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NEARBY



Haryana legislators lobby for berths

CHANDIGARH
After the formation of the BJP-Jannayak Janta Party coalition government in Haryana, the newly elected MLAs are lobbying for berths in the ministries. A BJP source said the Council of Ministers was likely to be finalised within this week.

NEWS ► PAGE 12



The Hindu's iconic crossword now playable online

The Hindu's iconic Cryptic Crossword is now available online in a playable, interactive form. It is the prime offering on Crossword+, The Hindu Group's website for interactive games. The website also has crosswords from *The Guardian* and *Sportstar*, along with Sudokus and puzzles for children. To subscribe: www.crossword.thehindu.com

Editor,
The Hindu

Govt. signals shift in stand, allows EU MPs to visit Srinagar

Embassy in Delhi says parliamentarians are in India in their 'personal capacity'

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Nearly three months after its decision on Article 370, the Union government has allowed a delegation comprising 27 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from Italy, Britain, France, Germany, Czech Republic and Poland to travel to Srinagar on Tuesday to see the situation there. The European Union (EU) Embassy in Delhi has clarified that the MEPs were in India in their "personal capacity".

This is the first time the government has allowed such a visit to the Kashmir Valley since August 5, when hundreds of leaders were taken into custody and communication lines cut.

Meet PM, Vice-President

On Monday, the MEPs met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu. At a lunch hosted by National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, they met a few mainstream Kashmiri leaders, including former Minister Muzaffar Beigh from the PDP and winners of the Block Development Council polls held in J&K last week.



Members of the European Parliament meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Monday. ■ ANI

They also met External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar for dinner. PDP leader Altaf Bukhari and Usman Majeed of the Congress too interacted with the EU members.

"Urgent action must be taken against all those who support or sponsor terrorists or support such activities and organisations or use terrorism as a state policy," the Prime Minister told the delegation in a reference to Pakistan, and hoped their visit to Srinagar would acquaint them with the development priorities of the region.

The delegation's visit to

Jammu & Kashmir was being coordinated with the NSA's office, said officials there, as Mr. Doval has been the government's point person on the move to dilute Article 370 and bifurcate the State into Union Territories.

To visit schools

While in Srinagar, the MEPs are expected to visit schools, where Class 10 exams begin on Tuesday, and receive briefings on the security situation. Significantly, the majority of MEPs belong to far-right, anti-immigration parties in the European Union,

Outright insult of Parliament, says Congress

Political parties expressed outrage at the Centre's decision to take an EU delegation to Jammu and Kashmir, while no Indian MP has so far been allowed to visit. Congress leader and Rajya Sabha MP Jairam Ramesh called it an "outright insult" of Parliament. ► PAGE 13

including Italy's Forza Italia, France's Rassemblement National, Poland's Justice and Law party, Germany's Alternative Fur Deutschland (AFD) and UK's Brexit Party.

However, a Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) official, who said other foreign groups may also be allowed to visit J&K, ruled out any political bias in the invitations, adding that they were "identified on the basis of their convenience to visit".

(With inputs from Vijaita Singh)

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

IS chief Baghdadi killed in U.S. raid

Cornered terrorist set off suicide vest

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Sunday that the Islamic State (IS) group's elusive leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi had been killed, dying "like a dog" in a night raid by U.S. special forces in northwest Syria.

Mr. Trump told the nation in a televised White House address that a "large number" of IS militants were killed during the raid. Cornered in a tunnel, Baghdadi detonated a suicide vest. "He died after running into a dead-end tunnel, whimpering and crying and screaming all the way," Mr. Trump said, adding that three of Baghdadi's children were also killed in the blast.

Mr. Trump said the raid – involving eight helicopters flying more than an hour from an undisclosed base – was carried out with the cooperation of Russia, Syria, Turkey and Iraq. He also thanked the Syrian Kurds "for a certain support they were able to give us."

Mr. Trump's National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien described the dramatic message the President and his advisers received as they monitored the raid from the White House Situa-



Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

tion Room. "The commander of the mission called and said, '100 per cent confidence, Jackpot'" – meaning Baghdadi was dead – Mr. O'Brien said on NBC.

Identity confirmed

Baghdadi, an Iraqi native, was believed to be 48 years old. His death has been reported several times over the years. Mr. Trump said there was no doubt this time, with a DNA field test confirming his identity.

At its height, IS controlled a swath of Iraq and Syria in a self-declared caliphate, brutally imposing a puritanical version of Islam and planning terror attacks. It took years of war before its final slice of territory in Syria was seized this March.

MORE REPORTS ► PAGE 14
EDITORIAL ► PAGE 10

European Union grants Brexit delay

REUTERS
BRUSSELS

The European Union (EU) on Monday agreed to a three-month flexible delay to Britain's departure from the bloc as Prime Minister Boris Johnson pushes for an election after opponents forced him to request an extension.

Just days before the U.K. is formally due to leave the EU on October 31, Brexit is hanging in the balance as British politicians are no closer to reaching a consensus on how, when or even if the divorce should take place. "The EU27 has agreed that it will accept the U.K.'s request for a Brexit 'flexextension' until 31 January 2020," European Council president Donald Tusk said in a tweet, referring to the idea of a "flexible extension".

