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MGNREGA wages to be pegged to inflation

“They have now agreed to update the indices annually. MGNREGA wages will be linked to whichever index is higher in a particular State,” said the official, estimating that the increased wages based on updated inflation indices may result in 10% higher government expenditure on the scheme.

Wage rate revisions are usually notified at the beginning of a financial year, but the Ministry is trying to implement the hike during the current year itself, as part of a stimulus package to counter the ongoing slowdown.

“If transferring expenditure [via MGNREGA] is done, rural wages could increase and that could percolate down into more purchasing power in the hands of the consumer,” said Soumya Kanti Ghosh, chief economic advisor for the State Bank of India.

However, some economists questioned whether the move is sufficient to revive demand.

“Of course, any increase in wages is welcome. But the

base rate itself is so low for MGNREGA, so it may not be enough to link it to inflation now,” said Dipa Sinha, an economist teaching at Ambedkar University.

Wide gap
According to the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey, market wages for men were higher than MGNREGA wages by 74% in 2017-18, while for women, it was a 21% gap. “They must first increase the wages and subsequently ensure better inflation indexation. Otherwise, the impact will be minimal,” said Dr. Sinha.

Even with existing wages, the scheme is running out of funds due to increased demand for work. MGNREGA received a budgetary allocation of ₹60,000 crore, of which more than 75% has already been released by the Centre even before the halfway point of the year. Last week, the Finance Ministry for an additional supplementary grant of ₹15,000-₹20,000 crore.

Stocks slide on oil; Sensex declines 1.7%

Incidentally, the India VIX index, which reflects expectations of near-term market volatility, surged almost 7% to 16.

“The selling pressure aggravated for Indian markets as depreciating rupee and geopolitical tensions spooked investor sentiments,” said Ajit Mishra, Vice President - Research, Religare Broking.

“The sharp rise in crude oil prices has impacted domestic sentiments due to India’s high dependence on imports. Going forward, market participants would keep a close watch on geopolitical developments as any further escalation would have an adverse impact on markets and economy,” he added.

The weak investor sentiment was further corroborated by the extremely negative market breadth as

losers outnumbered gainers in the ratio of 2:1.

On the BSE, almost 1,700 stocks lost ground, as against 829 gainers. All the sectoral indices also ended in the red.

Among the other major Asian markets, Hong Kong’s Hang Seng Index lost more than 1%, while the benchmarks of China, Taiwan, Philippines and Singapore also ended in the red as crude hovered around \$69 in late morning U.S. trade.

On the Sensex, sector heavyweights like Maruti Suzuki India, Axis Bank, Tata Steel, Bajaj Auto, State Bank of India (SBI) and HDFC were among the big losers.

Foreign portfolio investors, meanwhile, continued their selling activity with net sales in the current month pegged at ₹3,220 crore.

U.S., India keen to wrap up trade deal

While the Ministry of Commerce has officially been non-committal, officials in the know have said that there is a high likelihood of the two leaders announcing a major trade deal during the event.

“The U.S. ambassador was there during Mr. Goyal’s meeting with the foreign pharmaceutical companies, and in fact he asked the Indian players to leave the room as he was not comfortable having the Indian representatives there,” a representative of the Indian medical device manufacturers told *The Hindu*.

“We had to wait for 2.5 hours for the meeting to get over, and insist that the Minister meet us too.

Our meeting was much shorter, about half an hour.”

Commerce Ministry officials, however, justified Mr. Juster’s presence in an internal meeting of the Indian government.

“It is not unusual for the Ambassador to be involved in the discussions, especially in the run-up to the meeting between Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump,” an official said.

“To have another government sit in on your discussions on a national policy is extremely outrageous,” Malini Aisola, Co-convenor of the All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN), said.

“It is unbelievable the kind of open pressure the U.S. government is putting.”

Anticipatory bail plea of IPS officer rejected

Therefore it could not pass orders on either of the petitions.

Counsel for Mr. Kumar argued that the petitioner’s name does not feature in any previous charge sheet filed by the agency. He argued that the officer, “who was a witness” in the Saradha case till September 13, was declared an accused on Tuesday and the CBI is pushing for his arrest. The CBI lawyer argued that custody would be necessary because he had “suppressed” evidence.

Meanwhile, there was hectic activity at the CBI office in Kolkata, with senior

officials holding a series of meetings. CBI Joint Director Pankaj Srivastava told journalists, “so far he [Mr. Kumar] is not cooperating.”

