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NEARBY



Mayawati appoints kin to key party posts

LUCKNOW
BSP chief Mayawati tightened her family's grip on the party by appointing her younger brother Anand Kumar as vice-president and his son Aakash Anand as national coordinator on Sunday. She informed her party leaders and MPs about the appointments at the BSP's national-level meeting here, sources said.

NEWS PAGE 12

Former journalist shot at by car-borne men

NEW DELHI
A former journalist was shot at in east Delhi's Vasundhara Enclave by car-borne masked men on Saturday night, the police said on Sunday. Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Jasmeet Singh said the incident took place when the victim was driving home in Noida after meeting a friend in Raj Nagar extension.

CITY PAGE 4

MBA graduate held for Dwarka double murder

NEW DELHI
An MBA graduate has been arrested for allegedly killing a couple in Dwarka after they turned down his marriage proposal to their daughter, the police said on Sunday. On Saturday, Hari Ballabh and his wife Shanti Singh, both from Bihar, were found stabbed to death at their house in Dwarka's Mohan Garden.

CITY PAGE 4

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ಕನ್ನಡ ಸಾಹಿತ್ಯ
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EDGE PAGE 4



Caught unawares: A pandal, where people had gathered for a 'Ram Katha', collapsed at Jasol in Rajasthan's Barmer district on Sunday after sudden rain and squall. •PTI

14 killed in Rajasthan's Barmer as tent collapses on devotees

Sudden rain and squall led to short circuit; CM orders probe

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

Fourteen persons were killed and over 50 injured when a large tent collapsed on a crowd of devotees in a sudden rain and squall, which led to a short circuit followed by electric current in the iron structure, during a religious congregation in Jasol village of Rajasthan's Barmer district on Sunday. The deceased included two women and a 15-year-old boy.

Trapped under tent

Most of the victims were electrocuted as they were trapped under the tent which was uprooted by strong winds in the afternoon.

Barmer Collector Himanshu Gupta said about 700 people had assembled for

listening to 'Ram Katha' (Lord Ram's story) at a local school ground, when the dust storm and downpour swept the venue.

The 'Ram Katha' was organised by the Mata Rani Bhatiyani Mandir Sansthan of Jasol, which had invited internationally acclaimed story-teller Muralidhar Maharaj to deliver his sermons.

Muralidhar Maharaj, who had started the Ram Katha on Saturday, warned the devotees of the tent falling on them in the middle of his talk and asked them to rush outside.

Mr. Gupta said 25 of those injured had been admitted to the Nahata Government Hospital in the nearby Balotra town and one person with burns was referred to Jodhpur. Doc-

tors feared that the toll could increase as several injured persons were in a serious condition.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, who ordered the district officers to investigate the cause, will go to Jasol on Monday to meet the injured. He said the local administration was engaged in the rescue and relief work and was extending "every possible help" to those affected and their kin, including their medical treatment.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the loss of lives and wished those injured an early recovery. "Collapse of 'pandal' in Barmer is unfortunate. My thoughts are with the bereaved families and I wish the injured a quick recovery," he tweeted.

MEA rejects U.S. report on state of religious freedom in India

'A foreign govt. has no locus standi to pronounce on the rights of our citizens'

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

Foreign governments do not have the right to criticise India's vibrant democracy and dedication to rule of law, said the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Sunday, after the U.S. State Department's annual report on religious freedom pointed out India's failure to protect minority communities.

"We see no locus standi for a foreign government to pronounce on the state of our citizens' constitutionally protected rights," said MEA Spokesperson Raveesh Kumar.

The report sets the backdrop of the visit of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that begins on June 25.

The Hindu reported earlier that the report was re-

It is widely acknowledged that India is a vibrant democracy, where the Constitution provides protection of religious freedom, and where democratic governance and rule of law further promote and protect the fundamental rights

RAVEESH KUMAR,
Spokesperson,
Ministry of External Affairs



law further promote and protect the fundamental rights." Apart from the murders and lynching by cow vigilante groups, the report pointed out that there were several attempts to undermine minority institutions and change the names of cities that reminded one of the pluralistic nature of India. In this regard, the report highlighted the change of the name of Allahabad to Prayagraj.

The MEA did not answer if the report and its observations about India's failure to uphold and protect minority rights would feature in talks with Mr. Pompeo during his visits here between June 25 and 27.

INDIA REJECTS PAK. CHARGE OF
POLITICISING FATF PAGE 13

leased by Mr. Pompeo himself, and he referred to the issue of religious freedom as a "deeply personal" priority.

The 2018 Report on International Religious Freedom referred to multiple instances of the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Centre and various State governments of the Bharatiya Janata Party having taken

steps that hurt the Muslim community.

The official spokesperson, however, maintained that India was proud of its "secular credentials", saying, "it is widely acknowledged that India is a vibrant democracy where the Constitution provides protection of religious freedom, and where democratic governance and rule of

U.S. targets Iranian computers

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

U.S. military cyberforces launched a strike against Iranian military computer systems on Thursday as President Donald Trump backed away from plans for a more conventional military strike in response to Iran's downing of a U.S. surveillance drone, U.S. officials have said.

The cyberattacks, done with Mr. Trump's approval, disabled Iran's computer systems that controlled its rocket and missile launchers, the officials said.

