

NEARBY



Air quality continues to be in 'severe' category

NEW DELHI
Air quality in the city continued to be in the 'severe' category for the second consecutive day on Thursday, precipitated by dense clouds and stalled winds.

CITY ► PAGE 4

Vivekananda statue defaced in JNU

NEW DELHI
The walls inside the JNU administration block building leading up to the V-C's office, the door of the office and the pedestal of a yet to be unveiled statue of Swami Vivekananda were defaced allegedly by protesters during the ongoing agitation against fee hike.

CITY ► PAGE 2

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FRIDAY REVIEW ► 8 PAGES
(TABLOID)

SC dismisses pleas to review Rafale ruling, raps Rahul

Necessity for the 36 aircraft has never been in dispute, says three-judge Bench

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

A three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Ranjan Gogoi, on Thursday dismissed petitions seeking a review of its December 14, 2018 judgment upholding the purchase of 36 Rafale fighter aircraft.

"The endeavour of the petitioners was to construe themselves as an appellate authority to determine each aspect of the Rafale purchase... We cannot lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with a contract for aircraft pending before different governments for quite some time. The necessity for those aircraft has never been in dispute... This court did not consider it appropriate to embark on a roving and fishing enquiry," Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul said, delivering the main judgment he co-authored with the CJI on Thursday.

The Bench also closed a criminal contempt petition filed by BJP leader Mee-nakshi Lekhi against Congress MP Rahul Gandhi for

Free to fly

The SC rejected pleas for a review of its judgment that gave a clean chit to the govt. on the purchase of 36 Rafale fighters. Key points of the judgment:



Rafale jets are a necessity. The contract had remained pending through

different governments

There is no ground to order an FIR by the CBI or a roving inquiry

It refused to reexamine aspects of pricing, the decision making process and the selection of offset partner saying the review applications cannot be entertained unless there is an "error apparent on the face of the record"

It said comparing the prices of bare aircraft and fully-loaded aircraft to weigh losses was like comparing apples and oranges

wrongly attributing the phrase *chowkidar chor hai* (the watchman is a thief) to the court.

It said Mr. Gandhi's statement was "unfortunate" and that a political leader of his stature should be "more careful in the future". It wondered whether Mr. Gandhi had even perused its order before making the statement. Mr. Gandhi has already apologised to the court.

Justice Kaul said the issues of registering an FIR and a consequent probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation were decided on merits by the court in the judgment in December last. There was no need to reopen them.

petitioners' case

The review petitioners included former Union Ministers Yashwant Sinha and Arun Shourie and lawyer

Justice Joseph has opened a huge door into investigation of RAFALE scam. An investigation must now begin in full earnest. A JPC must also be set up

RAHUL GANDHI, CONGRESS LEADER

After today's rebuke from the SC, Congress and its leader, for whom politics is above national interest, must apologise to the nation

AMIT SHAH, UNION HOME MINISTER

Prashant Bhushan.

The petitioners had alleged that the government concealed crucial facts and misled the Supreme Court into giving a favourable verdict.

They had sought the registration of an FIR and an investigation by the CBI into their complaint against the Rafale purchase.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12
MORE REPORTS ► PAGE 12

Sabarimala case: larger Bench to decide role of courts in religion

Chandrachud and Nariman deliver a dissenting judgment

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A majority judgment delivered by a five-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Ranjan Gogoi on Thursday kept a final decision on the Sabarimala review and writ petitions in abeyance till a larger Bench of seven judges delivers an "authoritative pronouncement" on the exact role a non-epistolary court can play in deciding whether a particular practice is essential or integral to a religion.

The review Bench, however, did not pass any interim order for stay of its September 28, 2018 judgment, which upheld the right of women aged between 10 and 50 to enter and worship at the temple in Kerala.

Chief Justice Gogoi, delivering the majority opinion along with Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Indu Malhotra, framed a series of questions for the larger Bench.

These include whether a court can probe if a practice is essential to a religion or should the question be left to the respective religious head; should "essential reli-

Another issue pending is ... on whether a particular practice is essential or integral to religion... It is time this court evolves a policy to do complete justice and for an authoritative enunciation of the constitutional principles by a larger bench of not less than seven judges

CHIEF JUSTICE RANJAN GOGOI, IN MAJORITY OPINION

What this court has before it is review petitions arising out of the judgment with regard to Sabarimala... If and when issues set out in the Chief Justice's judgment arise, they can appropriately be dealt with by the Bench/Benches which hear the petitions concerning Muslims, Parsis and Dawoodi Bohras

JUSTICE ROHINTON F. NARIMAN, IN DISSENT

gious practices" be afforded constitutional protection under Article 26 (freedom to manage religious affairs); and what is the "permissible extent" of judicial recognition a court should give to PILs filed by people who do not belong to the religion of which practices are under the scanner.

Justices Rohinton F. Nariman and D.Y. Chandrachud, however, joined to deliver a stinging dissent. Both dismissed the majority decision of a reference to a larger

Bench.

Both Justice Nariman and Justice Chandrachud were part of the Constitution Bench that delivered the original majority judgment in September 2018.

Justice Nariman, who wrote the dissent, said the judgment of a five-judge Constitution Bench was the last word on the interpretation of the Constitution.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12
MORE REPORTS ► PAGE 8
EDITORIAL ► PAGE 10

Man faces life term for bomb hoax call

He tried to stop wife from flying abroad

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The NIA has registered a case under the stringent Anti-Hijacking Act against a 28-year-old man who allegedly made a hoax call to the Delhi airport in August to stop his wife from leaving the country for work, claiming she was a suicide bomber.

This is the second such case to be investigated by the NIA under the Anti-Hijacking Act, 2016, that prescribes life imprisonment for making false calls of bomb threats.

The accused, Nasrudeen, hailing from Bihar's Sitamarhi and a resident of Chennai, was arrested from the Bawana Industrial area in Delhi for making the hoax call to the international airport.

On August 8, at 9 p.m., a call was received at the Delhi International Airport Limited's call centre in Gurugram

that a woman named Zabina had reached the airport and could cause a blast on a Dubai or Saudi Arabia-bound flight. On investigation, it was found out to be a hoax and Nasrudeen was arrested the next day.

In June, a special NIA court in Ahmedabad sentenced a businessman to life term and imposed a fine of ₹5 crore for placing a hoax hijack note on a Jet Airways plane in October 2017.

This was the first case investigated by the NIA under the Act after it came into force in 2017. The Act had replaced the 1982 Act.

The businessman, Birju Kishore Salla, said he committed the crime to force Jet to shut its Delhi operation, which would eventually lead his girlfriend, who worked in the airline's Delhi office, to come to Mumbai.

Fear factor



No pictures: Youth trying to avoid the camera while waiting to submit documents at a recruitment rally of the Border Security Force on the outskirts of Srinagar on Thursday. As many as 2,200 aspirants have applied for 1,300 posts. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

India's requests for Facebook user data rising sharply

The social media company got 22,684 official queries for information, second only to the U.S., in 2019

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA
NEW DELHI

The Indian government's requests for user data from Facebook increased nearly 37% in the first half of 2019, and at 22,684 queries, was the second highest globally, according to the Transparency Report of the US-based social networking site.

In comparison, Facebook received 16,580 requests in the January-June 2018 period and 20,805 requests during July-December that year. Of the 22,684 data requests, Facebook said it had produced some data in 54% of cases. "Facebook responds to government requests for data in accordance with applicable

law and our terms of service.

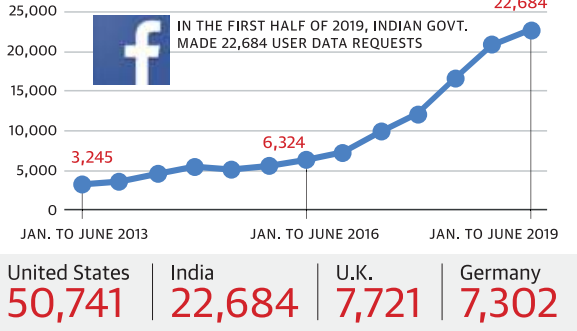
Each and every request we receive is carefully reviewed for legal sufficiency and we may reject or require greater specificity on requests that appear overly broad or vague," the company said.

Majority complied with

Globally, it received 1,28,617 such requests from governments. Of these, Facebook produced some data for 73.6% of cases. The US government submitted the maximum number of 50,714 requests for details of 82,461 Facebook users/accounts during the first half of the current year. The US was followed by India, whose 22,684 requests were

Seeking information

The government's user data requests from Facebook have steadily gone up in the last six years



for 33,324 users/accounts, the UK (7,721 requests for 10,550 user/accounts), Germany (7,302 requests on 9,800 users/accounts) and France (5,782 requests for

6,961 users/accounts). The report showed that during January-June 2019, Facebook had nearly 70 internet disruptions that affected its products in

about 17 countries. India topped the list with 40 disruptions.

However, as far as total duration of disruptions was concerned, India came in at number two with eight weeks, 2 days and 22 hours.

During the period reviewed, the social media giant also restricted access to 1,233 items of content, including 1,211 posts, two profiles, 19 pages and groups and one comment. "We permanently restricted access to content in India in response to legal requests from law enforcement agencies, court orders, and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology," the company said.

AAP's donations nearly doubled in 2018-19, says poll panel report

SP's total income reduced slightly during the same period

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

In the run-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the income of the Aam Aadmi Party from donations nearly doubled, according to the party's annual audited accounts for 2018-2019 submitted to the Election Commission of India.

The report, made public by the ECI on Wednesday, said AAP's "donations and contributions" went up from ₹10.61crore in 2017-2018 to ₹19.17 crore in 2018-2019. The party's expenditure on elections also shot up from ₹33.21 lakh in the previous financial year to ₹4.30 crore in 2018-2019.



AAP's "cash and cash equivalents" stood at ₹7.95 crore, which was over twice the amount on March 31, 2018, - ₹3.87 crore. In total, at the end of the financial year, AAP's total funds, including fixed assets and loans, stood

at ₹10.11 crore, an increase from ₹6.06 crore at the end of 2017-2018.

The ECI also published the Samajwadi Party's annual accounts report, which showed a decrease in the party's income from ₹47.19 crore in 2017-2018 to ₹33.80 crore in 2018-2019. While donations and "other income" increased, income from fees and subscriptions reduced from ₹19.57 crore in 2017-2018 to ₹51.49 lakh in 2018-2019. The SP's income from donations, contributions and grants more than doubled from ₹73.99 lakh to ₹1.83 crore in 2018-2019. The party ended 2018-2019 with ₹572.21 crore in total funds.

Registration in colonies from month-end: BJP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
The process of allowing resi- dents of unauthorised colo- nies to obtain registry of their respective plots would commence in the last week of November, the BJP pro- mised here on Thursday.

Making the announce- ment ahead of the winter session of Parliament, the party’s leaders further claimed that the Delhi Devel- opment Authority had al- ready taken a “giant leap” towards the implementation of the scheme. “The Central

government is going to in- troduce a Bill in the winter session of Parliament. After the passing of this special law, properties will be regis- tered floor-wise in the name of occupants who have the power of attorney,” Delhi BJP chief Manoj Tiwari said.

JNUSU distances itself from defacement row

Students say it’s an attempt to malign movement against fee hike

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The walls inside the JNU ad- ministration block building leading up to the Vice-Chan- cellor’s office, the door of the office and the pedestal of a yet to be unveiled statue of Swami Vivekananda were al- legedly defaced by protes- ters during the ongoing agi- tation against fee hike on the university campus.

The JNU Students’ Union on Thursday distanced itself from the defacement contro- versy and said it condemned the attempts to malign the students’ movement through acts which do not represent it.

“Our movement against the fee hike and the imposi- tion of a draft hostel manual without consultation is a de- mocratic movement against

authoritarian ways of admi- nistrative functioning. Stu- dents with their future at stake due to the fee hike can never be perpetrators of any violence or undemocratic action,” the JNUSU said.

‘Bid to divert attention’
It added that the student community does not en- dorse any act of vandalism carried out in its name and whoever is involved is doing it in his or her own name and should not use the name of the movement to justify such acts. The JNUSU said the defacement was being used as a tool to divert atten- tion from real issues that stu- dents were fighting for.

Members of the ABVP blamed “left-wing” students for defacing the pedestal and scribbling objectionable

messages, mostly directed towards right-wing outfits, on it. They said that it would derailing the movement to roll back fee hike. In an ap- peal, the JNUSU asked the student community to exer- cise restraint and not en- courage recklessness.

The JNU administration has not yet indicated wheth- er it would be taking any ac- tion against those involved in the defacement activities.

Reacting to the deface- ment row, JNU V-C M. Jaga- desh Kumar tweeted: “Van- dalising Swami Vivekananda statue at JNU admin block which is yet to be unveiled is the most despicable act one can commit. Swami Viveka- nanda is India’s youth icon. Disrespecting him in our Un- iversity by some miscreants is not at all acceptable.”

Teachers from central universities protest NEP

Students, leaders join march against policy

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Several students and teach- ers from various central un- iversities here took out a rally under the banner of Federa- tion of Central Universities Teachers’ Association (FED- CUTA) from Mandi House to Parliament Street, demand- ing the withdrawal of the proposed New Education Policy (NEP).

“The NEP makes a mock- ery of public trust in higher education and research by removing all standards of quality and equity from pub- lic-funded institutions,” the group said. Speakers at the rally, including leaders from political parties such as D. Raja (CPI), Dilip Pandey (AAP), Ashok Tanwar (Con- gress) and those from univer- sities such as DUTA president Rajib Ray and former JNUSU president N. Balaji, attacked the government for the in-

creasing privatisation of higher education.

The protesters said, “The NEP limits regulation to an outcome-based approach, which would empower pri- vate bodies such as a board of governors to run universities on commercial lines, appoint teachers through fear or fa- vour, deny democratic parti- cipation, hike students’ fees at will.” A precursor to the NEP can be seen in the “auth- oritarian fee hikes” that have prompted massive unrest among students in JNU and IITs, they added. Attacking the Union government, the FEDCUTA said it was trying to pull out of the responsibil- ity of funding education and appointing regular faculty through this policy. It also ar- gued that students from mar- ginalised sections would be hit the hardest as it would make “quality education and research unaffordable.”

JNU students continue to protest fee hike

JNUSU says it will not have any dialogue with the V-C on Twitter

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Students of Jawaharlal Nehru University on Thursday con- tinued their protest against fee hike by organising a sit-in at the administrative block. The protesters said they have re- jected the decision taken at the “secret” Executive Coun- cil meeting offering a “partial rollback” of the fee hike and would continue their protest until the old rates are reinstated.

“It is clear that the current movement in JNU has be- come the vanguard of a larger movement nationwide, a movement for affordable education that sees educa- tion as a right instead of a commodity. The impetus gained by our movement has put the MHRD, which is sin-

gle-handedly responsible for cutting down the funds for higher education, on the de- fensive,” said the JNU Stu- dents’ Union.

