

IN BRIEF
Centre issues drought advisory to 6 States
NEW DELHI
With water storage in dams dropping to a "critical" level, the Centre has issued a "drought advisory" to Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu, asking them to use water judiciously. The drought advisory is issued to States when the water level in reservoirs is 20% less than the average of live water storage figures of the past 10 years. PTI

Naxal involved in killing of BJP MLA arrested
DANTEWADA
A Naxal allegedly involved in the killing of BJP MLA Bhima Mandavi and four policemen in an IED attack last month was arrested on Friday in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh, police said. The rebel, identified as Jivan alias Hemla, carrying a reward of ₹5 lakh on him, was apprehended by local police near Dantewada jail here, Superintendent of Police Abhishek Pallava said.

Centre's 'no' to sharing black money details
NEW DELHI
The government has declined to share information on black money cases received from Switzerland, citing confidentiality. Replying to an RTI query, the Finance Ministry said India and Switzerland share information on black money on a case to case basis... the information is governed by confidentiality provisions." PTI

Army jawan dies during mountain expedition
NEW DELHI
Naik Narayan Singh of the Army's 18-member mountaineering expedition team to Mount Makalu passed away as the team was descending after successfully scaling the peak on May 16, the Army said on Friday. Naik Singh had also taken part in other mountaineering expeditions in the past. He joined the Army in 2002 and hailed from Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand. He is survived by wife and three children.

Air India panel to meet on sexual abuse charge
NEW DELHI
Air India's internal committee on sexual harassment will hold its first meeting on Monday to look into allegations levelled by a woman pilot against a senior pilot. The probe panel has asked both the accused as well as the woman complainant to be present to depose before it, according to the airline's spokesperson.

Navy boosts its air warfare capability

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI
The Navy crossed a milestone in enhancing its anti-air warfare capability, with the maiden "cooperative engagement firing" of the medium-range surface-to-air missiles. This was achieved by network-centric operations that helped to combine the capabilities of all military platforms in a formation, the Navy said on Friday. "The firing was undertaken on the western seaboard by the INS Kochi and the INS Chennai, wherein the missiles of both ships were controlled by one ship to intercept different aerial targets at extended ranges," the Navy said in a statement. The trial was carried out by the Navy, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI). The missile was developed by the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad, a DRDO laboratory, and IAI. It is made by Bharat Dynamics Limited.

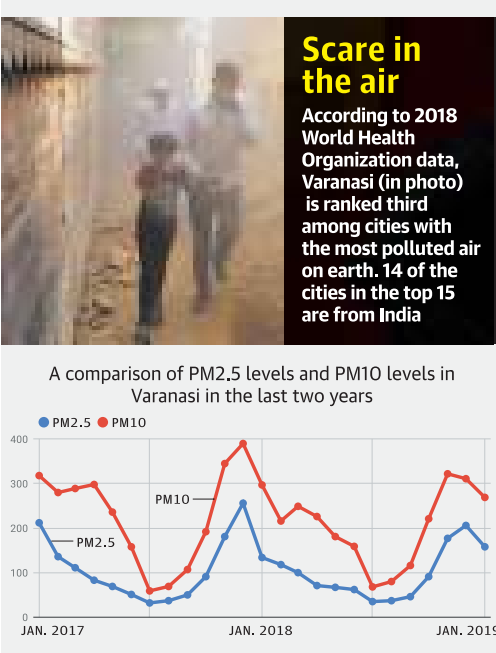


Table with 3 columns: RANK, CITY, PM 2.5 LEVEL. Lists 15 cities with their respective PM2.5 levels, with Varanasi ranked 3rd.

Varanasi has only one air quality monitoring station

It was ranked among the top 3 most polluted cities in world

JACOB KOSHY NEW DELHI
Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constituency Varanasi, which goes to polls on Sunday, continues to have only one air quality monitoring station, despite being ranked as among the top 3 most polluted cities in the world three years ago, a Right to Information request has found.

Zero 'good-air' days
The Central Pollution Control Board's 2015 dataset (made public in 2016) found Varanasi's air quality to be among the most toxic in the country and that it had only one air quality monitor capable of measuring particulate matter 2.5 and particulate matter 10 levels. Out of 227 days measured in 2015, the city had zero 'good-air' days and this was attributed to the heavy levels of industrial pollution. Biomass burning, vehicular emissions, brick kilns and diesel

generator sets were also major contributors. Let Me Breathe, a portal that investigates how people cope with poor air quality, queried the city's civic officials and the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board with Right to Information requests to check what progress the city had made in improving its air quality. While the average air quality for PM 2.5 from 2017-2019 had improved to 104 from 206 in 2016, the maximum PM levels breached continued to be above 200, or in the "very poor" category. "Serious priority" "Varanasi is one of the most polluted cities on the planet. Still there is only one monitoring station. While in the last few years the government has done amazing work on the beautification of the city and solar, it's time to make air pollution a serious priority as well," Tamseel

Hussain, Founder, Let Me Breathe, said. While Varanasi's municipal bodies had taken steps to address road dust and curb road-side burning of garbage, no data was provided on the number of violations and the steps taken to reprimand offenders, the RTI queries revealed. Varanasi is one of the cities that is part of the National Clean Air Campaign, an initiative by the Union Environment Ministry to improve air quality in 100 cities by 20% at least by 2024. One of the commitments under this is to improve air quality monitoring. In February, a study by IIT Kanpur and the Shakti Foundation showed Varanasi suffered from poor air quality for 70% of the days between October and November 2018 with PM 2.5 levels crossing 170 micrograms per cubic metre against the national average of 60 and the WHO average of 25.

