

IN BRIEF



**Asaram Bapu's son convicted in rape case**

**AHMEDABAD**  
A local court in Surat on Friday convicted Narayan Sai, son of self-styled godman Asaram Bapu, in a rape and sexual harassment case filed in 2013. It will pronounce the quantum of punishment on April 30.

**Odisha 'godman' arrested for raping 8-year-old**

**BERHAMPUUR**  
A self-proclaimed godman was arrested on charges of raping an eight-year-old girl in Rambha police station area of Odisha's Ganjam district on Friday. Bhaskar Nahak, 45, who claimed to possess divine powers, had asked the girl to bring him a bottle of drinking water. He subsequently locked her up and raped her, police said.

**Alert keyman averts train mishap in A.P.**

**MACHILIPATNAM**  
An alert keyman on duty, Brijmohan, averted a possible train accident on Friday when he stopped the Puri-Tirupati Express between Kaikaluru and Mandavalli after noticing a crack on the railway track.

**Help for women abandoned by husbands**

**NEW DELHI**  
Wives of non-resident Indian (NRI) men who are victims of marital disputes can now walk-in for a meeting with the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW). These meetings will be held every Monday from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the NCW's office in New Delhi without prior appointments.

**Missing man found dead in Muzaffarnagar**

**MUZAFFARNAGAR (U.P.)**  
A 20-year-old man who went missing three days ago was found dead in a field in Bhojehri village in the district on Friday, the police said. The deceased was identified as Rahul and his body has been sent for post-mortem, they added. P11

**Manipur school burnt down for suspending 6 students**

Teachers have been provided security

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI/IMPHAL**

A missionary school in Manipur's Kakching district was burnt down on Thursday night, three days after six of its students were suspended for a month for indiscipline.

The police arrested two suspects early on Friday and have provided security cover to the administrators and teachers of St. Joseph's Higher Secondary School at Sugnu, the second oldest Catholic institution in Manipur.

Father Jacob Chapao, director of the Manipur Catholic Youth Organisation, in a statement condemned the "barbaric act."

**U.K. optimistic China will turn on Azhar**

Terror listing issue will figure during visit of top British diplomat to Delhi in May

**SUHASINI HAIDAR  
NEW DELHI**

The United Kingdom is "optimistic" that China will allow the UN Security Council terror listing of Masood Azhar, British High Commissioner Dominic Asquith said here on Friday.

"We are waiting to see whether the country which has been resisting the listing will lift that objection," said Mr. Asquith, speaking to journalists. "I remain optimistic that we will get to that conclusion. We have been strong supporters of the (UNSC) listing of Masood Azhar for a decade. So I hope we will get to that conclusion shortly," he added.

The issue is likely to be discussed during the upcoming visit of top U.K. diplomat and head of the Foreign and Commonwealth office Simon McDonald, who will

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**DOMINIC ASQUITH**  
British High Commissioner



meet Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale here on May 10.

After the Pulwama attack, the U.K., U.S. and France pursued the listing of the Jaish-e-Mohammad leader, first ensuring a UNSC statement was issued condemning JeM specifically, and then followed it up with a proposal to designate Azhar as a terrorist at the UNSC 1267 Taliban Sanctions Committee. After China placed a hold on the designation on March 13,

the three countries had tried to take a tougher line, threatening China with bringing the proposal to the full UN Security Council, and "publicly shaming" the Chinese government into agreeing to the proposal.

While none of the tacks appear to have moved Beijing thus far, MEA officials say they are more optimistic after Mr. Gokhale's visit to Beijing last week, where he raised the subject. In a press

statement on April 22, MEA spokesperson Raveesh Kumar had said that Mr. Gokhale had "shared with China all evidence of terrorist activities of Jaish-e-Mohammad and its leader Masood Azhar," and now awaited the decision of the 1267 Sanctions Committee as well as of "other authorised bodies of the UN."

According to UNSC rules, China has until September 2019 to lift the hold or ask for another extension of three months to decide on the Azhar listing, which it has vetoed on several occasions in the past decade.

Officials say they are keen to see movement on the issue before the next summit-level meeting of the Prime Minister with Chinese President Xi Jinping in India, being planned in the months following the elections.

**HC wants responsibility fixed in rationalists' murder probe**

Court issues directions in Pansare, Dabholkar cases

**SONAM SAIGAL  
MUMBAI**

The Bombay High Court on Friday directed the Chief Secretary-Home, Additional Chief Secretary-Finance, the signatory of status reports filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and senior officials of the CBI and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), to convene meetings periodically into the probe of the murder of rationalists Govind Pansare and Narendra Dabholkar.

This was observed by a Division Bench of Justices S.C. Dharmadhikari and B.P. Colabawalla after reports filed by the CBI and the Special Investigation Team (SIT) were provided.

The court said a committee needs to be formed in order to ensure that one person shall be responsible for the matter.

The court was hearing a

**No arrest of Navlakha till May 2, says Bombay HC**

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI**

The Bombay High Court on Friday extended activist Gautam Navlakha interim protection from arrest till May 2 in the Bhima-Koregaon violence case.