TEHRAN'S WARNING PAGE 14
CLOUDS OF WAR EDITORIAL

Southwest monsoon's current rainfall deficit is 38%, says IMD

Only half of usual summer foodgrain crop area sown so far

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

With the southwest monsoon running late, the country faces a 38% current rainfall deficit, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The IMD said the country, as a whole, received 70.9 mm rainfall so far this monsoon season, whereas the long period average is 114.2 mm. This leaves a shortfall of 38%.

The rain deficit has depleted reservoirs, besides delaying sowing of summer foodgrain crops. Parts of central and peninsular India are staring at a drought for the second successive year.

Farmers' groups are demanding that the government declare drought in affected areas immediately, so

Cropped out

Preliminary report on area* coverage under Kharif crops as on June 21, 2019

Crop	Normal area to be sown for this week	Actual area sown in 2019	Difference between Normal & Actual
Rice	7.39	6.30	-1.09
Pulses	5.45	1.70	-3.74
Coarse cereals	11.41	7.40	-4.00
Oilseeds	7.69	1.60	-6.09
Sugarcane	47.22	49.35	2.13
Jute & mesta	7.06	6.08	-0.98
Cotton	19.34	18.18	-1.16
Total	105.56	90.62	-14.94

that relief measures can begin this month.

"There must not be any delay in the declaration of drought. Instead of waiting for the end of the monsoon, drought must be declared in all those districts where sow-

ing has been severely affected owing to 50% or greater deficit in June," said the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee, a platform of over 200 farmers' groups.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Elderly couple, caretaker murdered in Vasant Vihar

Entry to flat was friendly and assailants deliberately ransacked house: police

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

An elderly couple and their caretaker were found murdered in their flat in south Delhi's Vasant Vihar on Sunday morning.

The bodies of Vishnu Mathur, 78, his wife Shashi, 75, and their caretaker Khushboo, 22, were found in their two-bedroom flat on the first floor of Vasant Apartments. Police said the couple had one stab wound each on their throats while Khushboo had at least five similar wounds around her neck.

The entry to the flat was friendly and the assailants deliberately ransacked the house to make it look like robbery, the police said.

DCP (South West) Deven-



Policemen near the flat where the murders took place. •SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

der Arya said Khushboo, hired through a placement agency, had been staying with the couple for the past six months as a nursing attendant. Police suspect that someone known to her is involved.

Mr. Arya said they were informed about the incident at 8.50 a.m. by a neighbour. Babli, a domestic help who had

come for household work at the flat, found the door open. On entering the flat, she found Khushboo lying on the floor in a pool of blood and the couple lying dead on a bed. She immediately alerted a neighbour.

"We have questioned several people who were frequent visitors to the flat. The case will be worked out soon," Mr. Arya said.

The police said the couple is survived by a married daughter who lives in East of Kailash. She used to visit her parents regularly and talk to them daily through video calls.

"We spoke to the couple's daughter and her husband to know if any jewellery, cash or valuables were missing

from the house. They claimed that the couple did not keep any such valuables with them," said the officer.

Vishnu had retired from the office of the Central Government Health Scheme and Shashi from a civic body in New Delhi. They had been living in Vasant Apartments for the past nearly 18 years.

The couple had lost their son in a road accident in 1999.

"Shashi was bedridden for the past few months as she had fractured her knee and underwent surgery. Khushboo was hired to take care of the couple as Vishnu had also stopped moving out of the flat due to ill health," a police officer said.

SEE ASLO PAGE 4

4 militants killed in Shopian

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Four militants were killed by security forces in south Kashmir's Shopian on Sunday.

A police spokesman said that on a tip-off, a cordon and search operation was launched at Panzar. In the ensuing encounter, four militants were killed, and their bodies were retrieved.

The deceased were Rafi Hassan Mir and Suhail Ahmad Bhat of Shopian and Showkat Ahmad Mir and Azad Ahmad Khanday of Pulwama. The police said Showkat had a long history of terror crimes since 2015.

U.P. government project to beautify Taj Mahal stalled

Barrage proposal stuck between two expert committees of the Union Environment Ministry

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

When's a barrage, not a barrage? An answer to this lies at the heart of the clearance to a project to improve infrastructure and long-term sustainability of the iconic Taj Mahal in Agra.

A proposal by the Uttar Pradesh government to construct a barrage across the Yamuna, a kilometre and a half away from the Taj Mahal, is stuck between two expert committees of the Union Environment Ministry.



In limbo: The barrage is meant to secure the foundation of the Taj Mahal and improve the water level at Agra. •PTI

Each committee, consisting of eminent experts, thinks that it's the other pa-

nel that should be taking a call on the future of the project, a perusal of the public

records of meetings and discussions in the Ministry shows.

The project of the Irrigation Department envisages construction of a barrage for "securing the foundation of the Taj Mahal, improving the water level at Agra, beautifying and navigating the Yamuna at 1.50 km downstream of the Taj Mahal."

Water all through year

Such a storage, generally used in irrigation and hydro-electricity projects, would

ensure a minimum quantity of water all through the year.

It would help to recharge the ground water and facilitate navigation through river routes. That stretch of the Yamuna is a National Waterway (Delhi to Allahabad) and the barrage would serve as an alternative to motorised transport and would also help to develop a green belt around the pond which would "improve the environment around the Taj Mahal", the project proponents say.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

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