to contest poll

MAHESH LANGA
AHMEDABAD

In a major setback to Patidar quota leader Hardik Patel, who recently joined the Congress and was keen to contest the Lok Sabha election in Gujarat, the Gujarat High Court on Friday rejected his plea seeking a stay on his conviction in the 2015 Mehsana rioting case.

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Ground Zero

The rumble beneath their feet
Maharashtra's Palghar district has experienced thousands of small quakes since November last year, raising fears of a larger one. Fortifying the district for such an event is going to be challenging.

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Campaign gets rolling



On track: The Election Commission and the Railways have come together to launch an awareness campaign through displays on four long-distance trains, giving out details of the voter helpline number and the voters' service portal. A joint team on Friday flagged off the Kerala Express at the New Delhi station. ■ PTI

China denies it is shielding Masood Azhar

ATUL ANEJA
BEIJING

China on Friday dismissed allegations that it was sheltering terrorists by placing a "technical hold" on listing Masood Azhar, head of the banned Pakistan-based group Jaish-e-Mohammad, as a global terrorist.

On Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had criticised China's policy.

Without naming any specific country, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang said: "If certain country accuses China of sheltering by putting such technical hold, does that mean that all countries that put hold are sheltering terrorists? If this makes sense, shall we say that the country that puts the most holds is the biggest protector of terrorism?"

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JNU sedition case: court summons DCP

NIRNIMESH KUMAR
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Friday summoned Deputy Commission of Police (Special Cell) of the Delhi Police for an explanation as to why former JNU president Kanhaiya Kumar

and others were charge-sheeted for the offence of sedition without prosecution sanction.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Deepak Sherawat has asked the police officer to be present on Saturday.

The court has been deferring taking cognisance of the chargesheet against the accused in the sedition case since the probe report was filed without sanction in January this year.

DETAILS ► DELHI METRO PAGE 1

Government sets up group to monitor terror sympathisers

TMG to take coordinated action in all registered cases that relate to terror financing and terror-related activities

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

To take action against "hard core sympathisers among government employees, including teachers, who are providing covert or overt support" to terror-related activities, the Ministry of Home Affairs has formed a Terror Monitoring Group (TMG). The Friday's order by T. Sreekanth, Director of

Jammu and Kashmir Department in MHA, says that in order to ensure synergised and concerted action against terror financing and other related activities in Jammu and Kashmir, a multi-disciplinary monitoring group comprising eight members has been constituted.

The TMG has to take coordinated action in all regis-

tered cases that relate to terror financing and terror-related activities and bring them to a logical conclusion.

Concerted action
It will identify all key persons, including leaders of the organisation(s), who are involved in supporting terrorism in any form and take concerted action against

them. The TMG will "investigate the networks of various channels being used to fund terror and terror activities and take coordinated action to stop flow of such funds," the order reads. The group will meet on a weekly basis and submit action-taken report regularly to the MHA.

The TMG will be chaired by Additional Director Gen-

eral of Police, CID of J&K Police, and include Inspector General of Police of J&K and Additional Director of Intelligence Bureau, J&K, as members. It will also have representatives from the Central Bureau of Investigation, National Investigation Agency, Central Board of Direct Taxes and Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs.