

IN BRIEF



**Congress names whips, committee members**

**NEW DELHI**  
The Congress on Wednesday named Tamil Nadu MP Manickam Tagore and Assam member Gaurav Gogoi (in photo) as party whips. Goa MP Francis Sardinha and Kerala member K. Muraleedharan have been chosen for the parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance. Kerala member K. Sudhakaran will be on the committee on OBCs, Ravneet Singh Bittu, Punjab MP, on PSUs and Santokh Singh Chaudhary on SC/STs.

**No martyrdom status for Pulwama CRPF victims**

**NEW DELHI**  
There is no official nomenclature to accord martyrdom status to CRPF personnel killed in the Pulwama attack in Jammu and Kashmir, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Wednesday. Minister Nityananda Rai said the Ministry had issued instructions to issue "Operational Casualty Certificate" to the next of kin of the Central Armed Police Forces and Assam Rifles personnel killed in action.

# NATO ally status unlikely now

U.S. House to vote on diluted Bill on defence cooperation with Delhi

**SRIRAM LAKSHMAN**  
WASHINGTON

The U.S. House Committee on Rules voted on Tuesday night to send a watered-down version of an amendment to enhance defence cooperation with India to the full House floor for a vote.

The new India NDAA amendment, a part of the House's version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) FY 2020, replaces a significantly stronger amendment (the "Sherman Amendment") that sought to place India on a par with the U.S.'s NATO allies by amending the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), a U.S. law that governs the sale of high-end defence equipment to other countries.

Concerns over India's purchase of the S-400, turf battles between the Armed Services and Foreign Affairs Committees and some State Department opposition are likely to have contributed to the watering down of the amendment. Nevertheless, what passed the Senate and what is being considered by the House, provides some direction to the executive with regard to bolstering India-



**It's always disappointing when strong bipartisan legislation on India doesn't get across the finish line. Policymakers should understand that we need to boost India as a counter to China and that we can't let India's relationship with Russia get in the way**

**MUKESH AGHI**, CEO, U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum

U.S. defence cooperation, although falling short of the original legislative goal. This comes days after Secretary of State Michael Pompeo travelled to New Delhi to push for stronger U.S.-India ties across the board.

The original House amendment was submitted by Brad Sherman, a California Congressman who is co-Chair of House India Caucus and heads the Asia Pacific subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Despite having bi-partisan support and co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle, the amendment did not make it to the House Rules Committee – a fate similar to the corresponding amendment in the Senate, submitted by Mark Warner (Democrat, Virginia) and John Cornyn (Republican, Texas)

which also sought to give India NATO-equivalent status for arms sales.

A source outside Congress who had worked on the legislation said India's plans to purchase the S-400 Triumf missile shield from Russia made some in the Senate (and House) wary and came in the way of the original amendment making it to the final package in both legislative chambers. This view was supported by at least one person in Congress.

"It's hard to go after Turkey for the S-400 purchase and allow India a boost in the same Bill," a Congressional aide, who did not want to be named, told *The Hindu*. The NDAA Bills (House and Senate versions) limit transfer of F-35 aircraft to Turkey unless Turkey can provide assurances that it is

not accepting delivery of the S-400.

"It's always disappointing when strong bipartisan legislation on India doesn't get across the finish line. Policymakers should understand that we need to boost India as a counter to China and that we can't let India's relationship with Russia get in the way," Mukesh Aghi, president and CEO of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum, told *The Hindu*. The original AECA amendments also became a casualty of turf-related issues between the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Committee on Armed Services and the corresponding committees in the Senate.

AECA is the statute which authorises the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program through which the U.S. sells arms abroad and the procedure is less complicated if the purchaser is a NATO ally or Japan, South Korea, Israel, Australia or New Zealand.

The Sherman amendment in the House and Warner/Cornyn amendment in the Senate, sought to add India to the list of non-NATO allies listed above.