ED attaches Om Prakash Chautala's ₹1.94 cr. property

Money laundering case is based on FIR against him by the CBI for disproportionate assets

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI
The Enforcement Directorate has provisionally attached a property worth ₹1.94 crore of former Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala in a corruption case. The total attachment in the case stands at ₹6 crore. The money laundering case is based on an FIR lodged by the Central Bureau of Investigation against

Mr. Chautala and others for allegedly acquiring assets disproportionate to their known sources of income. The CBI has filed a chargesheet against him and his sons, Abhay and Ajay Chautala, under the Prevention of Corruption Act. According to the CBI, Mr. Chautala had acquired assets disproportionate to his known sources of income to the tune of ₹6.09 crore from May 24, 1993, to May 31,



Om Prakash Chautala

Chautala had also acquired assets disproportionate to their known sources of income to the tune of ₹119. 69 crore and ₹27.74 crore, respectively," said the Directorate. The ED alleged that Mr. Chautala had acquired immovable properties in Delhi and Panchkula. He also got constructed a residential house at Sirsa in Haryana during the check period from the money received

from undisclosed sources. "He had disclosed properties so acquired in the affidavit filed before the Returning Officer in the Haryana Vidhan Sabha elections in 2005 and 2009, thereby projecting publicly the tainted properties as untainted," it said. The agency had earlier attached assets worth ₹46.96 lakh of Mr. Chautala. "Further, properties of Mr. Chautala to the tune of ₹3.68 crore were attached in April 2019.

Ex-servicemen status for nursing service

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI
The Defence Ministry and the Army have agreed in principle to grant ex-servicemen status to the Military Nursing Service (MNS) cadre, which has been their long-term demand. The decision comes as the Supreme Court has asked for their opinion in an ongoing case on the issue. "The Army and the Ministry have agreed in principle for ex-servicemen status as also their demand to use star plates on cars for Brigadiers and above," a defence official said. All benefits In all, the MNS had 28 demands of which these two are the major ones. The status entitles them to all benefits of veterans, the official stated. Some MNS personnel had approached the Armed Forces Tribunal which supported their demand. After this, the Defence Ministry challenged it in the Supreme Court in 2010. On May 7, the Supreme Court asked the Ministry and the Army to submit their reply.

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Identity crisis: A man helps villagers in filing NRC forms in Mayong village in Morigaon district of Assam in this picture from August 2018.

Former Assam Minister gets NRC notice

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GUWAHATI
Former Assam Minister and legislator for more than 30 years Gautam Roy was served a notice challenging his inclusion in the final National Register of Citizens (NRC) on May 14 and asked to appear before the NRC service centre in Hailakandi the following day. Mr. Roy and his six-year-old grandson were served a notice by one Johirul Ali

Choudhury of Hailakandi. "I could not attend the hearing as I was in New Delhi. I reached Hailakandi on Thursday and applied for fixing another date," Mr. Roy said, adding that the notice underlined how "NRC had become an excuse to harass genuine citizens." Of the around three lakh objections that the NRC centres received, more than 2.5 lakh were filed on December 31, 2018, the last

day for filing claims and objections. But when the hearings began, none of the objectors turned up, as required by the procedure set up by the Centre. Organisations such as the All Assam Minority Students' Union and the All Assam Bengali Youth Students' Federation have been demanding that objections be dismissed in the absence of the objectors at the hearings.

proposal to extend the NRC to States other than Assam," Mr. Ahir said. However, in March, BJP's national president Amit Shah began his election campaign in West Bengal with a promise to introduce NRC in the State. The BJP's election manifesto released on April 8 clearly says the NRC will be implemented in a phased

manner across the country. A senior government official said provisions like the Citizenship Act, Foreigners Act and the Passport Act existed to detect and deport illegal immigrants in the country. "The NRC is unique to Assam. It is being conducted under the supervision of the SC," said the official.

As per flats of the Supreme Court, the Registrar General of India published the final draft list of NRC on July 30 last year to segregate Indian citizens living in Assam from those who had illegally entered the State from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971. Nearly 40 lakh people were excluded from Assam's final draft of the NRC.

'Peace pact with Taliban is unlikely before Sept. polls'

Afghan official says no compromise on fundamental issues

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE NEW DELHI
A peace agreement with the Taliban is unlikely to materialise before the September election in Afghanistan, said a leader of the High Peace Council of the country. Addressing a gathering at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) here, Mohammad Umer Daudzai, Chief Executive of the Afghan High Peace Council, said Afghanistan would not compromise on fundamental issues with the Taliban, stating that the rebels would have to come clean about ties with Pakistan.



Mohammad Umer Daudzai visiting dignitary, Ms. Swaraj conveyed India's support to peace and stability in the war-torn country. "India expressed its support for sustainable peace in Afghanistan," said the Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar in a social media message. Areas of concern Mr. Daudzai explained Kabul's main areas of concern about the ongoing peace talks between the Taliban and the United States in Qatar. He pointed out that the U.S. special envoy for the

talks, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, and other senior officials have from time to time briefed Kabul about the talks but maintained that they had no way to find out if they were being told the full details. The visit by the key official took place, days after the visit of Mr. Khalilzad to Delhi during which he briefed Indian policy makers. High profile However, he said the talks had given the Taliban a higher political profile. He mentioned that the U.S.-Taliban talks were not supposed to treat the rebels as the real representative of the people of the country, saying "People of Afghanistan are optimistic of the future of peace but they are also pessimistic as the real party that is the Government of Afghanistan is missing in the talks." "When the right time comes, the Taliban will join the rest of the country," said Mr. Daudzai, expressing hope for continued peace process in the future.