It added: “Cruellest of jokes has been played by the MHRD and the admin in the name of special concessions for Below Poverty Line [BPL] students. The criteria of the government states that any household whose annual in- come is less than ₹27,000 per annum is enumerated as BPL. This makes the monthly in- come for a BPL household equal to or less than ₹2,250. However, the scheme pro- posed by the admin would make a monthly mess bill of a student from a BPL back- ground approximately ₹4,108 for single seater and ₹3,958 for double seater. This would

make the annual hostel ex- penditure for a student from a BPL background ₹49,300 for single-seater and ₹47,500 for double seater.”

The group said JNU’s own data shows that since 2013, over 50% of the students are women, many of whom have been able to sustain their education against patriarchal norms because of the univer- sity’s fee structure and fel- lowships. “With the new fee structure, all the students mentioned above will have to discontinue their education as the common fellowships MCM – ₹2,000 per month – and Non-Net – ₹5,000 per month – will prove to be in- adequate,” the JNUSU said, adding that it would not toler- ate a dialogue with the V-C via Twitter and press releases.

NO MATCH

The difference between DU and JNU hostel fee is stark

DU HOSTEL ROOM CHARGE:

Hostels	Monthly rent
Rajiv Gandhi Hostel for Girls	2,133*
Gwyer Hall	3,025
Ambedkar-Ganguly Students House for Women	4,000*
Meghdoot Hostel	3,330
University Housing for Women	1,060*
Aravali Hostel	2,220
Geetanjali Hostel	1,200
Saramati Post Graduate Men's Hostel	1,750

* FEE PAYMENT ON QUARTERLY BASIS

JNU HOSTEL ROOM CHARGE:

Particulars	Existing charges	Revised charges for all, including BPL students with scholarships	Revised charges for eligible BPL category students
Single seater	₹20 per month	₹600 per month	₹300 per month
Double seater	₹10 per month	₹300 per month	₹150 per month

SOURCE: DU AND JNU

MHA tells CIC it doesn't recognise any police force association

Home Ministry's submission challenges validity of IPS Association

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

The legality of the Indian Police Service (IPS) Association has suddenly come under a cloud as the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has informed the Central Information Commission (CIC) that it does not "recognise or approve" any police force association.

A September 26 order of the CIC mentions the MHA's submission that it has "not recognised or approved any Police Force Association, thus, no information regarding Indian Police Service Association is available with them".

The RTI reply has stirred a debate in the police community as the IPS Association and other similar groups spear-



The IPS Association spearheaded the social media campaign against alleged atrocities on police personnel during the clash with lawyers at Tis Hazari Courts. ■ FILE PHOTO

headed the social media campaign against alleged atrocities on police personnel after the clash with lawyers at the Tis Hazari Courts on November 2. To correct the anomaly, the MHA will soon file an affidavit before the CIC where it is expected to submit that the restrictions on forming unions, as per the Police-Forces (Restriction of Rights) Act, 1966, does not apply to All India Services officers, including the IPS. Section 3 of Police

Forces Act states that no member of the police force has the right to form any association without the express sanction of the Central Government.

RTI plea

The RTI plea was filed by Nutan Thakur in 2018, seeking details regarding IPS Association. "The Commission, after hearing the submissions of the respondents and perusing the records, observes that

as per the respondent, since the MHA has not approved the constitution of a Police Force Association, the information sought for by the appellant is not available with the respondent. The Commission, therefore, directs the respondent to file an affidavit with the Commission deposing that MHA has not approved the constitution of a Police Force Association. Hence, no information can be provided to the appellant," the CIC order said.

A senior officer said that IPS officers are not appointed under any statute mentioned in the Police-Forces Act. "We are appointed under the All India Services Act, 1951. IPS is a civil service, not a police force. Else, it would have been India Police Force. Besides, it only acts as a platform for meeting of minds and representing service issues. It's on par with other service associations," he said.

Two directors of a firm get 3-year jail term in coal scam

NIRNIMESH KUMAR
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Thursday sentenced two directors of a private company to three years' imprisonment and imposed a fine of ₹40 lakh each in a coal block allocation case.

"The directors – Gyanchand Prasad Agarwal and Umesh Prasad Agarwal – are sentenced to imprisonment for three years each and to also pay a fine of ₹40,00,000 each for the offences under Sections 420 IPC and 120B/420," said Special Judge Bharat Parashar. The company, Pawanjay Steel and Power Limited, has to give ₹75 lakh fine. The third accused in the case, S.K. Kanungo, was awarded two years imprisonment and fined ₹one lakh. The Judge had held the accused guilty of criminal conspiracy and cheating.

11 missing children reunited with families

Gift from Delhi Police on Children's Day

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Delhi Police's Crime Branch reunited 11 missing children with their families on the occasion of Children's Day, officers said on Thursday.

A team of Anti Human Trafficking Unit, Crime Branch, Rohini, rescued 27 children from railway stations and ISBTs in the city between November 1 and 14, they said.

Of the 27 children, 11 were reunited with their families with the help of an NGO. Most of the children were from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Maharashtra, while two of them had come from Nepal, said the police.

Each child had a different story to tell. Some had been abandoned while others had left their homes after a scolding from their family members. Most children

had boarded a train without ticket and had reached different railway stations in Delhi.

Additional Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch) B.K. Singh said, "We traced their parents after speaking to the children and checking police records. On Children's Day, their parents were called to Delhi and the children were reunited with them." The children were offered books, clothes and other gifts by the police.

Since January 1, the Crime Branch has rescued 617 children from bus stands and railway stations of Delhi under Operation 'MILAP', a Delhi Police initiative. Further, the Police Control Room unit has reunited 146 children with their families and rescued six kidnapped children between January 1 and November 13, said DCP (PCR) Sharat Kumar Sinha.

32-year-old convict in Rohini jail dies

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 32-year-old convict, who was serving time in Rohini jail, died under mysterious circumstances on Wednesday morning, the police said on Thursday.

They said a magisterial inquiry has been initiated. The deceased has been identified as Hunny, said sources. A senior officer said Hunny was arrested in a robbery case registered in 2009. He was convicted in the case later.

Around 4.30 a.m., Hunny was found unconscious in his cell after which he was taken to dispensary inside the prison. Thereafter, he was referred to Baba Saheb Ambedkar hospital where he was taken around 5.30 a.m. He died during treatment at 11.30 a.m, the officer added. Following this, the District police were then informed of the incident.

Four men injured in fight over parking in east Delhi

Two cross-FIRs registered in the case

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Four persons were injured when a quarrel broke out between them over a parking issue in east Delhi's New Ashok Nagar on Tuesday evening, the police said.

Two cross-FIRs have been registered in connection with the incident. An officer said the injured have been identified as Bharat Bhushan, his brother Shiv Kumar, Amit, and his brother Nikhil.

On Tuesday evening, Amit and Nikhil along with a few family members had come to Kondli market while Bharat had come to meet Shiv, who runs a mobile shop in the area. "Bharat had parked his car in front of his brother's shop. Amit had also parked his bike there. After shopping, Amit asked Bharat to move his car so he could take out his vehicle but Bharat re-

fused. An argument broke out between the two which soon turned violent and they thrashed each other," the officer said.

Bharat said the accused hit him and his brother with a helmet. Amit alleged that the Bharat and his brother beat him, his brother and mother. All the injured were then rushed to a hospital from where Bharat and his brother were referred to Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital. A case under Section 308 (attempt to commit culpable homicide) of the IPC has been registered based on the complaint by Bharat. Another case under Sections 323 (causing hurt) and 341 (punishment for wrongful restraint) have been registered based on Amit's complaint. No arrests have been made and probe is under way, the police added.

Labourer dies after falling from second floor

NEW DELHI

A labourer died after he allegedly fell from the second floor of a building in Sarai Rohilla on Tuesday, the police said. An officer said Ganga Ram from Rajasthan had come to work in Inderlok's DDA flats along with one Gajendra Singh. A case has been registered under Section 304A (causing death by negligence) of IPC.

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THE HINDU



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DELHI TODAY

Talk: To mark the birth centenary of Nani Palkhivala, a special lecture will be delivered by Dr Bibek Debroy, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister of India at C.D. Deshmukh Auditorium, IIC, 5 p.m.

Book Launch: Journalist and writer Amandeep Sandhu will launch his first non-fiction book 'Panjab: Journeys Through Fault Lines', at IIC, 6:30 p.m.

Music: A Festival of Music event will feature a Hindustani classical sitar recital by Ayan Sengupta, followed by Musical Kabeera by Maitreyi Pathari, Kabir Antarman ki Awaaz by Vidhi Sharma at IIC, 6:30 p.m.

Exhibition: "Free-form", a solo black & white photography show on trees by Dev Banerjee at Open Palm Court Gallery, IHC, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: "Soliloquy", an exhibition of drawings and paintings by Bijoy Kumar Basak at Triveni Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. (Mail your listings for this column at cityeditor@thehindu.co.in)

‘Centre not taking concrete steps to curb pollution’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

As the air quality in Delhi again deteriorated to alarming levels, the AAP on Thursday hit out at the Centre for not taking “concrete steps” to tackle pollution despite a Supreme Court direction to expedite deliberations to find a permanent solution to the problem.

The air quality remained in the ‘severe’ category on Thursday.

Senior AAP leader Sanjay Singh alleged that the BJP is trying to “politicise” a sensitive issue like pollution and the Centre is not taking concrete steps to tackle the issue.s

“The BJP, on the other hand, is trying to increase the pollution in the national capital. I think it is time that the Centre clarifies why no concrete steps are being taken despite the Supreme Court’s direction,” Mr. Singh said.

North civic body uses chemical dust suppressant to check pollution

Civic body sourced 100 kg of the chemical for trial in Rohini

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The North Delhi Municipal Corporation used chemical dust suppressant in Rohini to check air pollution on Thursday, the civic body’s Standing Committee chairperson Jai Prakash said.

Magnesium chloride chemical dust, which is mixed with water and sprayed into the atmosphere catches on to dust particles, making them heavier and causing them to settle for longer, Mr. Prakash said.

The civic body currently

BSES ties up with Australian company

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Electricity discom BSES has tied up with an Australian company to set up a consumer-to-consumer solar power trading system based on blockchain technology, the firm said on Wednesday.

It claimed that a study had been successfully undertaken and that the system could be rolled out if regulatory approvals are established. The discom also plans to run a pilot project amidst a group of gated communities in Dwarka, which generates about five to six megawatts of solar power. Through the system, consumers would be able to trade solar power between each other instead of having it spill back into the grid, the discom said.

Toxic air fails to kill excitement among visitors at India Gate

Children complain of discomfort; elders decide to cut short outing

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

The air quality in the national capital continued to remain in the ‘severe’ category on Thursday but it could not stop visitors from thronging the lawns of India Gate.

For 32-year-old housewife Anu, visiting India Gate on her marriage anniversary was more important than battling the thick layer of toxic smog that shrouded the city. “Though the weather is not suitable and the pollution levels are high, we could not afford to waste this day by spending it at home,” said the Uttam Nagar resident.

Though the deteriorating air quality in the city forced the Delhi government to shut schools on Thursday and Friday, several schoolgoing children still ventured out to celebrate Children’s Day on Thursday.

Urvashi Rajput of Bucket List, an NGO for underprivi-

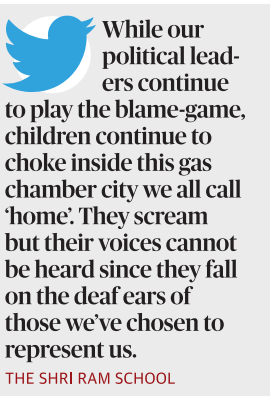


People enjoying boatripe near India Gate in New Delhi on Thursday. ■SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

leged children, was seen accompanying around 20 children. Asked about the pollution risk, Ms. Rajput said, “This outing was planned almost one week ago on account of Children’s Day. We did not expect that the air quality would be this bad. It was too late to cancel the trip and the children were extremely excited... But we are heading back now as some of them have started complain-

ing of discomfort.”

Highlighting the plight of students due to the high levels of pollution in the city, The Shri Ram School, in a series of tweets said, “While our political leaders continue to play the blame-game, children continue to choke inside this gas chamber city we all call ‘home’. They scream but their voices cannot be heard since they fall on deaf ears of those we’ve chosen to



represent us.”

Manju Dikshit, a tutor based in Neb Sarai, said: “I have brought around 10 children here to celebrate Children’s Day. It was only after we stepped out that we realised that the situation was this bad. It was too late for us to head back and the children really wanted to come. I have decided to return earlier than we had planned,” said Ms. Dikshit.

Odd-even: BJP MP protests ‘inconvenience’

Vijay Goel calls scheme poll gimmick

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

BJP Rajya Sabha MP Vijay Goel on Thursday held a protest against alleged inconvenience being faced by the people of the Capital due to the implementation of the odd-even scheme, at ITO junction here.

Calling the enforcement of the scheme a “drama and an election gimmick”, Mr. Goel held a placard that read “Pradooshan ki jimmedaar, Kejriwal sarkaar”, odd-even hai bekar [The Kejriwal government is responsible for pollution, the odd-even scheme is useless!], along with party cadre.

He also interacted with commuters who, the party claimed in a statement, related accounts of alleged inconvenience due to the regulations of the scheme. On its part, AAP alleged that the party’s leaders were “playing with the health of Delhiites” in their “race to become the Chief Minister”.

“The Kejriwal government is neither taking pollution nor odd-even scheme seriously. They have been blaming stubble burning for increased pollution levels; then what is the need of the odd-even scheme, which they implement sporadically?” Mr. Goel said.

High pollution levels continue to plague the Capital

AQI remains in ‘severe’ category for second consecutive day

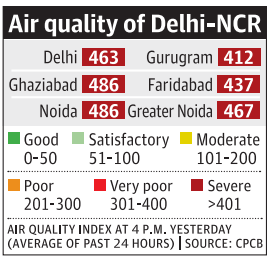
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Air quality in the city continued to be in the ‘severe’ category for the second consecutive day, precipitated by dense clouds and stalled winds. Schools in the National Capital Region were shut, and government orders banning use of hot-mix plants and stone-crushers in Delhi-NCR continued to remain in force.

Meteorological agencies said that the overall air quality index in the city was at the “higher end of the severe category”.

There appeared to be reduction in instances of stubble burning in Punjab, said SAFAR, a forecasting agency.

“It may be noted here that due to stagnation and



very low mixing height, flushing [of pollutants] is almost insignificant and considering the life time of PM 2.5, sustainable cumulative impact of stubble intrusion on November 14 is estimated to be more than 30%,” the SAFAR analysis noted.

The cloudy skies are further expected to block the sun on Friday and this will lead to “a further deterioration in air quality,” said SAFAR, “ However, an in-

crease in wind speed is forecast by November 16 which is likely to increase ventilation and improve the air quality to ‘very poor’ category. Further improvement is expected by November 17.”

Friday will be the last day of the odd-even scheme in Delhi that is in force since November 4.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Wednesday that if Delhi’s air continued to be bad, he would not hesitate to extend the scheme beyond Friday. Delhi alone did not suffer toxic air with surrounding cities like Noida, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gurugram having registered ‘severe’ air quality, according to the evening report of the Central Pollution Control Board.