EU member-states will need Britain to formally reply to the offer of a three-month delay before launching a "written procedure", whereby governments will have 24 hours to accept or reject. Mr. Johnson will respond to the EU's delay offer once he has reviewed the details, his spokesman said.

EXTENSION COMES WITH CONDITIONS ► PAGE 14

Police in gunbattle with Maoists in Kerala

Patrol engages group in Palakkad

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala police said they had either injured or killed at least three suspected Maoists in a gunbattle between the armed irregulars and Thunderbolt commandos in the Agali forests of Palakkad district early on Monday.

Top officials told *The Hindu* that the Maoist casualties could include a woman.

The men were later identified as Karthi and Suresh. The police are yet to recover the bodies.

Commandos safe

The commandos suffered no casualties in the firefight that unfolded sporadically in the dense Manjakandi forests in the Attappady range

of the Mannarkkad forest division. Officials privy to the operation said the Thunderbolt commandos had the area under their control.

The Agali police were on their way to the spot to secure the bodies, collect evidence, map the crime scene, recover the weapons used by the commandos and the insurgents, and send them for forensic ballistic examination.

According to initial reports, the Thunderbolt commandos were on an area domination patrol and holding high ground when they sighted the "heavily armed" irregulars.

(With inputs from Palakkad)

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

Fast and furious



Men of the armed Sikh order Nihang show their horse-riding skills during a religious procession on 'Fateh Divas', or 'Victory Day', in Amritsar on Monday. ■ PTI

BJP, Sena teams meet Governor separately

Power-sharing tussle continues

SHARAD VYAS
MUMBAI

As the tussle for power sharing continues in Maharashtra, delegations of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Shiv Sena met Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari separately at Raj Bhavan on Monday. The BJP delegation was led by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and the Sena team by Transport Minister Diwakar Raote.

The two said the meeting was just a courtesy call to extend Deepavali greetings to the Governor, but party sources indicated a discussion on the modalities of government formation did take place. The alliance partners had secured the support of five more Independent legislators, party



Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis with Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari. ■ PTI

leaders said. "Transport Minister Diwakar Raote called on the Governor and extended Deepavali greetings. The Chief Minister too exchanged greetings with the Governor," said a release from the Governor's office.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

Capital's air quality dips to season's worst

'Very poor' to 'severe' AQI, but post-Deepavali air cleaner compared with previous years

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi's air quality nosedived to the season's worst on Monday, reaching the higher end of 'very poor' category on Monday.

While it was due to a mix of factors including bursting of firecrackers on Deepavali night that went beyond the Supreme Court-prescribed time slot of 8-10 p.m., the Capital experienced cleaner post-Deepavali air compared with previous years.

The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) said peak values of PM2.5 – the deadly respirable particles – were lower than last year's.

The average Air Quality Index of the past 24 hours at 4 p.m. on Monday was 368, 'very poor', according to the Central Pollution Control



Haze envelops the national capital on Monday, a day after Deepavali. ■ SANDEEP SAXENA

Board (CPCB) that functions under the Environment Ministry. But another government-run entity, the Earth Sciences Ministry's System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research (SAFAR), put the AQI in the 'severe' category at 506 around 4 p.m. Though both

CPCB's and SAFAR's AQI is an average of the past 24 hours, the former considers 37 monitoring stations and the latter 10.

Both also use different methodologies to arrive at their AQI figure.

The city's AQI at 9.30 p.m. on Monday stood at

401, 'severe' category, with 18 out of the 35 monitoring stations for which data were available showing 'severe' and the rest of the stations showing 'very poor' AQI, according to CPCB.

The peak level of PM2.5 on the intervening night of Sunday and Monday was re-

'Pollution lowest in last 5 years on Deepavali night'

NEW DELHI

Air pollution post-Deepavali celebrations was the lowest in the last five years, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal claimed on Monday. "After 8.30 p.m., I could hear the sound of crackers bursting. I was very happy that compared to the last few years, there was less bursting of crackers this year," said Mr. Kejriwal.

► PAGE 5

corded around midnight at 1,070 ug/m3, which was less than the peak level of 1,560 ug/m3 recorded at the same time in 2018, according to the DPCC. The peak value thus shows a reduction of about 31%.

SEE ALSO ► PAGE 5

Second round of Smart Cities, AMRUT may roll out in 2020

Those who were left out will be covered, says Minister

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The second round of the Centre's flagship urban development schemes – the Smart Cities Mission and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) – were being considered and could be rolled out in 2020, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Housing and Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri told *The Hindu*.

The first round of the Smart Cities Mission that covers 100 cities would be 50% complete, that is 50 cities, by December, Mr. Puri said.

"I need to be careful, I



Hardeep Puri

can't start talking about Smart Cities two because for too many people, their desire is to get another smart city. And this is a project till 2022. I think sometime around next year the pressures will begin to build, like it has in the AMRUT

scheme," he said, adding that the government was already working on it.

Mr. Puri said AMRUT, a five-year scheme, started in June 2015. Many of its water and sewage management projects would get completed towards the end of the scheme – June 2020. "People are talking about AMRUT 2. Because there are 500 cities and the criteria was a population of 1,00,000, which gave a coverage of something like 65% of urban population. So what about the remaining 35%? We'll need to come up with an AMRUT 2 scheme," he said.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12