# Tariff tensions top U.S. agenda in meetings today

United States Trade Representative team to meet officials

**SUHASINI HAIDAR**  
NEW DELHI

In the first such formal engagement since the U.S. decided to withdraw India's preferential trade status in March, a team from the office of the United States Trade Representative will arrive in Delhi on Thursday for meetings with officials of the Commerce and External Affairs Ministries.

Officials on both sides have stressed that the talks are not yet a resumption of the trade dialogue, but are "talks about talks". They will explore steps to resume dialogue as mandated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. President Donald Trump after their meeting last month in Osaka.

The conversations in Delhi are expected to lay the ground for a meeting between USTR Robert Lightizer and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal in the next few weeks, as New Delhi and Washington try to pick up the pieces of the trade dialogue that went off the rails after the U.S. announced a review of India's Generalised



Trade ties have been hit due to public comments by President Donald Trump.

System of Preferences (GSP) status last April.

The final announcement of the withdrawal came on June 1.

In retaliation, India imposed higher tariffs on 28 U.S. products, that it had been holding off on since last April.

Trade ties have been further hit by a series of tweets and public comments by Mr. Trump, whose latest tweet on Tuesday called Indian tariffs on American products "no longer acceptable".

In a Congressional hearing in June, Mr. Lightizer also told members of the House Ways and Means Committee, that the U.S.'s

GSP decision was only the first of many possible punitive measures against what he called a "series of problems" with India.

"We made literally no headway on the issues over the course of months and months and months," Mr. Lightizer said.

**'Sudden' changes**

Apart from higher tariffs on IT products and services and automobile and agricultural products, the U.S. is expected to raise what it calls "sudden" and "unexpected" changes in rules and standards applied in India.

The government's new rules on financial data localisation and e-commerce have upset many U.S. IT and e-commerce companies including Amazon and Walmart operating in India.

In May 2019, the decision of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) to ban biofuels went down badly in Washington.

Indian and U.S. experts say it is unlikely that the two sides will be able to retrace their steps to last year.

# Rahul reaffirms Amethi connect

Says he won't abandon the constituency and will continue to visit it

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
AMETHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday reaffirmed his personal connection with Amethi on his maiden visit to the Uttar Pradesh constituency after suffering a humiliating defeat in the Lok Sabha election.

"I am happy to be in Amethi. It feels like coming home," he tweeted.

Earlier, addressing Congress workers at the Gauriganj Guesthouse in Amethi, Mr. Gandhi assured them that though he was elected MP for Wayanad in Kerala, he would not abandon the U.P. constituency and would continue to visit it.

"Don't think that Rahul Gandhi is not yours," he told them in an indoor meeting.

He said he would continue to raise the shortcomings of the Union and the State governments regarding Amethi in the Lok Sabha.



**Back in action:** Congress president Rahul Gandhi with party workers in Lucknow on Wednesday. •PTI

Mr. Gandhi explained to the workers that it was his responsibility to develop Wayanad, but he would also give time to Amethi.

"Don't you think I won't come here. I will keep coming here," he said to loud claps from party workers.

The Congress leader advised his party workers to start doing the job of the Opposition in the constituency. Referring to corruption and the state of the economy and trade, he said there was no

shortage of issues. "It is more fun doing the work of the Opposition. It's easier," Mr. Gandhi said in a lighter vein.

Sarvesh Singh, who was the chairman of the Congress election committee in Amethi, said the meeting lasted two hours and was attended by over 1,200 people.

Mr. Singh said that while there was no discussion on the factors behind his defeat, Mr. Gandhi told the workers that there may have been "shortcomings" from both ends, his and the workers, leading to the defeat.

Mr. Gandhi ignored the workers' requests to continue as party president, Mr. Singh said.

# Centre outlaws outfit for pro-Khalistani activities

'Sikhs for Justice' is based abroad

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

The Union Home Ministry has banned the Sikhs for Justice (SFJ), a group advocating secessionist and pro-Khalistani activities in India. The group was advocating Referendum 2020, an online campaign for Khalistan, a separate land for the Sikhs.