HC pulls up govt., civic bodies for deteriorating air quality

Court says authorities have not followed its orders

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The High Court on Thursday pulled up the city government and civic bodies over the dangerous level of air pollution in the Capital, noting that the conditions would have been much better had they followed the court’s orders.

A Bench of Justice G.S. Sistani and Justice Anup J. Bhambhani remarked that the problem lies in the implementation of the order and not because of a lack of ideas. It also noted that air pollution needed to be tackled as a collective responsibility.

The court’s observation came while hearing a public interest petition initiated by it on the issue of air pollu-

tion in the Capital. The next date of hearing is on December 2.

Felling of trees

Senior Advocate Kailash Vasudev, who was appointed as amicus curiae in the case, referred to a report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) regarding the felling of trees to highlight that the Forest Department has not met the afforestation target.

He also attributed air pollution to construction activities and vehicular traffic.

The court then directed the Chief Conservator of Forests of Delhi government to appear before it on the next date of hearing. The Forest Department will have to explain its plan for increasing

the forest cover here. It also asked the authorities here to ensure that building materials or ‘malba’ are not left uncovered and using the water sprinkling process while removing them.

The court additionally asked the standing counsel of all departments to be present on the next date of hearing. The case was initiated by the High Court in February 2015 and since then it has passed a slew of directions to curb air pollution here.

The Supreme Court is also seized of a separate case on the issue of air pollution in the Capital. Earlier this week, it had directed the city government to furnish day-to-day Air Quality Index (AQI) data of Delhi.

Dry day



A washerman dries bedsheets near the Yamuna. ■V.V. KRISHNAN

Pets also prone to diabetes, dogs at highest risk

Clinics in Gurugram have witnessed a spurt in such cases over the past few years; obesity, lack of awareness leading causes

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM

Not just the humans, pets, especially dogs are also prone to diabetes and the clinics in Gurugram have witnessed a spurt in such cases over the past few years. Obesity and lack of awareness among pet owners are leading causes of the disease.

Though World Diabetes Day is observed on November 14, vets feel very little has been done to create awareness among owners about diabetes in pets.

Interestingly, like humans, male dogs are more affected by the disease compared to female dogs. The mean age for onset of diabetes in them is 7-9, though it tends to

occur to older dogs in the middle age – 5-12.

Cats, on the other hand, are less at the risk and the mean age for them is 10.

Dogs are mostly affected by Type 2 diabetes caused due to the lack of insulin production, whereas cats have Type 1. The vets, however, differ on the issue.

Spokesperson of DLF Phase-III-based CGS Hospital, Salisha Whitney Correi, said that a significant increase was witnessed in the number of cases of diabetes in dogs over the past few years, adding that obesity is one of the leading causes. Sudden onset of the symptoms accompanied by less awareness among owners is also a reason. “We have



Around 30 dogs and cats have been treated at CGS hospital, DLF Phase-III, so far this year. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

treated around 30 dogs and cats this year so far. In 2018, the number of diabetic pets treated at our hospital was 20,” said Dr. Correi, a veterinarian.

Sandeep Yadav, Director, SKRD Veterinary Hospital, Sector 31, lamented that awareness on the disease was poor among pet owners even

in cities like Delhi and Gurugram. He said only 1-2 % of pet parents knew that diabetes was common in dogs and were surprised when they were told the same. In the last seven years, Dr. Yadav has seen 25-35 diabetic pets and the number is increasing.

He advised that people

should take their pets for routine blood check-ups and annual full body check-ups to prevent the disorder. Canine diabetes was a chronic disease and could be managed with the help of advice of vets, added Dr. Yadav.

Samoyeds, Miniature Schnauzers, Toy Poodles, Pugs, German Shepherd, Golden Retrievers and Labradors are among the breeds, which are at risk.

Polyuria (frequent urination), polydipsia (frequent water intake), polyphagia (frequent food intake), weight loss, lethargy, bulging of eyes and ants coming on the urine are some of the common symptoms of diabetes in

pets. In a few cases, urination is painful and the pets start licking their genitals.

Canine diabetes is generally treated with insulin injections. Dogs need to be admitted for a few days to monitor insulin dose and blood glucose levels.

Diabetic cataract is a common complication seen in canines with uncontrolled blood sugar levels. “Some dogs suddenly start banging into objects driven by diabetic cataract. We are the first private veterinary hospital to set up a dedicated Veterinary Ophthalmology Unit in India. We have all the latest veterinary-specific, high-end ocular machines,” claimed Dr. Correi.

NGT panel to hold meet on solid waste management

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Following orders of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the first meeting of an NGT-appointed committee on municipal solid waste management will be held on November 19.

The committee comprises representatives from the NITI Aayog, Ministry of Urban and Housing Affairs, Ministry of Jal Shakti, National Mission for Clean Ganga, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and the chairman of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

Earlier, the green panel had observed that according to data provided by the CPCB, there are more than 4,000 legacy waste

dump sites across the country that require remediation under the relevant solid waste management rules.

“Besides, this will unlock the land occupied by such waste sites which is urgently required for setting up integrated waste management and processing facilities or for afforestation, green belts, biodiversity parks and buffer zones in accordance with the environmental laws,” a Bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel had observed.

The Bench had also added, “If necessary, a part of the land could be monetised is so decided by the state governments concerned.”

DELHI Timings				
FRIDAY, NOV. 15				
	RISE	06:43	SET	17:28
	RISE	19:48	SET	09:05
SATURDAY, NOV. 16				
	RISE	06:44	SET	17:28
	RISE	20:42	SET	10:04
SUNDAY, NOV. 17				
	RISE	06:45	SET	17:27
	RISE	21:41	SET	11:00

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	26	15
Safdarjang	26	15
Palam	26	16

Delhi Palam Today
26°C A smoggy morning will prevail. Pollution will continue to remain in severe category. A cloudy sky is likely.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
27°C Smog will continue to prevail during morning. A partly cloudy sky will prevail.

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Khattar Ministry takes shape

Governor administers oath of office to 10 Ministers; 8 from BJP and one from JJP

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

Eighteen days after the BJP and the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) formed a government in Haryana with Manohar Lal Khattar as Chief Minister, Governor Satyadev Narayan Arya on Thursday administered the oath of office and secrecy to 10 Ministers. Six of them are of the Cabinet rank and four Ministers of State.

Eight of them are from the BJP, one is from the JJP and one is an Independent. The sole woman Minister belongs to the BJP.

Five of the six Cabinet Ministers are from the BJP. They are six-time MLA Anil Vij; former Speaker Kanwar Pal Gujjar, who belongs to



CM Manohar Lal Khattar

the Other Backward Class; Banwari Lal, the BJP's Dalit face; Mool Chand Sharma, a Brahmin and two-time MLA; and Jai Parkash Dalal, a Jat and a first-time MLA. The Independent MLA from Rania Ranjit Singh was also given a Cabinet berth.

Ministers of State with independent charge are Om Parkash Yadav of the BJP, who is an MLA from Nar-

naul; Ms. Kamlesh Dhanda, the BJP MLA from Kalayat; Anoop Dhanak, the JJP MLA from Uklana; and Sandeep Singh, the former Indian hockey team captain and BJP MLA from Pehowa.

The Cabinet can have 14 members, including the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister.

Later in the day, the Chief Minister recommended to the Governor the allocation of portfolios. Mr. Vij will look after Home and Health and Mr. Pal will handle Education and Forest. Mr. Sharma has been given Transport and Mines. Mr. Ranjit Singh will handle Power, Mr. Dalal Agriculture and Mr. Lal Cooperation.

Mr. Khattar was sworn in

on October 27 as the Chief Minister for the second time. Dushyant Chautala of the Jannayak Janta Party took the oath as Deputy Chief Minister. However, no Ministers were sworn in that day. Governor allocated eleven portfolios on November 13.

As per a notification, the Deputy Chief Minister has been given excise and taxation, industries and commerce, revenue and disaster management, public works, development and pan-chayats, food, civil supplies-consumer affairs, labour and employment, civil aviation, archaeology and museums, rehabilitation and consolidation.

All other departments are with Mr. Khattar.

Compensation plan may not fetch desired results: experts

Punjab govt. to pay ₹2,500 per acre to stop stubble burning

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

While the Punjab government has decided to pay ₹2,500 per acre as compensation to small and marginal farmers, who have not burnt paddy residue in the ongoing harvesting season, farmers' unions and agriculture experts feel that the move may not fetch the desired results.

"The government's decision would only have a limited benefit... They have announced to give compensation to farmers who own land up to five acres, but what about others? If any farmer has even a little over five acre then compensation will not be given, what's the point of putting conditions? The government should compensate every farmer otherwise the desired result will not be achieved," said Harinder Singh, general secretary of the Bharti Kisan Union (Lakhowal).

Mr. Singh said FIRs registered against farmers for defying the ban on stubble burning should also be immediately withdrawn. The government data



A farmer burning stuble in Punjab

shows that between October 1 and November 13, as many as 48,689 cases of farm fires were reported in Punjab. Last year, during the same period there were 44,845 such incidents.

Sangrur district has seen the highest number of farm fire incidents at 6,558, while Bathinda with 5,522 is in the second spot. Firozpur recorded as many as 4,537 cases to be placed third on the list, according to the Punjab Pollution Control Board.

Stubble burning, close to the autumn season every year, has been a key contributing factor to air pollution

across the northern region, including Delhi.

For management of paddy straw, the Centre and the State government are providing subsidised agro-machines and equipment to farmers and cooperative societies to achieve zero burning, yet farmers continue to burn the crop residue claiming lack of alternatives.

'Not a lasting solution'
Lakhwinder Singh, professor of Economics at Punjabi University, Patiala, who has been mapping rural Punjab for decades, feels that the State government's decision to pay compensation is not a long-lasting solution to the problem.

"The compensation amount is good but it's not a permanent solution. Let's say even if all farmers are given compensation and they don't burn the residue... They collect it then what next? What will they do? How will they dispose it? The solution lies in alternative uses of residue for which the State government needs to infuse investment," said Mr. Singh.

U.P. government removes Amethi DM

Video of alleged insensitivity went viral

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government on Thursday removed Amethi District Magistrate Prashant Sharma, a day after a video clip of him meeting the bereaved family of Vijay Kumar Singh alias Sonu Singh went viral on social media. On the demands of the family, Mr. Sharma had visited the post-mortem house on Wednesday, where the body of Sonu Singh (35), who was killed by armed miscreants on Tuesday night, was brought.

In the video clip that has gone viral, the DM is seen almost dragging a cousin of the deceased. Locals had expressed anguish over the administration's alleged insensitivity.

The State government has removed Mr. Sharma and put him in waiting, a government spokesman said on Thursday.

Moradabad Development Authority vice-president

Arun Kumar has been posted as Amethi's District Magistrate replacing Mr. Sharma, the spokesman said.

Tagging the DM, Amethi MP Smriti Irani had tweeted "We should be modest and sensitive, this should be our effort. We are public servants, not rulers".

Sonu Singh owned a brick kiln and his father Shivanayak Singh is a senior leader of the ruling BJP in the district.

'Administration not god'
In the video clip, the DM is purportedly heard telling Sonu Singh's family members that there is no country in the world where killings do not take place and the administration is not god that it can prevent incidents of crime from taking place. "What would you have done had you been in our place? Would you have stopped the killing from taking place?," he is heard asking the crowd.

Complaint against police over free food

Association of Food Operators writes to Ghaziabad SSP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

After two of its officers have been charged with corruption, the Ghaziabad police faced a new low with the Association of Food Operators of Ghaziabad alleging that the police ask for freebies and when its members don't oblige, they are threatened with fake cases.

In a letter written to Sudhir Kumar Singh, Senior Superintendent of Police (Ghaziabad), Anil Kumar Gupta, president, Association of Food Operators, alleged that policemen stationed at different police stations in the city not only ask for free food

for themselves but also for their colleagues. He said during festivals police officers asked for food to be served for functions at police stations and when member shop owners ask for payment, they are warned of cases being registered against them.

Growing demand
Mr. Gupta added that the members didn't mind serving a few free plates to beat constables and officers as they work for their security but now things were going out of hand as since Diwali officers have demanded large amount of sweets and

dry fruits for themselves and their relatives.

He said he had been asked for specific instances but feared that it could result in further harassment of the shopkeepers as it was easy to book anybody under non-compliance of fire security norms and lack of parking facility in front of the shop.

Mr. Singh said he had taken cognisance of the complaint and has directed the officers concerned to take action. "I have appealed to the businessmen to send pending bills to my office and directly complain to me over phone if any policeman harasses them," he said.

Three-year-old dies after swallowing toy in M.P.

Freebie was inside a packet of snack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEEMUCH (M.P.)

A three-year-old boy lost his life after choking on a toy found inside the packet of a local snack brand in Neemuch district of Madhya Pradesh.

The incident, which took place at Kenpuria village on November 3, prompted the authorities to seize a large

number of packets of the snack and destroy them.

Rohit, the victim, found a whistle packed inside as a freebie when he opened the snack packet, said district Food Security Officer Sanjeev Mishra.

The child chewed the whistle and tried to swallow it but it got stuck in his throat.

‘Top priority to curbing crimes against women’

Sarpanch's husband held for officer's death

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Minister of State Dibya Shankar Mishra on Thursday told the Assembly that the government accords highest priority to curbing crimes against women and it was committed to ensuring a safe working environment for women of the State.

Replying to an adjournment motion moved by the Opposition Congress on the issue of safety and security of women in the wake of the death of panchayat executive officer Smitarani Biswal in Jajpur district, Mr. Mishra informed the House that the post-mortem report conclud-

ed that “the cause of death of Ms. Biswal was due to asphyxia and may be suicidal in nature”.

Mr. Mishra further said that as the investigation suggested the involvement of Rupesh Bhadra, husband of the local sarpanch, in abetting the suicide of Ms. Biswal on October 16, he was arrested on October 19 and is now in jail.

The Opposition BJP and Congress had stalled the proceedings of the House on the first day on Wednesday demanding discussion on the law and order issue and seeking a CBI probe into Ms. Biswal's death.

Call to remove new Assam NRC Coordinator

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) has asked the State government to remove Hitesh Dev Sarma as the Coordinator for the exercise to update the National Register of Citizens for his “communal and partisan” views on social media. The Sarbananda Sonowal government had on November 9 named Mr. Sarma as the replacement for Prateek Hajela who was relieved on November 11.

Govt. report recommends ₹2,904 crore compensation for Marathwada farmers

NCP chief Sharad Pawar begins two-day visit to Vidarbha to assess damage to crops

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AURANGABAD**

A compensation of ₹ 2,904.36 crore needs to be paid to farmers in Marathwada region for the crop loss caused by unseasonal rains, a government report has said.

The report prepared by Aurangabad divisional commissioner's office said unseasonal rains affected 44,33,549 farmers, ruining crops over 41,49,175 hectares in eight districts.