A Division Bench of Justices Ranjit More and Bharati Dangre was hearing a plea filed by Mr. Navlakha

urging the court to quash the FIR against him by the Pune police. Advocate Yug Chaudhary, appearing for Mr. Navlakha, said, "Mr. Navlakha is a peace activist", while questioning how provisions of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act were applied in his case. The final hearing in the case is on May 2.

clutch of petitions filed by members of the Pansare and Dabholkar families. The CBI SIT is investigating the Dabholkar murder and the State CID is probing the Pansare murder.

Referring to the murder of journalist Gauri Lankesh in 2017, the court said, "When

a similar attack was carried out in Karnataka on writer Gauri Lankesh, the police immediately probed and arrested the accused without waiting for court orders or for any petitions to be filed. We do not want Maharashtra to expect court orders to investigate murders."

**'Baba' held for rape of minor**

**RAHUL KARMAKAR  
GUWAHATI**

A faith healer, arrested in Guwahati on Thursday for allegedly raping and impregnating a 15-year-old last year, has turned out to be the equivalent of an MLA in an autonomous council.

The police on Friday produced Ghanashyam Das, referred to as 'Babaji' by his followers, before a local court, which ordered his judicial custody for 14 days. The man had been on the run after the minor girl, who he was to cure, gave birth to a girl on April 8 at a private hospital. The hospital reported the case to 181 Women Helpline. "We found out that he is a Member Council Legislative Assembly after arresting him on Thursday," Pallav Tamuli, Assistant Commissioner of Police, told *The Hindu*.

Das is one of 40 MCLAs in the Bodoland Territorial Council that administers four districts of north-central and western Assam.

**PepsiCo goes easy as case turns a hot potato**

After boycott calls, firm offers to settle case with farmers

**PRISCILLA JEBARAJ  
NEW DELHI**

Facing boycott calls after it sued four Gujarati potato farmers for ₹4.2 crore, food and beverages giant PepsiCo has offered to settle the case if the farmers stop growing the registered potato variety used in its Lays chips. Farmer groups across the political spectrum have joined a growing chorus of outrage on social media to demand that PepsiCo withdraw its rights infringement case.

In an Ahmedabad civil court on Friday, PepsiCo's lawyer offered a settlement on these terms: the farmers must give an undertaking that they will not use its registered variety and surrender their existing stocks, or must enter PepsiCo's collaborative farming programme where farmers buy seeds from the company and sell produce back to it.

The lawyer for the farmers said they would need time to consider the offer and to reply to the court. The next hearing is on June 12.

"We have not yet decided what to do about the offer," Haribhai Patel, a farmer, told *The Hindu* on the phone. He owns four acres of land planted with potatoes, and is one of the four farmers being sued for ₹1.05 crore in damages. "We



**Dire straits:** Potato farmers at a field at Magodi village, some 45 km from Ahmedabad. •AFP

would like to fight. The company is harassing us. Just to come to Ahmedabad for this court case, I have to leave my fields and that hurts my livelihood."

**'Last resort'**

A company spokesperson said PepsiCo India had proposed to amicably settle with people who were unlawfully using seeds of its registered variety. "The company was compelled to take the judicial recourse as a last resort to safeguard the larger interest of thousands of farmers that are engaged with its collaborative potato farming programme."

PepsiCo has invoked Section 64 of the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights (PPV&FR) Act, 2001 to claim infringement of its

rights. However, farmers' groups cite Section 39 of the same Act, which says that a farmer is allowed "to save, use, sow, resow, exchange, share or sell his farm produce, including seed of a variety protected under this Act," so long as he does not sell "branded seed."

Farmers' groups as well as the corporate farming industry see the case as a precedent that could have a far-reaching effect on how other food crops are developed, sown and sold.

"This is a test case that will affect all Indian farmers. It is a matter of seed sovereignty, food sovereignty and sovereignty of this country," said Kapilbhai Shah of the Gujarat farmers' welfare group Jatan. "For the farmer, it is do or die."

**Banks have made no offer on salaries for Jet employees**

Airline's efforts to get funds from consortium fail

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI**

Jet Airways on Friday told its employees that despite its best efforts there has been no clarity or commitment on salaries by any of its stakeholders.

In a mail to employees, Jet Airways CEO Vinay Dube said the leadership team had spent the last few days trying to convince the consortium of Indian banks (led by the State Bank of India) to release some funds for employees, while continuing to support the bank-led bid process for the airline.

"We have told them repeatedly that our employees are facing grave hardships owing to non-payment of their salaries and that if this were to continue any longer, our employees will have no option but to find employment elsewhere. Unfortunately, the banks have said that they are unable to make any salary commitments, if at all, until after the bidding process is complete," Mr. Dube wrote.

**Flight of talent**

The CEO informed that while on the one hand, they

are being told to preserve the value of Jet Airways during the bid process, on the other hand, with no salary payment, some colleagues, who are the "very fabric and value" of this airline, have had no choice but to find employment elsewhere.

"When we highlight the disappointing irony of this situation to the lenders, we are simply told that this problem is to be addressed by the company's shareholders, who should and could have agreed on a Resolution Plan a long time ago," he said.