Senior CBI officers said that several teams have been set up to locate Mr. Kumar. The government has said that Mr. Kumar is on leave from September 9 to 25 and remains incommunicable. A CBI official in New Delhi said Mr. Kumar failed to appear before it on Tuesday in connection with the Saradha case. The CBI has approached a Delhi court seeking a non-bailable warrant against Mr. Kumar, sources said.

Modi has ended policy paralysis: Shah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday attacked the Congress for its “culture of policy paralysis”, alleged corruption and unguarded borders prior to 2014, saying people then wondered whether India’s multi-party democratic system had failed.

“After nearly 70 years of Independence, there was a question in the minds of the people whether the vision of the founding fathers had really been realised. Whether the multi-party democratic system had failed to fulfil the aspirations of the citizens of the country,” he said at an event of the All India Management Association.

In this scenario, the nation in 2014 gave a resounding majority to the Narendra Modi-led government for the first time in 30 years, Mr. Shah said. He said previous governments could take only five decisions in the past 30 years, whereas, the Modi government took over 50 decisions in the past five years.

Congress reacts

The Congress said Mr. Shah’s statement was “belittling India’s multi-party democracy and shocking”.

Senior Congress leader Anand Sharma said, “Given India’s rich diversity, only a multi-party system can be inclusive and representative of the Union of India. The NDA itself is a multi-party alliance and its member parties have formed governments in States. I hope that Nitish Kumar, Parkash Singh Badal, Uddhav Thackeray and others are listening.”

All 4 accused in Bettiah gang-rape case held

Police deny that victim was recently released from the Muzaffarpur shelter home

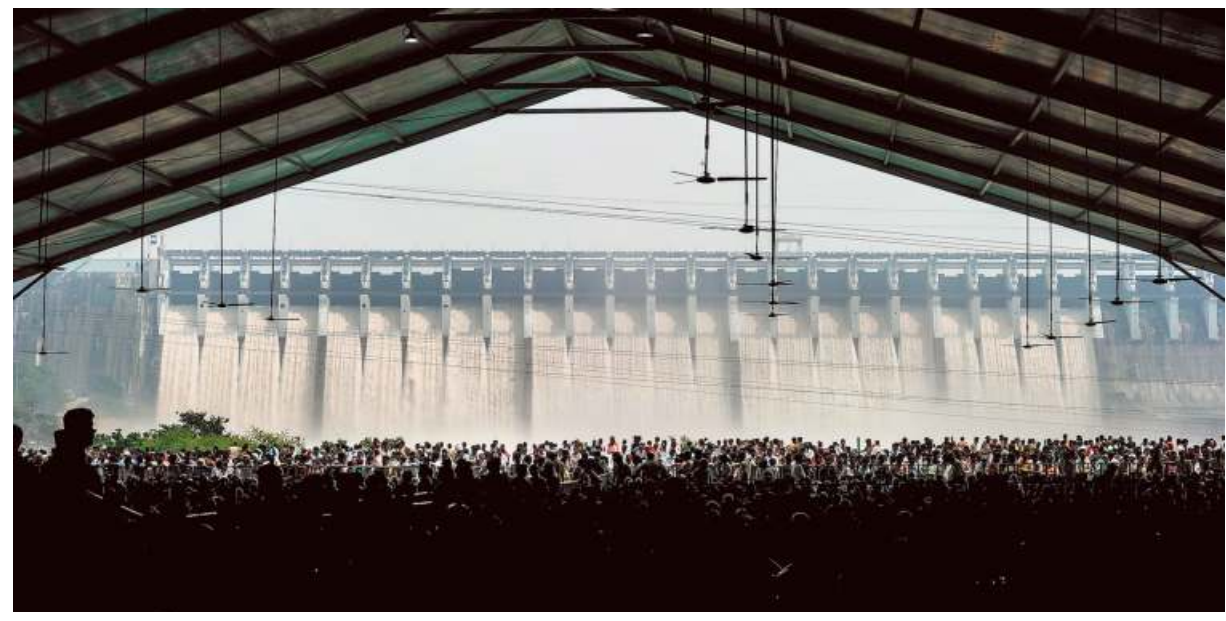
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA/BETTIAH

All four persons named as accused in the Bettiah gang-rape case have been arrested and the complainant, who claimed she was 18 years old, turned out to be a minor, a police officer said on Tuesday.

