

NEARBY



Former Uttarakhand CM Rawat booked for graft

NEW DELHI  
The Central Bureau of Investigation has booked former Uttarakhand Chief Minister Harish Rawat, his then Cabinet colleague Minister Harak Singh Rawat, Samachar Plus news channel CEO Umesh Kumar and others on graft charge. Mr. Harak Rawat is now in the Cabinet of the BJP government in the State.

NATION ► PAGE 9

Complete your Prelims GS preparation in 30 weeks with 55 UPSC level Test Series. PT Toppers' Pack Course contains 10 RED BOOKS  
Covering Static & Current Affairs  
crack IAS.com  
Mentorship, Guidance  
Call Now! 9217070707  
crackiasquery@gmail.com

Six MLAs join BJP in Jharkhand

PATNA  
The ruling BJP in Jharkhand got a shot in the arm ahead of the Assembly election in the State as six Opposition MLAs, including two from the Congress and three from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, joined the party at a function in Ranchi on Wednesday.

NEWS ► PAGE 12

39 bodies found in truck in London

Vehicle is believed to be from Bulgaria; involvement of traffickers suspected

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE  
GRAYS

Britain launched a major murder investigation after 39 bodies were found in a truck at an industrial park in Grays, east of London, on Wednesday.

The truck driver, a 25-year-old man from Northern Ireland, has been arrested on suspicion of murder.

The local police force, who are working with immigration officials, said their priority was to try to identify the victims, thought at this stage to be 38 adults and one

teenager. "We believe the lorry is from Bulgaria," said Essex police chief superintendent Andrew Mariner.

Appalled, says PM

The tragedy sparked questions about the route taken by the truck – and whether people trafficking had played a part.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said he was receiving regular updates, and sent his sympathies to the victims' families. "I'm appalled by this tragic incident in Essex," he said.



Forensic officers examining the truck found at Essex in south England with 39 bodies on Wednesday. • AP

Over 1,700 colonies to be regularised in Delhi

DDA to start process immediately; over 40 lakh people likely to benefit

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Addressing a long-pending demand of residents of Delhi's unauthorised colonies, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a proposal to grant ownership and transfer rights for properties in 1,797 colonies that had been identified in 2014.

The decision comes ahead of Delhi Assembly elections, which are in due early 2020.

Announcing the decision taken by the Cabinet at a meeting chaired by Prime Mi-

**Next steps**

- DDA to delineate boundaries of unauthorised colonies
- Local area plans for each colony to be prepared by DDA
- Conveyance deed will be executed for residential use, irrespective of use

DDA to set up portal for applications by residents

Residents will have a year to pay the charges

nister Narendra Modi, Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar said about 40 lakh people would benefit from this decision. Union Housing and Ur-

ban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said the number could be higher at 50 lakh. He said the Delhi Development Authority would start the process immediately.

Apart from buying and selling of these properties, people will be able to get loans for them and the government can carry out development works there. He added that a "nominal" amount would be charged - 0.5% of the circle rate for properties on government land and less than 100 square metres in size, 1% for those 100 to 250 square metres and 2.5% for those more than 250 square metres.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

WE THANK CENTRE: CM ► PAGE 3

Joint venture



Villagers taking part in community fishing at Tetelia village on the outskirts of Guwahati, Assam, on Wednesday. Once the paddy planting season is over, people descend on shallow waterbodies in groups to try their luck. • RITU RAJ KONWAR

Rabi crop MSP to be hiked for next season

'Decision to increase farmers' incomes'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday decided to hike the minimum support price (MSP) for rabi crops for the marketing season 2020-21. The increase is based on the principle that MSP should be at least 1.5 times the all-India weighted average cost of production, a press release said.

"This MSP policy, whereby the farmers are assured of a minimum of 50% as margin of profit, is one of the important and progressive steps towards doubling farmers' income by 2022 and improving their welfare substantively," the release said. The highest increase has been recommended for lentils (increase of ₹325 to ₹4,800 a quintal) followed by safflower (increase of ₹270 to ₹5,215 a quintal) and gram (an increase of ₹255 to ₹4,875).

