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Hunt for missing jumbo ends, mahout arrested

NEW DELHI
 An elephant which had been missing for the last two months was rescued and its mahout arrested on late Tuesday night from east Delhi. The 47-year-old jumbo, Laxmi, was sent to an elephant rescue centre at Ban Santour in Haryana around 9 p.m. on Wednesday, said forest department officials.

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Court raps Delhi govt. over delay in sedition case

NEW DELHI
 A city court on Wednesday pulled up the AAP government for "delaying" the decision on a Delhi police request for sanction to prosecute former JNUSU president Kanhaiya Kumar and others in a sedition case. "The time which is being taken to finalise the issue of sanction or otherwise has caused wastage of judicial time as the case has been listed and adjourned repeatedly since the filing of the chargesheet," CMM Manish Khurana said.

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SC allows Ayodhya mediation committee to resume talks

Court hints that hearings of the appeals are likely to be completed by October 18

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed the Ayodhya mediation committee to resume talks with the disputing Hindu and Muslim parties even as it indicated that the ongoing hearings of the appeals before a Constitution Bench is likely to finish by October 18.

Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi is scheduled to retire on November 17. If the hearings are completed by October 18, the court will have a month to write the judgment for the over 70-year-old Ramjanmabhoombi-Babri Masjid title dispute.

Another chance
 By giving mediation another chance, the court has opened the doors again for an amicable settlement of the dispute among the parties. The mediation panel, if it is successful in patching up a settlement, can move the court with the terms of the settlement anytime during the hearings or after the judgment is reserved but before the verdict is pronounced.

The court said mediation should continue to remain confidential and would be carried on simultaneously with the court proceedings, which have been going on

Healing and hearing

March 8: Constitution Bench appoints former SC judge F.M.I. Kalifulla, senior advocate Sriram Panchu and spiritual guru Sri Sri Ravishankar as mediators to "heal minds and hearts" of Muslims & Hindus over title dispute

On July 9: Gopal Singh Visharad, an original claimant who filed a title suit in 1950, through his survivor Rajendra Singh, claimed the mediators were making no real progress

July 11: SC asked Justice Kalifulla to submit a report by July 31

July 29: Efforts collapsed after hardliners on both sides refused to co-operate

August 2: SC said daily hearings to start from August 6

Over 25 hearings later, Nirvani Akhara and Sunni Waqf Board wrote to the mediation panel, urging it to resume talks

September 18: Bench allows talks to resume and continue simultaneously with court hearings. It urged lawyers to finish the hearings by October 18, giving the judges one month to write their judgments before the CJI, who heads the Bench, retires on November 17

for over 25 days. The Bench said it may even relegate Saturdays for the Ayodhya hearings if required.

On September 17, the court asked the lawyers to chalk out a timeline to present their oral arguments in the appeals. The lawyers had conveyed it on Wednesday, after which the Bench estimated the hearings could be closed by October 18.

On September 16, the mediation committee filed in parallel a short memorandum informing the court that parties across the Hindu-Muslim divide had approached it with a request to resume talks to amicably resolve the dispute.

The memorandum suggested that mediation could continue even as the court

continues to hear the appeals.

The parties asked the mediators - former Supreme Court judge F.M.I. Kalifulla, spiritual guru Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and senior advocate Sriram Panchu - that talks should resume from the point where they were abruptly dropped at the last minute on July 29 due to resistance from certain blocs across the religious divide, causing heartburn among other stakeholders.

In limbo

The Constitution Bench announced the failure to reach a final settlement in a hearing on August 2. Adjudication of the pending appeals, which were kept in limbo due to the mediation, com-

menced from August 6. The Sunni Waqf Board is arguing its case.

The mediation effort was initiated by the court on March 8 in a bid to heal minds and hearts. The Bench had explained that the case was "not about the 1500 sq ft of disputed land, but about religious sentiments." The mediation committee had held several rounds of talks with the stakeholders in Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh, of which the disputed area in Ayodhya is a part. The proceedings were held in camera and care was taken to maintain confidentiality to ensure its success.

RAM CHABUTRA TURNS FOCAL POINT OF HEARING PAGE 13

Never spoke of imposing Hindi: Shah

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

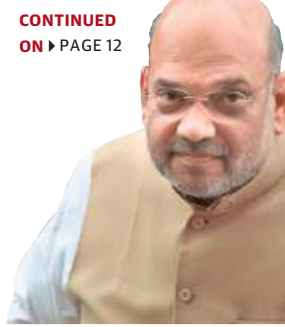
Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday claimed that he did not push for Hindi over regional languages.