‘Confessed involvement’
Additional Director General of Police (Headquarters) Jitendra Kumar said that the four accused, including two brothers, have confessed to their involvement with the girl last week.

Bettiah SP Jayantkant said all four accused named in the FIR – Akash Kumar, Sajjan Kumar, Kundan Kumar and Anshu Kumar – have been arrested.

“All of them, including si-



Silver cascade: People watching the release of water from the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada at Kevadiya on Tuesday. For the first time since the height of the dam was raised in 2017, the water level reached its peak of 138.68 m. ■VIJAY SONEJI

J&K move inspired by Patel: PM

Modi recalls former Home Minister’s vision at a rally near Sardar Sarovar dam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
AHMEDABAD

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel’s vision inspired the Union government’s recent move on Jammu and Kashmir, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday. Praising the former Home Minister for his role in unifying the country, Mr. Modi said the government’s move was aimed at resolving the decades-old issue with implications on national security.

“The people of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh region had to face discrimination for 70 years due to which India had to face consequences in the form of separatism, violence, etc. Taking inspiration from Sardar Patel, the country has now decided to tread on a new path to resolve the decades-old problems,” he said.

Blaming violence and separatism for lack of development in the insurgency-hit State, he said, “We will make



Meal with mother: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his mother Hiraben on the occasion of his 69th birthday. ■PTI

the stream of development flow through Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh and Kargil regions by winning the faith of the local people.”

Celebration at home

Mr. Modi, who turned 69 on Tuesday and celebrated his birthday in Gujarat, his home State, made the remarks at a rally near the Sardar Sarovar Dam, where he offered prayers. The dam achieved the full reservoir

level for the first time, prompting State-wide celebrations.

Lauding Sardar Patel for his role in the annexation of Hyderabad princely State with the Indian Union in 1948, the Prime Minister said September 17 was celebrated as the Hyderabad Liberation Day because of the vision of the late leader.

“Just imagine that had the foresight of Sardar Patel not been there and he would not

have been given the task of integration, what kind of a map India would have now. Today, India is trying to fulfil his resolution of “One India, excellent India” and complete his uncompleted tasks,” he said.

Mr. Modi said he was happy to see the rising number of visitors to the Statue of Unity of Sardar Patel, built by the Gujarat government at a cost of ₹3,000 crore overlooking the Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada river.

Mr. Modi arrived at Kevadiya in the morning to take part in the “Namami Narmada” festival being celebrated by the State government to mark the filling up of the dam to its full reservoir level of 138.68 metres due to heavy inflow of waters from the Narmada’s catchment areas in Madhya Pradesh. After attending the rally in Kevadiya, the Prime Minister flew back to Gandhinagar where he visited his mother.

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Exhibition marks PM’s birthday

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

On Tuesday, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi marked his 69th birthday on a visit to Gujarat, his Cabinet colleagues shared their birthday greetings for him at events held by their Ministries on various issues.

Culture Minister Prahlaad Singh Patel inaugurated an exhibition of photos of monuments and archaeological sites in Kashmir, mostly in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, a first according to the Ministry, at the National Monuments Authority’s headquarters here.

Union Minister of State for the Prime Minister’s Office Jitendra Singh was also a part of the inauguration ceremony.

Amid the photos of monuments in PoK, including the Shiva temple in Mirpur and Red Fort or Muzaffarabad Fort, were two exhibits on Mr. Modi.

In one of them, a photo of the Kirti Toran in Vadnagar in Gujarat was displayed with the inscription: “The village where our Prime Minister was born – The boy who sold tea near Kirti Toran became the greatest icon of India’s Kirti – Glory world over (sic).” Photos of Mr. Modi – one from his childhood and one current – were on display.

Another exhibit wishing the Prime Minister on his birthday was placed next to the Kirti Toran photo.

Assam police take action in stripping case

Two police personnel suspended

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Assam Police on Tuesday suspended the officer-in-charge (OC) and a female constable of a police station in Darrang district for allegedly stripping and torturing three women – one of them in an early stage of pregnancy – during interrogation in an abduction case.

This followed a complaint lodged against Mahendra Sarma, the OC of Burha police station, by the Assam State Commission for Women.

The police from Darrang had on September 9 come to Guwahati in search of one Rafiqul Islam accused of abducting a girl in the district’s Burha police station. In-

stead, they picked up three of his female relatives.