The report, based on a survey conducted by the revenue department, was submitted to the State administration on Wednesday, said deputy divisional commissioner Parag Soman.



NCP chief Sharad Pawar at Chargaon village, Katol taluka in Nagpur district, on Thursday to inspect the crops damaged due to unseasonal rain. •S. SUDARSHAN

The State is currently under President's rule. The perennially drought-stricken region of Marathwada received poor rainfall this monsoon, but was pounded

by heavy showers in October, destroying standing kharif crops.

“We require ₹2,904.36 crore to compensate farmers in the region,” Mr. Soman said.

“In majority of cases, ready crops were damaged in the fields before they could be harvested,” he added.

Nanded, Beed and Aurangabad districts were the worst hit, and require over ₹400 crore each in compensation, he said.

While unirrigated lands dependent solely on rain will get compensation at the rate of ₹6,800 per hectare, irrigated lands will receive ₹13,000 per hectare and orchards ₹18,000 per hectare,

it added.

A total of 50,20,591 hectares of land had come under cultivation in the region this monsoon, the report said.

The government had recently approved ₹10,000 crore as immediate assistance to farmers affected by unseasonal showers.

Meanwhile, Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar on Thursday visited Katol, Umred and Kamptee tehsils in in Nagpur district, accompanied by NCP leader and Katol MLA Anil Deshmukh, MLC Prakash Gajbhaye and others. Cotton, soybean, orange and sweet lime crops have been damaged in the area.

GoAir flight veers off runway, DGCA probing

Flight from Nagpur was diverted to Hyderabad due to bad weather

**ADITYA ANAND
MUMBAI**

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said on Thursday that it was probing how an Airbus A320 Neo aircraft with 180 passengers went off the runway onto the unpaved area travelling 200 meters over grass, while carrying out a last minute go-around, in Bengaluru airport on November 11.

The GoAir flight from Nagpur was diverted to Hyderabad following a sudden change in weather conditions, as it was making a scheduled landing in Bengaluru. Upon landing in Hyderabad, officials noticed mud and grass deposits on the main landing gear. An inspection by officials of the regional DGCA office and Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru reported landing gear marks on the unpaved surface.

While the aircraft has been grounded for a detailed inspection, the pilot,



Mud, grass deposits on the main landing gear of the GoAir plane. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

an expatriate, barred from flying for now and called to join the probe.

Senior DGCA officials said that the GoAir A320 Neo aircraft VT-WGR operating as flight G8-811 was cleared for approach for runway 09 at Bengaluru around 7.15 a.m. on November 11.

After landing at Hyderabad mud deposits were observed on left main landing gear, indicating that aircraft rolled on to soft ground/ unpaved surface. “As per the officials, the aircraft deviated to its left during go around at Bengaluru. Aircraft has been grounded for detailed investigation at Hyderabad. Digital Flight Data Recorder (DFDR) data along with other recorder data is being analysed for further investigation,” DGCA officials said.

No stay on 2018 order on Sabarimala: Trupti

‘We urge Kerala government to ensure that police escort women right inside the temple’

**SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE
PUNE**

Gender rights activist and Bhumata Brigade leader Trupti Desai on Thursday welcomed the Supreme Court's decision to refer review petitions to a larger bench against its verdict last year removing the ban on women aged between 10 and 50 years to offer worship at Sabarimala in Kerala.

Even as the Kerala government sought more legal clarity on the SC's decision as to whether the apex court had maintained status quo on its 2018 verdict, Ms. Desai, known in Maharashtra for her ‘temple-entry’ agitations, interpreted that the Supreme Court's verdict of last year to allow women of all age groups to worship at Sabarimala remained operational.

She said she was planning to visit Sabarimala in the next few days and added that



Trupti Desai

mere police protection by the Kerala government was insufficient to ensure that women could worship at the Ayyapa shrine in peace.

“The judges today have referred the Sabarimala case to a larger Supreme Court Bench of seven judges by saying that Sabarimala was only part of a larger issue which included the question of entry of Muslim women in mosques and Parsi women in their fire temples...While we were expecting a final decision on Sabarimala today, we

are nevertheless happy that the judges have not stayed the order,” Ms. Desai told *The Hindu*.

“We urge the Kerala government to ensure that police escort women right inside the temple, near the sanctum sanctorum... While my date of visit has yet to be finalised, I, along with other Bhumata Brigade members, will be visiting the shrine sometime on or immediately after November 17,” she said.

On 28 September 2018, the apex court had ended an age-old practice of keeping out women in their menstruating age from the temple by calling the practice as “discriminatory”. In November last year, Ms. Desai had made an ineffectual attempt at entering the temple despite the SC lifting the ban.

Her announcement of visiting the Sabarimala temple was followed by a barrage of death threats.

At the time, Ms. Desai had written to Kerala Chief Minister and the Kerala Director General of Police (DGP) demanding police protection for herself and six other women activists from her outfit, while accusing functionaries of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Congress and devotees of Lord Ayyappa of bombarding her with graphic threats if she tried to enter the temple complex.

Ms. Desai's highly publicised temple-entry ‘crusades’ over the past few years to demolish gender barriers at shrines across Maharashtra led to intransigent temple trustees opening the inner sanctum of the historic Shani Shingnapur Temple in Ahmednagar district to women in April 2016.

She had also mounted a campaign for entry of women in the core area of the Haji Ali dargah.

BJP begins introspection

Leaders to assess loss, find a way forward

**SHARAD VYAS
MUMBAI**

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has begun a three-day introspection to assess losses in the just concluded Maharashtra Assembly elections. Senior leaders met with all 105 elected MLAs at the party's head offices in Dadar to discuss the way forward in the current political crisis.

The party also discussed farm/agricultural losses in the State and possibilities of either sitting in the opposition or going for mid-term polls, sources in the party said. “We also discussed the internal organisation structure and how we could help the farmers in the current scenario,” said party leader Ashish Shelar.

The party also invited independent MLAs, who have already offered support to the BJP following the results, for discussions, sources said. The meeting on Thursday continued for over two



State unit BJP president Chandrakant Patil and former CM Devendra Fadnavis in Mumbai on Thursday. •PTI

hours.

Over the next two days leaders are expected to seek opinion from the legislators individually on what they think of the current stalemate with Shiv Sena.

“Another major issue we face now is how will our salaries be paid under the President's Rule. We also want to understand from the high command why an alliance with the Sena could not be formed,” said a five-term MLA from Vidarbha.

HC denies interim protection to Navlakha

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUMBAI**

The Bombay High Court on Thursday refused to grant immediate protection from arrest to civil rights activist Gautam Navlakha, who has moved the court seeking anticipatory bail.

The court said it would consider on Friday the issue of granting interim relief to Mr. Navlakha by way of protection from arrest.

Justice P.D. Naik posted for Friday Mr. Navlakha's plea seeking anticipatory bail in the Elgaar Parishad case and for having alleged Maoist links.

His counsel Yug Chaudhary on Thursday told Justice Naik that the activist was given protection from arrest since last year and no harm would be caused to the probe if the same was extended till Mr. Navlakha's anticipatory bail plea is heard by it.

“Co-accused Anand Teltumbde has also filed a pre-arrest bail plea in the high court and has been given protection from arrest. Both their cases are identical,” Mr. Chaudhary said.

Additional public prosecutor Aruna Kamat Pai, however, objected and said the relief granted to Mr. Teltumbde was extended by the Pune court.

“However, in this case, the sessions court has refused to extend the relief granted to Mr. Navlakha,” said Mr. Pai.

Apart from Mr. Navlakha and Mr. Teltumbde, several other activists have been booked for their alleged Maoist links and several other charges following the violence at Koregaon Bhima village in Pune district on January 1 last year.

IN BRIEF



TDP chief Naidu unfazed by defections

VIJAYAWADA
Andhra Pradesh leader of the Opposition N. Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday said the YSR Congress Party's tactics of luring TDP leaders and MLAs will not work on him. Breaking his 12-hour-long hunger strike 'Sand deeksha,' he said, "I have seen plenty of conspiring politicians. They cannot trick me with such politics," referring to the quitting of Gannavaram MLA V. Vamsi Mohan and Telugu Yuvatha chief Devineni Yavinash.

Nilam Sawhney is A.P. Chief Secretary

VIJAYAWADA
Senior IAS officer and former Secretary to the Department of Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, Nilam Sawhney took over as the Chief Secretary to the government of Andhra Pradesh at the Secretariat on Thursday. In-charge Chief Secretary Neerabh Kumar Prasad handed over the charge to her. Ms. Nilam is the first woman and the seventh Chief Secretary of the State post-bifurcation.

TTD gears up for 'Vaikunta Ekadasi'

TIRUMALA
Elaborate arrangements are in place for the 'Vaikunta Ekadasi' and 'Dwadasi' festivals, which fall on January 6 and 7 respectively. Heads of various departments were asked to come up with a roadmap to ensure that devotees are not inconvenienced, particularly in view of the heavy rush that is expected on the two days. Officials were directed to ensure hassle-free darshan and proper accommodation for devotees. Officials were asked to take the help of the police to ensure foolproof security arrangements.

Kerala to seek more clarity on verdict

Need to know the implications of the latest Sabarimala ruling, says Pinarayi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday said the government would seek more clarity on whether the decision of the Supreme Court last year to allow women of all age groups to worship at Sabarimala remained operational against the backdrop of its latest ruling.

Speaking to journalists here, Mr. Vijayan said the Supreme Court had in the past repeatedly refused to stay its 2018 verdict. The top court had not put in abeyance, negated or set aside the 2018 order in its latest ruling. Neither had it changed or altered its earlier opinions about the issue of women worshipping at Sabarimala, he said.



There is some confusion. The government has to seek legal clarity to clear the air and understand what the implications of the latest Supreme Court ruling for Kerala are. We have sought legal opinion from eminent lawyers

PINARAYI VIJAYAN,
KERALA CHIEF MINISTER

The general impression was that the 2018 order remained operational. However, the government could not proceed on assumptions. "We have sought legal opinion from eminent lawyers," he said.

Gender equality
Mr. Vijayan said it was unclear at this stage whether the five-member Constitutional Bench that gave the

ruling in 2018 would consider the review petitions again after the seven-member Constitutional panel of judges decided on the sweeping question of gender equality. "There is some confusion. The government has to seek legal clarity to clear the air and understand what the implications of the latest Supreme Court ruling for Kerala are," he said.

Mr. Vijayan noted that two

judges had dissented from the majority view. They had argued for the status quo, rejection of the review petitions and prosecution of forces that attempted to undermine the 2018 order.

"I wonder what would have been the situation if one more judge had cast his lot with them," Mr. Vijayan said.

To implement verdict

He said the government would implement the verdict. "However, we will wait and sit around till we get clarity on some matters," he said.

To a question, Mr. Vijayan said people were free to pray or protest provided they did not attempt to thwart the verdict and did not infringe on the law.

BJP warns Kerala govt. of backlash

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHI

BJP Kerala general secretary M.T. Ramesh has warned the Kerala government against permitting the entry of women into the Sabarimala temple in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision on Thursday to refer the issue to a larger seven-judge Bench.

Any such attempt by the government to allow women into the temple in the name of technicalities regarding the court's decision would invite serious repercussions, Mr. Ramesh said.

BJP workers will join devotees to prevent the entry of women into the temple in such a scenario, he said.

16 disqualified MLAs join BJP, 13 get ticket

However, Roshan Baig's entry into the party has been blocked

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

A day after the Supreme Court upheld the disqualification of 17 MLAs but allowed them to contest the bypolls, 16 of them joined the ruling BJP and 13 were announced as party candidates for the December 5 byelections.

The day also saw Janata Dal (Secular) announcing its candidates for 10 constituencies, while deciding to support an Independent candidate in Hoskote.

The Congress has already announced the list for eight constituencies and was in a huddle till late on Thursday to finalise candidates for the other seats.



Gathering strength: Supporters of disqualified MLAs giving missed calls to join the BJP on Thursday. • V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

Yediyurappa welcomes 'future Ministers'

STAFF REPORTER
BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa, who welcomed 16 of the 17 disqualified MLAs into the BJP on Thursday, assured them that the party "would fulfil all promises made" and went on to address them as "future Ministers."

He said at the function: "You need not be anxious about fighting elections in the BJP. The party high command is with you." Mr. Yediyurappa appealed to BJP workers and leaders to set aside differences and work towards the victory of the leaders in the bypolls. "It's because of their extraordinary sacrifice that there is a BJP government in the State today," he said.

Most disqualified MLAs

joining the BJP and being given party ticket for the bypolls in a matter of hours has given Mr. Yediyurappa a shot in the arm in a party where he has been fighting to assert himself, sources close to him analyse. It can be recalled that it was the Chief Minister who led the efforts to woo MLAs from the Congress and the JD(S) and successfully toppled the coalition government. "It was a gamble he took and now the party high command has come around too," one of his advisers said.

Though galvanising the party behind the MLAs is tough in some constituencies, a confident Chief Minister claimed that the party would win all 15 seats.

would be made an MLC and a Minister. The day also saw Sharath Bache Gowda, who had sought the BJP ticket from Hoskote, filing his

nomination as an Independent. Meanwhile, Raju Kage, BJP candidate from Kagawad in 2018, joined the Congress on Thursday.

Annual fest



Devotees taking part in the Kalpathy chariot festival in Palakkad, Kerala, on Thursday. Lord Vishwanatha Swamy and Goddess Visalakshi are carried in three elaborately decorated temple chariots through the streets during the festival. • K.K. MUSTAFAH

'Tiger Triumph' gets off to a grand start

The nine-day exercise by India, U.S. troops is to learn best practices in disaster, humanitarian response

SANTOSH PATNAIK
VISAKHAPATNAM

The maiden edition of the Tri-Services India-U.S. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Amphibious Exercise named "Tiger Triumph" got off to a grand start on the eastern seaboard on Thursday with top officials from both the countries resolving to take the relationship to the next level.

Prominent among those who participated in the opening ceremony on board INS Jalashwa, a landing platform dock currently in the Eastern Naval Command, included U.S. Ambassador to India Kenneth Juster, Vice-Admiral Satish Namdeo Ghorshade, Chief of Staff, Eastern Naval Command, Sujay Berry, Commander, East-



Opening ceremony: U.S. naval officers at the inaugural of the tri-services joint exercise in Visakhapatnam. • K.R. DEEPAK

ern Fleet and Cmde Christopher M. Causee, Executive Officer, USS Germantown.

Over 500 from U.S. and 1,200 from Indian forces are participating in the nine-day exercise being organised off Visakhapatnam and Kakinada coasts. The training

events are expected to boost U.S.-India military-to-military relations and learning about the best practices and standard operation practices in disaster and humanitarian response.

The exercise includes staff-planning events as well

as field training that simulate moving a humanitarian assistance/disaster relief force from ship to shore.

Joint command centre

The forces from both countries will transit from Visakhapatnam to Kakinada. The troops will shift ashore and set up a Joint Command and Control Centre and joint relief and medical camp.