Referring to his speech on the occasion of Hindi Divas on Saturday where he made a pitch for a common language for India, the Home Minister said that to end the confusion, people should listen to his speech carefully but "if someone wants to do politics, it is their choice."

"I have just made the request. I have failed to understand what is wrong in that," he said at an event organised by Hindi daily *Hindustan* in Ranchi.

Clarifying his comments, he said, "A child can perform, a child's proper mental growth is possible only when the child studies in mother tongue. Mother tongue does not mean Hindi."

(With PTI inputs)



CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Cabinet approves ban on e-cigarettes

It cites need to protect public health

Up in smoke

Wednesday's move follows an advisory by the government in 2018 to all States to consider banning e-cigarettes

e-cigarettes are brought from China and other countries and are not manufactured in India. They are also available online

WHO too urged member countries to take appropriate steps. It does not endorse e-cigarettes as cessation aids

16 States & one Union Territory have already banned them. The Indian Council of Medical Research, in a recent paper, had recommended a complete ban on them

They are marketed as being safer than conventional cigarettes but this is false. Available literature suggests that they may act as gateway products to induce non-smokers to nicotine use



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a ban on e-cigarettes, citing the need to take early action to protect public health.

Upon promulgation of the ordinance, any production, manufacturing, import, export, transport, sale (including online sale), distribution or advertisement (including online advertisement) of e-cigarettes shall be a cognisable offence punishable with imprisonment of up to one year, or fine up to ₹1 lakh, or both for the first offence; and imprisonment of up to three years and fine up to ₹5 lakh for a subsequent offence. Storage of electronic-cigarettes shall also be punishable with im-

prisonment of up to 6 months or a fine of up to ₹50,000 or both.

Children at risk

"Envisioned as a tool to combat tobacco addiction, electronic cigarettes and other vaping products have become a major problem and increase the risk of children adopting them," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said at a media briefing.

As per a release issued by the Centre, owners of existing stocks of e-cigarettes on the date of commencement of the ordinance will have to *suo motu* declare and deposit these with the nearest police station.

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Xi-Modi meet likely to skirt Kashmir issue

China had criticised Centre's move

ATUL ANEJA BEIJING

China on Tuesday signalled that the Kashmir issue is unlikely to be spotlighted during the informal summit in India between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping.



Xi Jinping

"I think for those things like Kashmir... I don't think it will be a major topic occupying the talks, that is my understanding," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said, during an interaction with media from Asia and Africa, undergoing an 11-month training course in China. "But for the leaders, they will be free to talk about

whatever they like," she said in response to a question.

China had earlier criticised India, especially for its August 5 decision to accord Union Territory status to Ladakh, which shares a disputed border with China.

CONTINUED PAGE 12

Pak. denies use of its airspace for Modi's flight

MEHMAL SARFRAZ LAHORE

Pakistan on Wednesday announced that it would not allow the use of its airspace for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flight to Germany. The official Twitter account of the Government of Pakistan (@pid.gov) shared a short video of Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi making this announcement.

Raveesh Kumar, MEA spokesperson, said, "We regret the decision of the Government of Pakistan to deny overflight clearance for the VVIP special flight for a second time in two weeks, which is otherwise granted routinely by any normal country."

DETAILS ON PAGE 13

Tabrez case accused face murder charge

Jharkhand Police does U-turn, submits supplementary chargesheet

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR

Making a U-turn in the Tabrez Ansari lynching case after allegations of attempts to weaken the case, the Jharkhand police submitted a supplementary chargesheet on Wednesday, seeking punishment under Section 302 of the IPC (murder) against 11 of the accused.

Another two accused, who were apprehended later, would also face murder charges. The Seraikela-Kharsawan police had earlier dropped the murder charges against the accused, contending that Ansari had died of cardiac arrest due to stress, and not injury. The charges were changed on the basis of a fresh forensic re-



Sahista Pervez, right, wife of Tabrez Ansari, being comforted by her mother. FILE PHOTO

port.

The Jharkhand police headquarters, in a press statement, said: "The reason of death was reserved in view of pending viscera examination in the post-mortem report received by police during the time of submission of charge sheet

earlier. In the report of the Forensic Science Laboratory, doctors had opined that the death was caused due to cardiac arrest. But, the reason of heart attack was not clear."