Its founder Avtar Singh Panu was seen shouting slogans and wearing a T-shirt that said "Khalistan Zindabad, Referendum 2020" at the India-New Zealand cricket match in the U.K on Wednesday.

A senior Ministry official said the SFJ's online supporters were over 2 lakh but physically it was only a group of eight to 10 people. The Punjab government

gave crucial information to help ban the group, the official said.

The official said 11 cases were registered against the SFJ in the past four years and 39 people were arrested. The group also funded certain activities.

"The Union Cabinet on Wednesday gave its clearance to declare SFJ, a fringe organisation run by radical Sikhs in U.S., Canada, U.K, etc. as an unlawful association under Section 3(1) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967," the official said.

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh said the Centre's decision to declare Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) an "unlawful association" was a "welcome step".

# Al-Qaeda releases its first video on Kashmir

Calls for 'unrelenting blows' on Army

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Al-Qaeda chief Ayman al-Zawahiri has released a video asking its cadres to inflict "unrelenting blows" on the Indian Army and the government in the Kashmir Valley to "bleed" the economy and make the country suffer.

This is the first time Zawahiri has issued a video specific to Kashmir.

A senior government official said it seemed to be an act of desperation on the part of the outfit in the wake of recent action by security agencies in Kashmir Valley.

The video was posted on the As-Sahab channel, an in-house production of Al-Qaeda. While Zawahiri did not mention Zakir Musa, a ter-



Ayman al-Zawahiri

rorist killed in May by security forces in Kashmir, his photo flashed on the screen. Musa was the founder of the Indian cell of Al-Qaeda, titled "Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind." The Al-Qaeda chief warned terrorists not to fall into the trap of Pakistan, which he termed a puppet of the U.S.

# As Pak. Army dithers, PoK family awaits son's body

Location to hand over body not decided

**PEERZADA ASHIQ**  
SRINAGAR

The body of an eight-year-old boy from Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK), who was found dead four kilometres inside Kashmir in the Kishenganga river on Tuesday, was moved over 200 km on Wednesday as the Pakistan Army kept changing the site to hand over the body.

"The two Armies (India and Pakistan) established contact (on Tuesday) after a video was uploaded by the family living in PoK's Minimarg across the river. The boy was identified but the location for exchange kept

changing on Wednesday," Shahbaz Ahmed Mirza, Deputy Commissioner, Bandedipora, told *The Hindu*.

The family of Abid Sheikh, a student in PoK, in a video uploaded online, said the boy had left for school on July 8 but did not return home. They suspect he fell off the cliff into the river and was washed four km across the LoC in J&K's Gurez valley.

"My only appeal to people of India is to help in returning the body of my son. I will be indebted. Our Army chief should also play a positive role," Nazir Sheikh, the boy's father, said in a video.

# Assam mulls 10 centres for those excluded from NRC

**RAHUL KARMAKAR**  
GUWAHATI

The Assam government has sent a proposal to the Centre for fast-tracking the establishment of 10 detention centres across the State to house people who would be excluded from the final National Register of Citizens (NRC).

The Supreme Court-monitored register, being updated on the basis of its 1951 avatar, has to be published by July 31.

**NRC exclusion**

About 40.07 lakh people out of 3.29 crore applicants had been excluded from the

draft NRC published on July 30, 2018. Another 1.02 lakh people were removed from the draft list of citizens on June 26.

"We have sent the proposal for 10 new centres in various places for NRC-excluded people," Kumar Sanjay Krishna, Assam's Additional Chief Secretary (Home and Political) told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

As per the blueprint, a detention centre each would be established in Barpeta, Dima Hasao, Goalpara, Kamrup (Metropolitan), Karimganj, Lakhimpur, Nagaon, Nalbari, Sivasagar, and Sonitpur districts.