INS Airavat, a landing ship tank, including its integral landing craft and helicopters and hydrographic survey ship INS Sandhayak, operating as a hospital ship, are participating in the exercise. The Indian Army will deploy one battalion group comprising troops from the 19 Madras and BMP-II infantry combat vehicles from 7 Guards unit. The Indian Air

Force is deploying one C-130J super Hercules aircraft, Mi-17 transport helicopters and rapid action medical team.

The U.S. Task Force consists of U.S. Navy Ship German Town, a landing ship dock with integral landing craft air cushions and amphibious assault vehicles and specially trained troops from the U.S. III Marine Expeditionary Force. The joint force comprises marine mechanised rifle company, a marine logistics element and medical regulatory team.

Visit to naval facilities

The exercise will have harbour phase till November 16 and sea phase from November 17 to 21. It includes visit to naval facilities, search and seizure training, live-fire drills, ship manoeuvre.

RTC unions give up merger demand for now

This may pave the way for talks to resolve the strike

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

In a major climbdown, the RTC Joint Action Committee, and the Opposition parties that are supporting it have decided to temporarily withdraw their main demand seeking merger of the corporation with the government to pave way for negotiations to resolve the RTC strike which entered 41st day on Thursday.

At a meeting, the JAC and leaders of various parties took the decision to withdraw the demand as the government projected it as the reason to back out on talks. "So, we decided that we will not insist on merger if it helped to begin the talks. There are other demands too which have to be discussed," Telangana Jana Samiti president M. Kodandaram said.



Major decision: TSRTC JAC convener E. Aswathama Reddy and leaders of Opposition parties addressing the media in Hyderabad on Thursday. • G. RAMAKRISHNA

He said the meeting decided to forge more coordination between the unions and the parties to highlight the struggle and the woes of the striking employees. As part of this, the next phase of agitation has been finalised, which includes a campaign in villages on Friday to save the RTC.

Hunger strike

JAC convener E. Aswathama Reddy, co-convener K. Raji

Reddy and other leaders Chary and Sudha would go on an indefinite hunger strike from November 16 and the RTC workers would stage mass hunger strike in front of all bus depots on November 17 and 18.

On November 19, the meeting decided to organise road blockade at several points on the highway from Hyderabad to Kodad.

Meanwhile, RTC workers staged demonstrations in

front of depots as part of a bandh in Mahabubabad district to express resentment over the suicide of Nares, an RTC driver, on Wednesday.

Rushed to hospital

A demonstration in front of Parkal depot lasted for nearly four hours.

A worker was rushed to hospital when he fell ill at the dharna in front of the Yadagirigutta depot.

Maoist links: Kerala HC calls for case diary of police probe

Direction comes after youth challenge bail dismissal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHI/KOZHIKODE

The High Court of Kerala on Thursday directed the State government to produce the case diary of the police probe launched into the alleged Maoist links of Alan Suhaib and Taha Fazal who had been charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

The court direction came on an appeal filed by the two youths challenging a sessions court order dismissing their bail pleas. A Division Bench headed by Justice A. Hariprasad adjourned the case to Monday.

The police charge was that the accused had links

with the Communist Party of India(Maoist) and were in possession of pamphlets about the banned organisation.

While declining bail to them, the sessions court had observed that banners, pamphlets calling for revolt and books published by the central committee of the organisation prima facie spoke of their association with the CPI(Maoist).

Custodial interrogation

Meanwhile, the Kozhikode sessions court on Thursday approved the request of the prosecution to interrogate Fazal. Sessions judge M.R. Anitha allowed his custodial

interrogation till 11 a.m. on Friday. This was after considering a report submitted by the Kozhikode Government Medical College Hospital on his health condition. He was to be produced along with Suhaib in the court on Wednesday.

Public prosecutor and government pleader K.N. Jayakumar said the police would seek further extension of the custody of the two who were arrested a fortnight ago for their links with the banned CPI(Maoist). The police custody of Suhaib will also end on Friday.

The sessions court had rejected their bail pleas last week.



IN BRIEF

Crime Branch to probe IIT-M student's death

CHENNAI
The Central Crime Branch will take over the probe into the death of 19-year-old student Fathima Latheef on the IIT - Madras campus, following allegations by her parents of harassment from the faculty and condemnation from political parties and student organisations.

SFI bags top four posts in Presidency polls

KOLKATA
The Students' Federation of India won all the top four posts in the Presidency University students' union elections on Thursday, after a gap of nine years. It won the posts of president, vice-president, general secretary and assistant general secretary. PTI

Odisha to compensate fishermen for fishing ban

BHUBANESWAR
The Odisha government would compensate 8,000 fishermen families who would bear losses due to the fishing ban imposed for the protection of the endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles. The annual ban would be in force from November, 2019 to May 31, 2020. The families would be paid ₹7,500 per month.

Govt. to set up northeast industrial corridor

NEW DELHI
The Centre plans to set up a northeast industrial corridor, with the Arunachal corridor acting as a bridge between India and southeast Asia, in a bid to provide employment opportunities and promote trade and tourism in the region, said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday.

India is home to 77 million diabetics

With the numbers expected to go up, experts urge focus on prevention

RAMYA KANNAN CHENNAI
One in six people with diabetes in the world is from India. The numbers place the country among the top 10 countries for people with the disease, coming in at number two with an estimated 77 million diabetics. China leads the list with over 116 million diabetics.

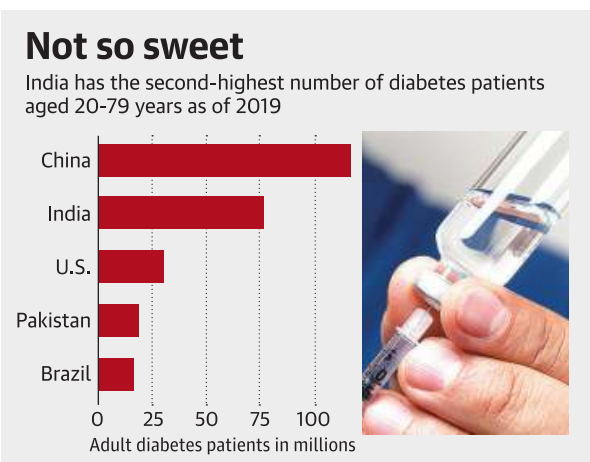
On International Diabetes Day, the International Diabetes Foundation(IDF) Diabetes Atlas makes it clear that India needs to pause and re-evaluate its strategy to combat diabetes.

The ninth edition of the IDF Diabetes Atlas offers projections that continue to put

India at the second slot right up to 2045. The numbers are staggering – just over 134 million Indians will be diabetics in the next 25 years.

Regional topper
India is at the top among a clutch of countries in south-east Asia – Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Mauritius. Bangladesh, which is second on the list of top five countries (20-79 years), however, has only 8.4 million diabetics.

The IDF has stressed the urgency to develop and implement multi-sectoral strategies to combat the growing epidemic. “Diabetes, being a lifestyle disorder with multi-



dimensional causative factors, definitely needs a multi-dimensional approach,” said A. Ramachandran, member of the Diabetes Atlas Committee and chairman, Dr.A. Ramachandran's Diabetes Hospitals, Chennai.

“Once diabetes is diagnosed, currently, there is only fragmented care, especially because our health delivery system is modelled for acute care rather than for chronic care,” he said. The way ahead, all experts

concurred, was a focus on prevention. India needs a more effective national diabetes prevention programme which will require cooperation from several quarters, including medical education, health awareness in schools, and urban planning, explains Mr. Ramachandran. V. Mohan from Dr. Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre also underlined that prevention was key to the problem. “In addition to people with diabetes, the country also has a huge burden of pre-diabetics. If we target them with information on the right lifestyle options to help keep blood sugar, lipids and blood pressure under control, we can prevent at least a third from developing diabetes.”

Lawyers’ stir: court defers judgment in shelter home case

Former MLA Brajesh Thakur is prime accused in the case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Thursday deferred by a month its judgment in the case of alleged sexual and physical assault of several girls at a shelter home in Bihar's Muzaffarpur.

Additional Sessions Judge Saurabh Kulshreshtha deferred the verdict till December 12 as 20 accused, who are currently lodged in Tihar Central Jail, could not be brought to the court premises due the ongoing lawyers' strike in all six district courts in the national capital.

Former Bihar People's Party MLA Brajesh Thakur is the prime accused in the case.

The court had reserved order on September 30 after final arguments by the CBI counsel and 11 accused in the case in which former Bihar Social Welfare Minister and the then JD(U) leader Manju Verma also faced flak as allegations surfaced that Thakur had links with her husband.

She had resigned from her post on August 8, 2018.

The CBI had told a special court that there was enough

evidence against all the 20 accused in the case.

Although the verdict had been listed for Thursday, the lawyers' strike in all the six district courts here, following the recent clash between the police and advocates, is yet to be called off.

The accused in the case have claimed that the CBI had not conducted a “fair investigation” in the case, which has been registered under provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and entails life imprisonment as the maximum punishment.

Noted mathematician Vashishtha Singh no more

He was suffering from schizophrenia

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT PATNA

Noted mathematician Vashishtha Narayan Singh died at a government hospital in Patna on Thursday. He was 77.

Singh, who had worked in the NASA in the U.S. and IITs in India, was suffering from schizophrenia for a long time.

State funeral

The Bihar government has announced a full State funeral for the mathematician.

Born into a poor family in Basantpur village of Bihar's Bhojpur district on

April 2, 1942, Singh had done his matriculation from Netarhat Residential School and his graduation from Patna Science College where he met American Professor John L. Kelley, who invited him to the U.S. for research.

In 1963, he completed his PhD on “on cycle vector space theory” from the University of California and worked at NASA. After returning to India he worked as an Associate Professor in IIT-Kanpur and Kharagpur.

He was fond of reading books on mathematics and playing the flute.



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Friday: Heavy rain/snow likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning likely at isolated places over west Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala.....	32.0	19.0	Kozhikode.....	.....	35.0	25.0
Ahmedabad.....	34.0	21.0	Kurnool.....	.....	31.0	23.0
Aizawl.....	25.0	15.0	Lucknow.....	.....	30.0	14.0
Allahabad.....	30.0	15.0	Madurai.....	.....	32.0	23.0
Bengaluru.....	27.0	18.0	Mangaluru.....	.....	36.0	23.0
Bhopal.....	30.0	17.0	Mumbai.....	.....	34.0	22.0
Bhubaneswar.....	31.0	17.0	Mysuru.....	.....	28.0	18.0
Chandigarh.....	26.0	15.0	New Delhi.....	.....	26.0	15.0
Chennai.....	32.0	27.0	Patna.....	.....	31.0	16.0
Coimbatore.....	31.0	22.0	Port Blair.....	.....	32.0	25.0
Dehradun.....	27.0	13.0	Puducherry.....	8.2	33.0	23.0
Gangtok.....	20.0	13.0	Pune.....	.....	29.0	15.0
Goa.....	34.0	23.0	Raipur.....	.....	30.0	18.0
Guwahati.....	31.0	19.0	Ranchi.....	.....	27.0	13.0
Hubballi.....	28.0	20.0	Shillong.....	.....	22.0	11.0
Hyderabad.....	30.0	20.0	Shimla.....	.....	17.0	11.0
Imphal.....	25.0	16.0	Srinagar.....	.....	6.0	0.0
Jaipur.....	29.0	21.0	Thiruvananthapuram.....	2.9	34.0	24.0
Kochi.....	33.0	24.0	Tiruchi.....	.....	0.9	31.0
Kohima.....	23.0	12.0	Vijayawada.....	.....	32.0	23.0
Kolkata.....	30.0	20.0	Visakhapatnam.....	.....	31.0	24.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)					Yesterday	
CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad.....	231	38	.....	89	115
Bengaluru.....	4	45	49	.....	63
Chennai.....	7	11	36	.....	36
Delhi.....	50	112	499	.....	.....
Hyderabad.....	3	59	52	.....	163
Kolkata.....	10	73	39	.....	253
Lucknow.....	17	28	52	.....	390
Mumbai.....	7	34	19	.....	118
Pune.....	75	11	61	.....	155
Visakhapatnam.....	5	34	31	.....	90

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.
NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.
CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.
PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Ratnakar breaks box office records in the northeast

The film is the biggest blockbuster of all time in the region

NAMRATA JOSHI MUMBAI

Assamese film *Ratnakar: A New Myth of Love* has broken all box office records since its release on October 11 to emerge as the biggest Assamese blockbuster of all time.

Loosely inspired by the 2016 Tamil Vijay-starrer *Theri*, *Ratnakar* has superstar Jatin Bora playing the lead role of a single father living incognito in a remote place for the sake of the safety of his young daughter.

Mr. Bora has also co-produced and directed the film. The music is composed by Zubeen Garg, another big



Jatin Bora in the Assamese film *Ratnakar: A New Myth of Love*

star in the Assamese cinema. The script is written by Abhijit Bhattacharjya, who is often called the “writing machine” of popular travell-

ing theatres in Assam.

“Not just Assam – it's the biggest ever money-spinner for the entire northeast,” says the film's co-producer Navanita Sarma Bora.

Ratnakar initially released in 59 theatres in the State and 12 others across the northeast in its first week. According to the film's distributor Siddharth Goenka, it has collected over ₹9 crore, which is just 1% of the entire Indian market.

“So, ₹9 crore in Assam would roughly be equivalent to a Hindi film doing ₹900 crore business in the all-India market,” says a trade expert.

BHU official removes RSS flag, loses job

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT LUCKNOW

The deputy chief proctor of the South Campus of the Banaras Hindu University, Kiran Damle, was allegedly forced to resign after she removed an RSS flag from the university playground. Police slapped criminal charges on her after the RSS filed a complaint.

The university on Thursday said it would request the

RSS – whose Mirzapur district in-charge Chandra Mohan filed the complaint – to withdraw the FIR. It would also approach the district administration to settle the matter, said the university. “We will protect her 100%,” Ramadevi Nimmanapalli, professor in-charge of the BHU South Campus, said.

The controversy took place on Tuesday when Ms. Damle uprooted the RSS flag

from the ground while a ‘shakha’ was on. After protests by some students and local RSS leaders, Ms. Damle resigned.

Ms. Damle has been charged with promoting enmity between groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, etc. and deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religious beliefs.

Dalit youth strangled in U.P.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GHAZIABAD

Pankaj Kumar, a Dalit youth, was allegedly strangled to death in Kamalpur village of Muzaffarnagar. The body was found near a tubewell outside the village on Thursday, police said.

According to Vijay Pratap Singh, circle officer, Budhana, the youth was missing since Wednesday night. Three people have been detained so far for interrogation, said Mr. Singh, adding that the motive behind the murder is being investigated.