For further investigation, police had sought an opinion from a board of doctors of

the MGM Medical College and Hospital.

On the basis of the new report, police came to the conclusion that the cardiac arrest was caused by the preceding violence inflicted with "hard and blunt object."

Besides, the police have also received the integrity report of the video in which Tabrez was seen brutally beaten up.

"There has been no tampering found in the viral video. So during further investigation on the basis of additional evidences, accused have been charged under section 302," the police said.

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Fuel prices see steepest hike since July 5

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Oil marketing companies on Wednesday raised petrol and diesel prices by 0.25 paise and 0.24 paise a litre, respectively, the largest increase in nearly two-and-a-half months.

Petrol will now cost ₹72.42 a litre and diesel ₹65.82 in Delhi, the reference market for the nation. The latest hike is the second consecutive large increase in petrol and diesel prices. On Tuesday, oil marketing companies increased the prices by 0.14 paise and 0.15 paise, respectively.

The increase on Wednesday was the largest since July 5.

DETAILS ON PAGE 13

Livestock fine transforms Arunachal village

Ledum gets a makeover after elders prescribed penalties for roaming pigs & cows

RAHUL KARMAKAR LEDUM

Breaking the rules of the road attracts little or no fine in Arunachal Pradesh, unless the "traffic law" violator is a pig or a cow in a village in the Frontier State's East Siang district.

Three years before the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, prescribed heavy penalties for traffic violators across India, the elders of Ledum village imposed fines on livestock loitering on the road leading to district headquarters Pasighat.

The quantum of fine read: a bullet for a pig, ₹500 for a cow and the possibility of it being auctioned off.

"It was difficult at first to impose the fine. Some village



Model village: The entrance to Ledum. RAHUL KARMAKAR

youth came out with their hunting guns and began shooting the pigs to let people know the rules were not to be taken lightly," Tatar Taying, the 53-year-old *gaon burah* (village elder), told *The Hindu*.

A gun is a prized possession for many men of the Adi community whose festivals include Aran that involves community hunting.

Ledum has 112 Adi households while three families belong to the Galo community.

By early 2017, the village youth shot 10 pigs. The pig-rearers have never since let the animals out.

The fine on the cows was conditional, though. "We kept grazing in mind and let the cattle use the road during the day. But owners

were fined ₹500 per cow if that was let out after dusk," said Tatiram Padung, another elder.

In 2016-17, the village committee collected ₹5,000 in 'bovine fine'. It fell to ₹2,500 and ₹1,500 during the subsequent financial years. Only ₹500 has been collected since April this year. "The dip in fines is a good sign, implying the people are getting used to cleanliness, which is remarkable for a village that was once tagged the dirtiest in central Arunachal," said Ajay Kamsi, a cultural activist. He attributed much of the change in the mindset to John Pada, a local and now the Superintendent of Police of Kamle district, who spread awareness.

'Who said we are going to destroy Parliament?'

Urban Affairs Minister says all options are open for redevelopment plan

DAMINI NATH NEW DELHI

A new office building for staff and all MPs linked to Parliament via an underground pathway or a new structure on top of the existing building are among the options the Centre is open to as it works on its redevelopment plan for the Central Vista, Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Wednesday.

After the government's ambitious plan of redeveloping Parliament, the 3-km Central Vista that stretches from Rashtrapati Bhawan till India Gate and development of a common Central Secretariat was announced last week, some architects raised concerns about the project. The Cen-



Hardeep Singh Puri

are going to destroy Parliament? All we have done so far is to invite ideas. If merely by inviting ideas, a building falls, then I believe it's not an idea, it's something else," he said.

Govt. to take call soon
 Later, speaking to reporters, he said more space could be added "in the chamber" to make way for expansion of Parliament after future delimitation.

The offices of staff and Ministers in Parliament currently could be shifted to a new building in the complex connected through an underground path, he said.

In his speech earlier, Mr. Puri had said the option of making a "dhaancha" or structure on top was also on the table. The new building would also hold of-

fices for all MPs, which are not available to them now.

He said a "political call" would be taken after the CPWD assesses the bids, the last day for which is September 30.

Speaking about the history of the CPWD, which was established 165 years ago by the British, Mr. Puri said: "CPWD was born in the 1850s, in Lord Dalhousie's period. The buildings constructed in that period reflected the colonial ethos that the country was subjected to."

He added that the redevelopment of the Central Vista was only one part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream.

"He has a vision for India," he said.

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