The MSP of rapeseed and mustard has been increased



Threshing on at a farm near Delhi. • V.V. KRISHNAN

by ₹225 to ₹4,425. For both wheat and barley, it has been increased by ₹85 to ₹1,925 and ₹1,525 per quintal, respectively. "In the case of cereals, the Food Corporation of India and other designated State agencies would continue to provide price support to the farmers," the government said. "State governments will undertake procurement of coarse grains with the prior approval of the Government and would distribute the entire procured quantity under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). The subsidy will be provided only for the quantity issued under NFSA."

Justice Mishra again refuses to recuse himself

Bench is re-examining the judge's order

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

Supreme Court judge Arun Mishra on Wednesday refused to withdraw from heading a Constitution Bench re-examining his own judgment on compensation under Section 24 of the land acquisition law of 2013.

A five-judge Bench led by Justice Mishra declined a plea made by several parties urging him to recuse himself from the hearing, as a Bench led by him, in February 8 last year, authored a majority judgment that was in conflict with a 2014 verdict of the court.

The Constitution Bench was set up by the Chief Justice of India to formulate the correct interpretation of the land acquisition provision. The 2014 judgment was, till Justice Mishra's judgment, considered the settled law on land acquisition compensation.

'Delhi will come to halt if Biharis stop working'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Janata Dal (United) president and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday said that Delhi would come to a standstill if "Biharis stopped working for a day".

Launching a veiled attack on politicians who had recently taunted Biharis for coming to Delhi only to avail themselves of medical benefits, Mr. Kumar said: "Delhi, being the national capital, belongs as much to Bihar as to any other State and we are free to come here."

DETAILS ON ► PAGE 5

₹70,000-crore BSNL, MTNL package cleared

In-principle Cabinet approval for merger, VRS proposal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

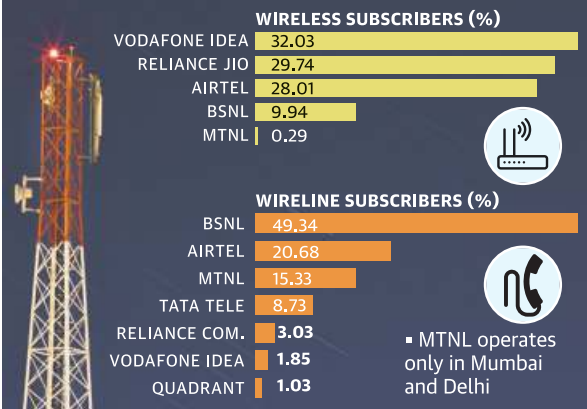
In an effort to revive the beleaguered state-owned telecom firms BSNL and MTNL, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a package worth nearly ₹70,000 crore. The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also gave an in-principle nod for the merger of the two entities.

Under the package, 4G spectrum worth ₹20,000 crore will be administratively allotted to the two firms. Their debt will be restructured by raising bonds with sovereign guarantee worth ₹15,000 crore and a voluntary retirement scheme, on an outlay of ₹30,000 crore, will be offered to the employees. The government also plans to monetise the assets of the two firms worth ₹38,000 crore.

"The thinking of our government is very clear. These are strategic assets of India. They are most cooperative when there is a natural calamity, the entire Army network is managed by them and even for banks most of the network is man-

Waves of change

BSNL and MTNL will account for 10% of the total wireless subscribers and nearly 65% of the wireline subscriber base



aged by BSNL. They are neither being closed or disinvested or hived off to a third party. We want to make these competitive and bring in professionalism," Communications Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said.

With these steps, BSNL and MTNL are expected to turn EBITDA (Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortization) positive in the next two years, he said. Stating that an immediate merger will not be feasible,

given that MTNL is a listed entity, he said till the time the process is completed, MTNL will work as a subsidiary of BSNL.

Mr. Prasad said administrative allotment of spectrum for 4G services to BSNL and MTNL will enable the PSUs to provide broadband and other data services. This spectrum will be funded by the government via capital infusion of ₹20,140 crore.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12