Review and reference

An omnibus reconsideration by the SC of all issues of religious freedom was unnecessary

Ordinarily, a reference to a seven-judge Bench for an authoritative pronouncement on the entire gamut of issues arising from Article 25 and 26 of the Constitution, which protect the religious freedoms of individuals and denominations, would have been welcome. However, the order of a Constitution Bench in making such a reference, while delivering the verdict on petitions seeking review of last year's judgment allowing women in the 10-50 age group to offer worship at the Sabarimala temple, is problematic. The order, passed by a narrow majority of three judges, with two dissenting, means that the review petition, as well as fresh writ petitions, on the issue will be kept pending until there is clarity on the nature of religious rights. The majority, headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi, held that the petitions against the 2018 verdict, which laid down that the practice of keeping women of ovulating age out of the shrine is discriminatory and violative of the right to equality, have revived the question whether an individual's right to worship can outweigh a religious group's right to manage the affairs of its religion. An issue resolved by a 4:1 majority is sought to be reconsidered by formulating fresh questions on the interplay between religious freedom and other fundamental rights, especially the right to equality.

The majority anticipates that similar basic questions on the conflict between individual freedom and constitutionally-protected religious beliefs may arise in other situations too. It cites pending petitions concerning the entry of women into a *dargah*, the entry of Parsi women married to non-Parsis into an *agryari*, and the practice of female genital mutilation among Dawoodi Bohras. It is shocking that the Bench includes the abhorrent practice of female genital mutilation in this genre. It is well-established that freedom of religion, under Article 25, is subject to public order, morality and health, and it may not be difficult for any court to test the validity of the practice against the restriction on grounds of a woman's health, and this may not require an exalted panel of seven judges. In keeping the petitions on Sabarimala pending further, the court has displayed a disquieting inability to stand by its previous transformative judgment. Further, it may lead to a repeat of the unsavoury incidents of last year when religious groups and political activists blocked and attacked women devotees. Justices Fali Nariman and D.Y. Chandrachud, in their dissent, rightly call out such transgressions against the rule of law and, while rejecting the need for review, want all authorities to remember their constitutional duty to work in aid of the Supreme Court and the law laid down by it. An omnibus reconsideration of all issues related to religious freedom was not the way out of the serious issues posed by the Sabarimala judgment.

Open, all the same

With the CJI under the RTI Act, there will be greater transparency by public authorities

The adage, "sunlight is the best disinfectant" is often used to delineate the need for disclosure of matters related to public interest through the Right to Information mechanism. The declaration of assets by ministers and legislators, besides electoral candidates, has gone a long way in shedding light on public authorities and provided the citizenry more relevant information about their representatives. Yet, judges of the Supreme Court had hitherto refused to share information on their personal assets, citing the express lack of public interest. The welcome ruling by a five-member Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court that the office of the Chief Justice of India is a "public authority" under the RTI Act, as much as the apex court itself, now enables the disclosure of information such as the judges' personal assets. The judgment's majority opinion, written by Justice Sanjiv Khanna, emphasised the need for transparency and accountability and that "disclosure is a facet of public interest". In concurring opinions, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud asserted that judicial independence was not secured by secrecy while Justice N.V. Ramana argued for the need of a proper calibration of transparency in light of the importance of judicial independence. The Bench unanimously argued that the right to know under the RTI Act was not absolute and this had to be balanced with the right of privacy of judges. But the key takeaway from the judgment is that disclosure of details of serving judges' personal assets was not a violation of their right to privacy.

The main opinion also argued that information related to issues such as judicial appointments will also be subject to the test of public interest and procedures mandated in the RTI Act that specify that views of third parties (in this case, judges) must be sought. While laying out the importance of the assessment of public interest in any RTI query besides bringing the office of the CJI under the purview of the Act, the decision has gone on to uphold the Delhi High Court verdict in 2010. The RTI Act is a strong weapon that enhances accountability, citizen activism and, consequently, participative democracy, even if its implementation has come under strain in recent years due mainly to the Central government's apathy and disregard for the nuts and bolts of the Act. Yet, despite this, the Supreme Court judgment paves the way for greater transparency and could now impinge upon issues such as disclosure, under the RTI Act, by other institutions such as registered political parties. This is vital as political party financing is a murky area today, marked by opacity and exacerbated by the issue of electoral bonds, precluding citizens from being fully informed on sources of party incomes.

Peace bought by an unequal compromise

We must be wary of verdicts that align cleanly with what appears to be the dominant public sentiment at a given time



SUHRITH PARTHASARATHY & GAUTAM BHATIA

The Supreme Court's Ayodhya Bench had a difficult task. The case before it was a property dispute: who had title to those 2.77 acres of land in Ayodhya? But embedded within it was an act of political and religious violence: the destruction of the Babri Masjid. The Court faced an agonising choice. It could have decided the case as a property dispute, leaving the events of 1992 to be adjudicated on other forums (where they still linger). Or, it could have acknowledged that property rights had become inseparable from the question of justice. Instead, the Court tried to do both. The result is a judgment that falls short both on law and justice.

Civil disputes in India are decided on "a preponderance of probabilities." A court weighs the available evidence and determines which of the competing claims is more likely to be true. The Ayodhya judgment applies this standard. But the Supreme Court's conclusion that the balance of probabilities was tilted in favour of the Hindu parties, despite the vast swathes of both documentary and testamentary proof that it cites, is almost glib.

Departure from 2010 verdict

The inference turns on a surprising departure from the Allahabad High Court's ruling in 2010, which had split the land into three portions. The Supreme Court, instead, designates the disputed property as a single, composite

unit. This finding allows it to use evidence of the exclusive use of the outer courtyard by the Hindus in determining the probability of the possession of the entire property. While the Court recognises that prayers were offered by Muslims between 1857 – after the annexation of Oudh by the British – and 1949, it takes the view that this fact is not sufficient proof of exclusive possession of the inner courtyard. This, the Court holds, is because the Hindus, in continuing to worship in the outer courtyard through their behaviour (such as offerings made to the 'Garbh Griha' while standing on the railing between the courtyards) had exhibited a belief that Lord Ram's birthplace was within the precincts of the central dome. Therefore, that the Muslims showed no interest in the outer courtyard was effectively held against them, although they consistently treated the inner courtyard as a mosque. Given that the property was categorised as an indivisible whole, this meant that the Hindus were exempted from the need to demonstrate possessory rights over the inner courtyard, beyond an exhibition of interest. Thus, although the nub of the dispute concerned the inner courtyard, eventually it was the Hindus' exclusive possession of the outer courtyard that tipped the balance.

The court notes that events subsequent to the annexation of Oudh in 1856 "form the continued basis" through which the parties have claimed their respective legal rights. But having done so, it, inexplicably, while recognising that the dispossession of the Muslims in 1949 (when Hindu idols were installed in the inner courtyard) was an act of desecration, fails to hold this against the claim made by the Hindus over the property. After all, it was this action that deprived



the Muslims in many ways of their ability to establish a more entrenched possessory right over the inner courtyard. Having concluded that the possessory rights of the Hindus over the disputed site stood on a better footing, the court nonetheless thought it fit to recompense the Muslims for the mosque's desecration in 1949 and its ultimate destruction in 1992 by ordering an allotment of five acres of alternate land in Ayodhya to the Sunni Central Waqf Board. It is here that the questions of law and the question of justice become entangled once again. And it is that entanglement that underlies much of the praise that the legal community has showered upon the judgment. Legal scholar Upendra Baxi called it a "miracle" of "complete justice." Justice (Retd.) Santosh Hegde said the judgment "is in the larger interest of the nation and peace in society." Encomiums such as this – focussing not on legal analysis but on 'statesmanship' – have come thick and fast.

But it is important to take a step back and ask: what does this really mean? There are two possible ways in which, despite the law, the Supreme Court's judgment may be defended for its 'statesmanship.' One may argue that the court used its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution to deliver "complete justice", without being shackled by the chains of civil law. Or, one may claim that the court acted "pragmatically" to bring about

closure to a festering dispute in a manner that would allow the country to move on. The first justification is flawed. Basic principles of restitution demand that parties be restored to their original positions, where possible. If the court believed that the Muslims had been wronged in 1949 and 1992, it could quite easily have ordered a reinstatement of the status quo that prevailed before those events. As it stands, the court's direction has an air of condescension to it – not justice.

Favouring the strong

But it is the second justification – one that hails the judgment as an exercise of "pragmatism" in order to ensure peace – that is disturbing. There is a crucial distinction between resolving a dispute on the basis of principle, and achieving "peace" simply by endorsing the existing balance of power – or by not provoking the strong. The Greek historian Thucydides recalled how the conquering Athenians told the rulers of Melos: "right... is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." The rule of law exists to save society from such a permanent state of *matsya nyaya*, and the judiciary exists to enforce that rule of law. And it is the commitment to the rule of law that defines the distinction between a just peace, and peace bought by an unequal compromise.

There is another important reason why such considerations should play no part in judicial rulings. And that is that judges – like the rest of us – are neither savants nor seers. The consequences of judgments, in the medium and long-term future, are impossible to predict. Perhaps peace will last; but perhaps, as experience tells

us, wounds that are papered over only fester further. Therefore, we must be particularly wary of verdicts that align cleanly with what appears to be the dominant public sentiment at a given time, on the apparent basis that the strict application of law and justice must give way, temporarily, to the interests of peace; because history tells us that the "temporary" can slip all too easily into the permanent.

It was reported that at a recent gathering, one of the judges of the Supreme Court, highlighting the unanimity of the decision, compared it with the famous U.S. Supreme Court verdict in *Brown v Board of Education*, which ordered American schools to be desegregated. Unanimity aside, *Brown v Board of Education* is, however, a case that is defined by the opposite logic. In *Brown*, the U.S. Supreme Court went against the dominant opinion, which was strongly in favour of keeping black and white schoolchildren "separate but equal." The Court went against it because, quite simply, it was the right thing to do. The status quo was disrupted. There were demonstrations and protests. But under immense pressure, the Court held firm. And the schools were desegregated.

In Ayodhya, on the other hand, the final verdict appears to strike an uneasy detente with a pernicious political ideology that resists substantive justice, reparations for past wrongs, and mutual tolerance. What else is the final relief – of giving the Muslim parties some land at another site to make it up to them for the destruction of the mosque – but only another way of telling them, "you are equal, but must be separate"?

Suhrit Parthasarathy is an advocate practising at the Madras High Court; Gautam Bhatia is a Delhi-based lawyer

The minority factor in Sri Lankan election

In 2010 and 2015, the minorities voted en bloc in favour of Mahinda Rajapaksa's principal rivals



T. RAMAKRISHNAN

Sri Lanka's November 16 presidential election is being keenly watched by the international community for more than one reason. One of the factors attracting curiosity from within and outside the country is which way ethnic minorities will vote this time. This is the third presidential election in the country since the end of the civil war in 2009.

On the previous two occasions (2010 and 2015), the minorities – Sri Lankan Tamils, Hill-country Tamils and Muslims – voted en bloc in favour of the principal rivals of Mahinda Rajapaksa. The six electoral districts known for predominant or dominant presence of the minorities went against him. This uniform mandate was remarkable, despite the three groups being heterogeneous and having, at times, an uneasy relationship among themselves.

In 2010, the former President, who sought a second term and won the election by a huge margin of around 18.43 lakh votes, secured around five lakh votes from these districts. His immediate rival and former Commander of the Sri

Lanka Army, Sarath Fonseka, polled nearly 7.5 lakh votes. As per the final result, the former got 60.16 lakh votes nationwide and the latter, 41.73 lakh.

Sirisena's margin

However, five years later, Mr. Rajapaksa suffered a stunning defeat at the hands of Maithripala Sirisena. The six districts made a huge difference to the eventual outcome, as Mr. Sirisena walked away with about 12.5 lakh votes of around 17.57 lakh valid votes. This made a critical contribution to Mr. Sirisena's eventual margin of victory of around 4.49 lakh votes.

The six districts in question, accounting for about 16% of the country's electorate, include two in the Northern Province – Jaffna and Vanni; three in the East – Batticaloa, Ampara (also known as Digamadulla) and Trincomalee; and one in the Central Province, Nuwara Eliya.

The voting pattern that the six districts witnessed in 2010 and 2015 was, in a sense, a repeat of the 2005 situation, when Ranil Wickremesinghe got about 6.95 lakh votes and Mr. Rajapaksa received 3.26 lakh votes. In the final nationwide count, the latter outsmarted the former by a narrow margin of 1.75 lakh votes. But, an important aspect of the 2005 election was the declaration by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of "absence of interest" in



the presidential election, the impact of which was felt more in Jaffna than in other districts. In Jaffna, the turnout was a mere 1.2% whereas it ranged from 34.3% in Vanni to 72.7% in Ampara. The "boycott" call, according to many observers, had determined the end result of the 2005 presidential election. Otherwise, voters in the Tamil-speaking areas, especially Jaffna, would have become the "kingmakers" by voting en bloc for Mr. Wickremesinghe.

Statistically speaking, Mr. Wickremesinghe's victory was a possibility in 2005. But the participation of Jaffna voters had always been subdued between 1988 and 2005. The primary reason for this could have been the LTTE factor. It was open knowledge that the Tamil rebels had no "great faith" in the Sinhalese political class or its system. Another reason is that a considerable section of the regis-

tered voters were living in other countries as Sri Lanka allows dual citizenship. Even in 2015, when the popular mood among the minorities was to vote out Mr. Rajapaksa, the turnout in Jaffna was 66.28%, whereas the figure ranged from about 71% in Batticaloa to around 81% in Nuwara Eliya.

The presence of candidates is a crucial factor that decides voters' participation. In the present election, there are 35 candidates, the prominent among them being Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP)'s Gotabaya Rajapaksa, United National Party (UNP)'s Sajith Premadasa, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)'s Anura Kumara Disanayake and former Army Chief, Mahesh Senanayake. However, the race is between Mr. Gotabaya and Mr. Premadasa.

More support for Premadasa

Both the main candidates have been able to secure support from political parties representing the minorities, even though Mr. Premadasa appears to be enjoying the support of the stronger parties. At the same time, at the all-island level, Mr. Premadasa's position is not similar to that of Mr. Sirisena in 2015, who had been backed by the JVP too.

While Mr. Gotabaya, who served as Defence Secretary during his brother's presidency, has named his manifesto as "ten-fold policy framework for inclusive go-

vernance," he has to apportion the blame that falls on Mr. Rajapaksa, whose track record on devolution and human rights was, according to his critics, "dismal."

On the other hand, though Mr. Premadasa is backed by the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and has talked about, in his manifesto, completing the process of constitutional reforms, there is a question mark over his specific position on devolution.

The anti-Muslim riots in Kandy in March 2018 and this year's Easter blasts are expected to have a bearing on minorities' psyche. Further, there are factors like the internal bickering within the ruling coalition and "lackadaisical performance" of the Sirisena-Wickremesinghe government on the economic front that may influence them.