Aided by the female constable, Mr. Sarma allegedly stripped and thrashed the trio throughout the night besides threatening to shoot them if they complained against him.

The victims lodged a complaint with the district’s Superintendent of Police Amrit Bhuyan on September 10 but investigation into the case was allegedly delayed.

“We have placed the OC and the female constable under suspension. Deputy Inspector General Brajenjit Sinha has been asked to investigate,” Assam’s Director-General of Police Kuladhar Saikia told *The Hindu*.

Ayodhya: SC delves into motifs

Advocate says arguments on the Hindu side are based on theology not legality

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Lotus carvings on Kasauti pillars, figurines, Garuda flanked by two lions and a Dwarapal are not typical features of a mosque, the Supreme Court confronted the Muslim side in the Ayodhya hearing on Tuesday.

The questions from the Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Ranjan Gogoi was based on architectural features and photographs of materials believed to be unearthed from the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhumih site.

But senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan countered the court’s questions, saying the “decorative pieces could have come from anywhere”. These objects and photographs of carvings did not provide a conclusive proof that there was once a temple dedicated to a particular deity - Lord Ram. “There is no direct evidence of an image

of a God in Ramjanmabhumih,” he argued.

Mr. Dhavan said the Hindu side’s argument of a temple of Lord Ram drew strength from the impression that mosques should be simple, unadorned. Mr. Dhavan said the Hindu side arguments were based on theology rather than legality and concrete proof.

“The theological argument raised here is just because they see some flowers, a lotus, this place is unIslamic and the mosque is not a mosque. It is too much to say that Islam is out, mosque is out just because you see a few figurines, flowers, etc. It is a little too rich to say a mosque is not mosque and prayer offered was not prayer,” he argued.

Justice D.Y. Chandrachud suggested the presence of these material objects, which were either found at the site of the mosque or formed part of the Babri



Masjid’s architecture, may have been due to cultural assimilation. “Cultural assimilations occur after invasions. We see how certain religions are practised differently in different countries,” Justice Chandrachud pointed out.

Latching on to that, Mr. Dhavan said, “Mosques were not built by Muslims alone... Taj Mahal was not built by Muslims alone. Both Hindu and Muslim labourers joined hands.”

“Just because there is cross near a temple in Kerala, it does not mean the temple stops being a temple,” Mr. Dhavan highlighted how

places of worship of different religions coexist in physical proximity.

He said pillars would have either been found lying around at the time of the construction of the mosque or were found broken and fixed to be used for the mosque, or they were brought to the site from other places.

The presence of these objects did not make Babri mosque “unIslamic or un-Quranic”. “You cannot use them to claim Muslims were not praying to Allah there but to some other god,” Mr. Dhavan said.

Justice S.A. Bobde asked whether there was any witness to back their claim that these materials and carvings were a result of cultural assimilation.

Mr. Dhavan replied, “Assimilation is there for My Lord to see. There is a chhabutra outside and a mosque inside. The British had allowed both for the sake of peace.”

India-U.S. bilateral planned in New York

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON DC

Apart from U.S. President Donald Trump’s participation in Sunday’s “Howdy, Modi!” diaspora event in Houston, it is understood that there will be an India-U.S. bilateral when both leaders are in New York City, on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly’s 74th session.

Mr. Trump is due to address the General Assembly

on September 24, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on September 27.

Mr. Trump also hinted at this when he said, “We’ll be meeting with India and Pakistan,” in response to a question on Monday about the Houston event. “So, I’ll see Prime Minister Modi and I will – we’ll be meeting with India and Pakistan. And I think a lot of progress has been made there. A lot of progress,” he said.



APPEAL

Name of Patient: Debmalya Sardar, 8 months. Hospital Name: Columbia Asia Hospital. Diagnosis: suffering from Cystic Congenital Heart Disease - Moderate Perimembranous VSD-L-R Shunt, RVOT Muscular Bundle with severe RVOTO. He requires to undergo ICR (Open Heart Surgery) at the earliest. The estimated cost of the surgery is Rs. 3,50,000.

We request kind hearted Philanthropists to save him. Kindly send donation by Cheque / D.D. / M.O. favouring Save Poor Lives A/c Debmalya Sardar S/B Account Code: SBIN001855, which is exempted under 80G of I.T. Act.

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