Given the Rajapaksas' "reach out" programmes in the North and the possibility of the UNP candidate facing anti-incumbency, the SLPP nominee could net more votes than his brother in 2015. Regardless of this, Mr. Premadasa's victory prospects rest on his ability to exceed or even match the support enjoyed by Mr. Sirisena among the minorities in the six districts. Even a semblance of apathy among voters may only benefit the SLPP, a factor Mr. Premadasa should be aware of.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Transparency in SC

The Supreme Court's verdict opening the office of Chief Justice to public scrutiny under the Right to Information Act (RTI) is historic (Front page, "Office of Chief Justice of India comes under RTI Act," Nov. 14). While the judiciary enjoys high public trust owing to its unflinching commitment to the rule of law, it has for long shied away from subjecting itself to public scrutiny. Concerns over the secrecy surrounding the present collegium system are genuine. While the executive has had no problems in disclosing the reasons for rejecting the collegium's recommendations, the Supreme Court's defence has remained absent from

the public debate. The landmark ruling allows public to seek information on appointment and transfer of judges, but the reasons behind these recommendations could still be clouded in secrecy as decisions of the collegium are largely based on reports from the Intelligence Bureau (IB). However, what should not be forgotten here is the fact that a transition to the era of transparency hinges upon the actions of the Chief Justice who is the administrative head of the Supreme Court.

M. JEYARAM, Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

Operation Lotus

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had denied any role in the resignation of 17 MLAs

of the Karnataka Assembly, which led to the Congress-JD(S) coalition government losing power in the State; but with 16 of these MLAs now embracing the saffron party, the cat is well and truly out of the bag. 'Operation Lotus', the name given by the Opposition to the BJP's game plan to lure MLAs, has clearly been resurrected and all the MLAs who resigned have been promised ministerial berths and also tickets to contest in the same seats that they had held before they submitted their resignations. The BJP's holier-than-thou attitude stands exposed and it will take plenty of time for this taint to wear away.

C.V. ARAVIND, Bengaluru

Nehru's legacy

Bhupesh Baghel's editorial piece titled "Nehruvian consensus under siege" (Nov. 14) was a poignant reminder of what is severely lacking in the current political realm in India. Fifty-five years after his death, Jawaharlal Nehru's vision (and that of Gandhi) of a secular, robust and ideologically thriving India is coming under threat. Our political system has disintegrated into one composed of leaders trading barbs like children in a playpen, backstabbing and engaging in underhand dealings. Add to this mix a political majority that is frequently seen using religious dissimilarities to strengthen their foothold, and denizens

that seem unable (or unwilling) to see through the smoke-and-mirrors.

MARIYAM SAVIOUR, Panangad, Ernakulam, Kerala

One reason why Nehru's legacy is vulnerable to criticism is due to his sparse and rather dispirited support for universal primary education. It is unlikely that he did not recognise that the ideal fuel for egalitarianism was enlightenment, the first step to which was basic education. Mahatma Gandhi's *nayi taalim* was a

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >>In the Oped article titled "Far removed from reality" (Nov. 14, 2019), the reference to *Howard Baker* should be corrected to say *Herbert Baker*. >>The picture that went along with the Sports page report "It will be a different ball game: Rahane" (Nov. 13, 2019, early editions) erroneously identified *Ajinkya Rahane* as *K.L. Rahul*. It was corrected in the city editions.

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Will the Kartarpur Corridor survive India-Pakistan hostilities?

PARLEY

The happiness could be overpowered by toxicity unless India-Pakistan relations improve

Over the past few days, thousands of pilgrims have visited the Kartarpur shrine through the special corridor built between India and Pakistan, which brought to reality a long-cherished dream of many Sikhs. After the celebration following the inauguration of the Kartarpur Corridor on November 9, many in the diplomatic and security establishment have expressed reservations about the project. In a conversation moderated by **Suhasini Haidar, K.C. Singh and Ajai Sahni** discuss the potential and the pitfalls of the India-Pakistan initiative. Edited excerpts:

The Kartarpur Corridor is a reality after seven decades. With Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Imran Khan comparing the corridor to the Berlin Wall coming down, what are your thoughts?

K.C. Singh: This was always welcome – not just the Kartarpur Corridor, but also perhaps the idea that other religious corridors may be built between the two countries. I think there may not be too many other religious spots like this, just four kilometres from the border.

But let's not conflate two things: the demand for the Kartarpur Corridor with India-Pakistan relations. If India-Pakistan relations were on a positive trajectory, Kartarpur would have been a confidence-building measure. Incidentally, this was never a part of the India-Pakistan comprehensive dialogue structure. Now if it was a confidence-building measure, you could see it helping the relationship further. But since the relationship is sour, and made worse by the August 5th decision on Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, you are dealing with two separate processes: a relationship going south and this kind of an initiative sticking out like a sore thumb.

Ajai Sahni: I would agree, and add something. I believe both sides have entered into this Kartarpur arrangement for divergent, conflicting, and partisan political and domestic reasons. This is not a decision in good faith, to my mind. In 2017, a parliamentary committee had mulled ov-

er this idea, consulted widely with security and intelligence agencies, and come to the conclusion that however desirable, the Kartarpur Corridor was not advisable due to the situation on the ground. This was completely ignored.

Now, when you enter initiatives with the wrong motives, you can be fairly certain that no Berlin Walls are going to come down. This is not about India-Pakistan relations, but about Pakistan's leadership trying to address its own strategic, tactical objectives, and about our ruling party trying to secure some political advantages. When negotiations are in bad faith, outcomes cannot be positive.

Given that there were no other bilateral talks, isn't the fact that the Kartarpur talks went on for an entire year a miracle of sorts?

KC: Well, I think the question arises as to why Pakistan has gone ahead with the initiative despite the Bala-kot strikes, the Pakistan-bashing rhetoric during the elections this year, as well as dilution of Article 370.

In the past year, the Kartarpur Corridor seems to have been pushed by Pakistan's military, with General Qamar Javed Bajwa making the first move when he offered the project. Government officials have also said that this project has been completed with "military precision". Do you think Kartarpur is a military project for Pakistan?

AS: Absolutely. The basic objective has been to give a fillip to the Khalistan [separatist] project. And this combines with efforts of the past 3-4 years of creating problems in Punjab through a terrorist proxy. It combines with the increasing rhetoric around Khalistan. We heard repeated statements from Pakistani Ministers that Khalistanis would be welcomed at Kartarpur. As far as the management of Kartarpur is concerned, it is completely in the purview of the Army and the Inter-Services Intelligence.



Is there an uptick in activity by these Khalistani groups?

AS: Marginally, yes. From what we have recorded, in the eight years preceding 2016, we saw no fatalities relating to activities from separatists in Punjab. Thereafter we have seen some. There is some limited uptick, but no major traction.

I want to put these suspicions that you refer to in some context. We have other religious pilgrimages between the two countries (Ajmer Sharif, Nankana Sahib, Hindu shrines, etc.) and a convention from the 1970s regulating them. So, why is Kartarpur different?

KC: First, the volumes are much smaller for those, and they are highly controlled. Lists are made in advance, and the Home Ministry and State governments run through them. Only a few thousand people go a few times a year.

AS: The real concern can be radicalisation, recruitment, and identification [by separatist groups]. If the volumes are substantial, as I am sure they will be eventually, they [the Pakistani establishment] will set up systems to expose these people to diaspora elements. The Khalistani leadership, still being given safe haven in Pakistan, will be used

The basic objective [for Pakistan] has been to give a fillip to the Khalistan [separatist] project. And this combines with efforts of the past 3-4 years of creating problems in Punjab through a terrorist proxy.

to identify individuals who are potential recruits and who could be mobilised for action or propaganda to support the broader Khalistani purpose. This is the slow attritional policy they would have imagined. Whether or not they are able to succeed is another matter.

If you can put aside the suspicions, how big a moment is the Kartarpur opening for the Sikh community and followers of Guru Nanak around the country?

KC: Kartarpur; Nankana Sahib, which is west of Lahore; and Dam-dama Sahib, which is between Islamabad and Peshawar are all important. There are many other gurdwaras in Pakistan, but these are the main ones. But at the same time I would say, let's not hype it too much. It is great that it has been done, but India should now be smart about it and make a counter-proposal and say, please, let us ex-

change an enclave. We don't want a corridor, and there is a natural barrier of the Ravi river which touches Kartarpur. We don't know why Radcliffe drew the line south but took out this enclave at this point. So, like we did with Bangladesh, why can't we exchange the enclaves of land with land here? Pakistan will immediately reject it because what they want is a constant pressure point. There is always the fear that the corridor will get linked to India-Pakistan relations. If relations are tense, they may tighten the flow of pilgrims, and even if they allow a normal flow here and the rest of the relationship is toxic, then you are allowing them to give the impression that Sikhs are favoured and creating a division with other Indians.

Are you saying that the government has allowed Pakistan to put issues of faith above national policy?

AS: Well, it is abundantly clear that they neglected issues relating to national security policy and the declared national policy on Pakistan. This [Kartarpur Corridor] contradicts what the practice was over the last 4-5 years. The diplomatic and political ecosystem towards Pakistan has been one of hostility and within that Kartarpur stands out not only as a positive exception but a contradiction.

Given all that, will the Kartarpur Corridor survive?

AS: I think it will be a perpetual hostage to a major terrorist event. And the moment something occurs, our political system will have to deal with the far greater disappointment of losing something we had gained as opposed to not having something the Sikh community desired. If Kartarpur is shut down now after having been opened up, the sense of loss will be far greater than not having access to Kartarpur for 72-73 years.

KC: Well, you saw the engagement and the message that Prime Minister Khan sent [with reference to Kashmir at the opening]. You also saw that the Indian Prime Minister could not go across, and asked Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to carry offerings and pay obeisance

on his behalf. So it cannot be seen in isolation to other problems. Those have become more toxic after the dilution of Article 370, and Mr. Khan said that, raising issues of human rights. So what can the corridor do by itself? It's a happy occasion which will be overpowered by the toxicity unless we can find a way to move the whole relationship forward. It can be a beginning, but cautiously so, and won't mean much unless the rest of the relationship goes forward.

Finally, many have said that Punjab bore the brunt of Partition. Can this engagement at least try and heal the wounds of the past?

KC: No, I think when Punjabis meet they always get along. They speak the same language, discuss the same culture, food is the same. The two Punjabis having better connectivity should be a natural outcome. After all, in the past, Punjab was land-locked but connected to Central Asia. During Maharaja Ranjit Singh's time, Lahore was connected by the Indus river, the Sutlej, and had riverine ties with the region. After Partition, all of that was de-linked. So [Indian] Punjab has become completely land-locked and looks at the rest of India for goods and services and markets. There is no [cross-border] trade left, and so Amritsar, which was on a major trading route to Central Asia, is now completely land-locked, and the same goes for Pakistan's Punjab province too. They are losing their links to the booming economy of India, simply because of their fixation on Kashmir.

AS: We could always enumerate all the many advantages. There are economic and social advantages that would come from better relations between India and Pakistan. The difficulty is that politics always trumps economics. As long as you have this politics of hatred that is entrenched in Pakistan because of a certain religious doctrine, and that seems to be something that is increasingly being seeded in India as well, I don't think one can imagine a very dramatic transformation or a very positive people-to-people relationship between the people of Punjab on this side of the border and people on the other side at present.

Back from the brink

The nearly year-long measles outbreaks in the U.S. offer lessons for India

R. PRASAD

On October 3, 2019, the U.S. just about managed to retain its measles elimination status declared nearly 20 years ago. A month earlier, New York State declared the end of a measles outbreak, which began on October 1, 2018 and continued for almost a year, bringing the country very close to losing the status.

The last case of measles in New York State occurred on August 19 and completed 42 days (two incubation periods for measles) after the onset of rash. It ended just a couple of days before the duration of the outbreak could cross the one-year mark. This was crucial as a country loses the measles elimination status if a chain of transmission from a given outbreak is sustained for more than 12 months.

An outbreak in New York City, which began on September 30, 2018, led to more than 600 confirmed cases. The outbreak in nearby Rockland County, New York, started the next day and led to more than 300 cases. While 29 other States in the U.S. reported outbreaks in the past year, these did not last long. The reason why they were both limited in size and short-lived was mainly because the vaccination coverage was high leading to high immunity protection in the population.

Reasons for outbreak

The nearly year-long transmission in New York highlights the possibility of a sustained spread of measles in small pockets of an under-immunised community even when vaccine coverage with two doses nationally is high. Inequities in vaccine coverage, or gaps in vaccine coverage between communities, age groups and geographic areas in countries with high coverage at the national level, provide a fertile ground for outbreaks and for prolonged spread in such under-immunised groups.

Gaps and disparities in vaccine coverage between communities was the reason why the two outbreaks among the children of New York lasted for almost a year. Vaccine coverage among children belonging to the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community was not high; measles vaccination

coverage in schools in the outbreak area was only 77%. In addition, there was also a delay in vaccination. The reason? Parents had refused to vaccinate their children fearing that the vaccine might cause autism. Low protection in children of this community meant that they ran a high risk of getting infected by unvaccinated people returning from countries with ongoing measles transmission.

While 1,249 cases of measles were laboratory-confirmed in 2019 from 22 outbreaks in 31 States, 75% of the cases were restricted to the Orthodox Jewish community in New York.

Problem in India

These details are important for India, which has a twin problem. The first is that it has huge pockets of under-immunised children. Second, the immunisation coverage with two doses at the national level is far below the World Health Organization level of 95% needed for protection and elimination. Intensified efforts to increase immunisation coverage in recent years have led to a sharp drop in the number of measles cases annually in India. Yet, in the October 2018-2019 period, India reported 71,834 cases, the third highest number in the world, according to the WHO.

While India intends to eliminate measles by 2020, the vaccination coverage has nowhere reached the 95% threshold for two doses. According to the June 2019 WHO and UNICEF estimate for national immunisation coverage, measles vaccine coverage in India in 2018 for the first dose was 90%. It was 80% for the second dose. But the reported coverage levels are "likely an overestimation", the report cautions, based on a coverage evaluation survey.

Protection offered by maternal antibodies last for only four-five months, while the first dose of measles immunisation is at nine-12 months of age. Thus there is a huge window during which infants are vulnerable to measles infection. Also, about 15% of children in India fail to develop immunity from the first dose of measles vaccine. Till such time older children are fully protected with two doses, infants will remain vulnerable.

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NOTEBOOK

A lesson from reporting on pollution

Knowledge is often least accessible to those who need it most

JACOB KOSHY

It has been happening for more than a decade now. During this season, smoke from the fields of Haryana and Punjab, where farmers set fire to rice stubble, combines with Delhi's local sources of pollution to worsen the air quality. Research shows that the contribution of stubble burning to Delhi's pollution is, at worst, 25%-40%. The rest is contributed by local industries, vehicles, power plants, and construction dust generated in the National Capital Region. Yet stubble burning makes for high-decibel 'conflict' reporting: Delhi's Aam Aadmi Party government blames Punjab and Haryana for the mess, while the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the Centre blames the Delhi government for not doing enough.

Last year, the Union Environment Ministry took some reporters from Delhi

to Punjab, to showcase steps taken to discourage farmers from burning stubble. They had adopted a stick and carrot approach: steep fines had been imposed on farmers burning stubble, and farmer cooperatives had been given heavily subsidised machines that cut, sorted and sometimes buried the straw in their fields. The trouble was that the machines were still too expensive. We spoke to many farmers. Some said they had stopped burning stubble, some complained of the difficulties in accessing these machines, some said they had seen value in the chaff and were selling briquettes of them to bio-ethanol power plants.

On our way back, some television reporters, who had been expecting visuals of burning fields, were disappointed. The skies were blue and there were no smoke plumes. Ergo, zero footage. Finally – and to

the annoyance of one of the Environment Ministry officials with us – we saw a dark cloud of smoke. We drove to the field. There we saw a man with a flaming torch setting fire to his rice field. "Who are you? Why are you doing this? Don't you know this is illegal?" He was met with an avalanche of questions from us and photographed. His field was suddenly on camera. "This is not my land. I'm just following my master's instructions," the man from Bihar said.

At this point, an official from the local pollution control board whispered to us that "it would be best to head back to the bus as things could turn violent". But within minutes came the 'master', a burly Sikh farmer, accompanied by burlier acolytes. The questions we had posed earlier came back to us: "Who are you? Why are you here? Oh, from Delhi!" What followed was an instructive

half-hour. We were told that subsidised machines were available only to a few farmers. He explained the economics of farming, how the unavailability of labour made it hard for farmers to switch from burning fields to other methods of disposing stubble. Many farmers couldn't be convinced that it was possible for pollutants to travel hundreds of kilometres to Delhi while their own skies were blue. And how did people in Delhi know that pollutants from Punjab were affecting them and that Delhi itself was not the culprit?

That was three years ago when I hadn't yet understood how air quality sensors worked. I learnt about this because of my privilege of being a journalist – the job gives me access to authorities, scientists, and detailed explainers on the Internet. Paradoxically, knowledge is often least accessible to those who need it most.

The Hindu.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 15, 1969

Giri on Nehru varsity

The Jawaharlal Nehru University, described as "a living memorial" to Nehru and the principles he stood for, came into being today [November 14, New Delhi] with the President Mr. V.V. Giri formally opening it. Both the President in his inaugural speech and the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, in her address to the university's first convocation underlined the importance of developing the university on "unique" lines to develop centres of advanced learning imbued with Nehru's spirit of nationalism, international approach, and his passion for science and technology. Mr. Giri said naming the university after Nehru "has indeed been fully justified as a grateful nation's humble tribute to the memory of a great leader who was in the vanguard of the freedom movement and who also gave it a sense of direction and a stable Government firmly rooted in democratic traditions." Mr. Nehru had an "abiding faith" in the great contribution which universities could make to national development, Mr. Giri told a large gathering of distinguished people from all walks of life who filled the vast auditorium of Vigyan Bhavan against the backdrop of a life-size portrait of Nehru in one of his most elegant and cheerful moods.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOV. 15, 1919.

Death of Sir V.C. Desika Chariar. Kt.

It is with feelings of profound regret that we have to announce the death of Sir V. C. Desika Chariar, yesterday evening, at his residence 'Padma Vilas', Mylapore. The end was quite sudden and unexpected, and it is believed it was due to heart failure. Sir V. C. Desika Chariar was a distinguished and prominent citizen of Madras being connected with a number of public institutions and was ever active in the promotion of objects of public utility. Born in the year 1861, he was educated at the Presidency College, took his B.L. Degree in 1886 and commenced practice as Vakil of the Madras High Court in the next year. He was an active member of the Corporation of Madras in 1896-1908, lecturer in the Law College in 1896-1900, Additional Member of the Legislative Council in 1904-1908 representing the Corporation of Madras and Fellow of the University of Madras. He took a keen interest in public movements and was associated with the Congress Sessions held in this city as an office-bearer before he became a Government servant.

FROM PAGE ONE

SC dismisses pleas to review Rafale ruling

Justice K.M. Joseph, the third judge on the Bench, agreed with the conclusions arrived in the main opinion of the Bench but suggested that the CBI should take prior sanction and register an FIR in case it found any material in the former Ministers' complaint.

The court allowed the government's application for correction of certain factual portions of the December last judgment. The main opinion said these mistakes only pertained to the narration of facts and did not affect the rationale of the judgment.

The two judges said the December 2018 judgment merely misconstrued between "what has been and what was to be done". The verdict had misinterpreted facts on whether the government had shared the price details with the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).

Secondly, it had conveyed the notion that the CAG report on the Rafale purchase was already before Public Accounts Com-

mittee of Parliament, when it was not.

Thirdly, the government had claimed that a redacted portion of the report was placed before Parliament and was in public domain.

Pricing issue

The court rejected the allegations on the pricing of the jets. It said it was not the function of the court to determine the prices.

The court noted how the review petitioners claimed they had got more information from "sources" about the Rafale deal after the court decision in December. In March, the court, in an order, agreed to examine various documents published in *The Hindu* to decide the veracity of the allegations against the Rafale purchase.

"We decline to, once again, to embark on an elaborate exercise of analysing each clause, perusing what may be the different opinions, then taking a call whether a final decision should or should not have been taken in such technical matters," the court said.

Larger Bench to decide role of courts in religion

Once a Constitution Bench has laid down the law, both legislature and the executive, were bound to comply.

Instead of complying with the Supreme Court judgment, the country was witness to the "sad spectacle of unarmed women between the ages of 10 and 50 being thwarted in the exercise of their fundamental right of worship at the Sabarimala temple". Organised efforts to thwart women from entering the temple should be put down firmly. All persons, including women between the ages of 10 and 50, were "equally entitled to practice the Hindu religion".

The Sabarimala judgment of September 2018 was based on a bona fide PIL plea, which had raised grave issues of gender bias on account of a physiological or biological function common to all women.

'Constitution is holy'

The fears raised by Justice Malhotra, who dissented in

2018, about the threat of PILs being used by third parties to tinker with religious beliefs were unfounded. "Busybodies, religious fanatics, cranks and persons with vested interests will be turned down by the Court at the threshold itself," Justice Nariman read out in open court. For judges, "the holy book is the Constitution", he stressed.

But Chief Justice Gogoi reasoned that an authoritative pronouncement from a larger Bench would instil public confidence. An increasing number of petitions were being filed questioning the validity of religious practices and their restrictions on women, he noted. Some of these have questioned long-held religious beliefs.

Like the Sabarimala issue, these petitions concerned the tug-of-war between women's fundamental right to equality under Article 14 and the believers' right to freely practice religion.

J&K Lt. Governor hints at early polls

'Police will have to play important role'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR

Lt. Governor Girish Chandra Murmu on Thursday hinted at early Assembly elections in the Union Territory of J&K.

"The role of the J&K police in maintaining peace is worthy of praise. The police force will have to play an important role in elections in J&K, which will be conducted soon," Mr. Murmu said during the passing-out parade of new recruits in Reasi district of Jammu.

The J&K Re-organisation Act which split J&K in to two UTs of J&K and Ladakh on August 5, has retained an Assembly for J&K but not for Ladakh. Mr. Murmu's statement assumed significance since J&K remains under Central rule from June 2017.

Meanwhile, senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi



Peace is key: Lt. Governor G.C. Murmu and Director-General of Police Dilbag Singh during a passing-out parade at Reasi in Jammu on Thursday. ■PTI

Azad on Thursday asked the Centre to release all mainstream leaders in J&K. "There is no point in detaining all the leaders if normalcy is returning to J&K," Mr. Azad said during the first visit to his hometown Baderwah in a year.

Punjab govt. must bear Kartarpur fee: SAD

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHANDIGARH

The Shiromani Akali Dal on Thursday asked Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to bear the \$20 service fee being charged by Pakistan for each pilgrim ac-

cessing the Kartarpur corridor, by reviving the 'Mukh Mantri Tirath Yatra scheme' initiated during the previous SAD-BJP regime.

Capt. Singh had earlier urged the SGPC to pay the fee.

CBI can probe Rafale deal: judge

Justice K.M. Joseph says the investigation agency can act on a corruption charge

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court's judgment upholding the Rafale deal will not bar the CBI from acting on a corruption complaint in the defence purchase, provided the agency gets prior sanction from the competent authority to launch an investigation, Justice K.M. Joseph held in his separate opinion in the Rafale review case on Thursday.

"It is my view that the judgment sought to be reviewed would not stand in the way of the first respondent [CBI] from taking action on the complaint in accordance with the law and after obtaining previous approval under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act," Justice Joseph observed.

However, the judge held that filing a writ or a review in the Supreme Court was not the right way for the peti-

A matter of words

The chronology of events in the contempt case:

April 10: Rahul Gandhi alleges that the SC had held that 'chowkidar is a thief'

April 12: BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi moves the SC, seeking contempt action against Mr. Gandhi for attributing his remarks on the Rafale verdict to the court

April 15: SC seeks an explanation from Mr. Gandhi

April 22: Mr. Gandhi files affidavit, says his comments were made on

the basis of bonafide belief and general understanding

April 23: SC issues contempt notice to Mr. Gandhi

May 8: Mr. Gandhi files additional affidavit, tenders unconditional apology

May 10: SC reserves its order on Ms. Lekhi's contempt plea

Nov. 14: SC rebukes Mr. Gandhi but closes the contempt proceedings with a warning to him to be more careful



tioners to go about it.

At one point, the judge wonders whether the effort to probe the corruption complaint filed by former Union Ministers Yashwant Sinha, Arun Shourie and senior lawyer Prashant Bhushan would end up as a "futile exercise" as the sanctioning

authority under Section 17A of the anti-graft law is the government itself. But, nevertheless, Justice Joseph said the agency could seek prior sanction and investigate the Rafale deal if the complaint indicates commission of cognisable offences.

Justice Joseph said the CBI

Rafale ruling has ended vilification exercise: MoD

'Court has upheld the govt. position'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court's dismissal of the Rafale review petitions has brought to a close "an exercise of vilification and casting doubts" on the defence acquisition process, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) said on Thursday.

"Today, the Supreme Court has categorically rejected the review petitions filed subsequently against the order on merits bringing to a close an exercise of vilification and casting doubts on the defence acquisition process which has an adverse impact on the morale of the security forces," the Ministry said in a statement. The apex court had given a clear verdict on December

14, 2018 on the petition seeking an inquiry into the procurement of 36 Rafale fighter aircraft, it noted.

The November 14 judgment had stated that the review petitions were without any merit and dismissed, the statement said.

The Ministry listed out several points of the judgment while putting emphasis on certain portions concerning various aspects of the deal. "On pricing, the court has upheld the position of the government that the price of the aircraft is lower than the previous deal..." it stated. In another instance, the statement said, the court had "rightly observed" the need for fighter aircraft and the delay in the procurement process.

IN BRIEF



Will not allow anyone to exploit farmers: U.P. CM

LAKHIMPUR KHURI (U.P.)

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said he will not allow anyone to exploit farmers and will ensure payment of cane dues even if the government has to 'auction defaulter mills'. "If someone has this misunderstanding that he is going to earn by stopping cane payment to farmers, then he is wrong," he said while inaugurating a building of Agricultural College here.

Bypolls to 2 Rajya Sabha seats on December 12

NEW DELHI

Two Rajya Sabha seats — one each from Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh — will go to polls on December 12, the Election Commission of India announced on Thursday. Former Congress Rajya Sabha MP from Karnataka K.C. Ramamurthy had resigned on October 16 and then joined the BJP. Samajwadi Party's MP from Uttar Pradesh Tazeen Fatma quit on November 3, after she won the bypoll for the Rampur seat in Uttar Pradesh.

SC to hear pleas on Article 370 on Dec. 10

NEW DELHI

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court led by Justice N.V. Ramana on Thursday scheduled for December 10 its hearing of petitions challenging the dilution of Article 370, which was the source of special rights accorded to Kashmiris under Article 35A, and the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories. The Bench, including Justices S.K. Kaul, R. Subhash Reddy, B.R. Gavai and Surya Kant, did not pass any interim orders.

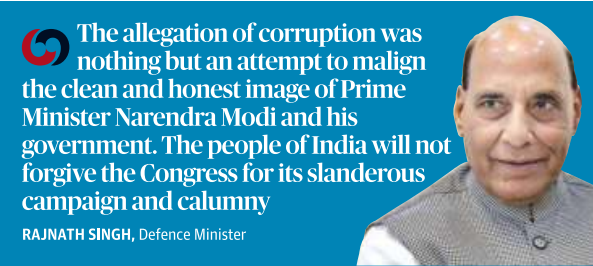
Shah wants Congress to apologise

Rajnath echoes demand, saying the party has been misleading people

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Senior Ministers of the Narendra Modi government on Thursday demanded that the Congress and its former president Rahul Gandhi apologise to the country after the Supreme Court dismissed review petitions on the acquisition of the Rafale fighter jets.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah termed the verdict a befitting reply to the Congress and its leaders, and demanded that they apologise. "The Supreme Court's decision to dismiss the review petitions... is a befitting reply to those leaders and parties that rely on a malicious and baseless campaign. After today's rebuke from the Supreme Court, the Congress and its leader, for



whom politics is above national interest, must apologise to the nation," he said.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the allegations of corruption were aimed at maligning the Prime Minister and demanded that the Congress apologise.

"The allegation of corruption in the Rafale deal was nothing but an attempt to malign the clean and honest image of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his govern-

Rahul renews demand for JPC investigation

Surjewala dares Centre to order probe

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said the separate opinion of Supreme Court judge Justice K.M. Joseph in the Rafale review case has opened a door for an investigation into the Rafale fighter aircraft deal, and reiterated his demand for instituting a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) to probe the pact.

At a separate press conference, Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala alleged that the BJP was trying to "mislead" the people and dared the government to carry out an open investigation.

Asked whether the party would stick to its *chowkidar chor hain* (the watchman is the thief) slogan, he replied in the affirmative. It would remain until a proper investigation unravelled all as-



Rahul Gandhi

pects of the Rafale deal, he said. "Justice Joseph of the Supreme Court has opened a huge door into an investigation of the Rafale scam. An investigation must now begin in full earnest. A Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) must also be set up to probe this scam," Mr. Gandhi tweeted with the hashtag 'BJP Lies On Rafale'.

At a press conference, Mr. Surjewala said the BJP should stop celebrating and focus on an investigation as the court decision had paved the way for a probe.

NDA won't cross 25 in Jharkhand: R.P.N. Singh

Congress State in-charge stops short of predicting the number the party and its two allies will win

SOBHANA K. NAIR NEW DELHI

The BJP and its allies will not cross 25 seats in the Jharkhand Assembly election, R.P.N. Singh, Congress State in-charge, said on Thursday, a day after the last date for filing nomination for the first phase of polls.

The BJP's pre-poll alliance has nearly collapsed, with all its three allies — the Jharkhand Students Union, the Janata Dal(U) and the Lok Jan-shakti Party — deciding to go solo in the elections, giving the JMM-Congress-RJD alliance a moral boost.

"People of India have started teaching the BJP a lesson for its arrogance. In Maharashtra, they spoke of a target of 220 seats and they

could get only 105 seats. In Haryana, they spoke of 75-plus, and they won only 41 there," Mr. Singh told *The Hindu*. According to the feedback from ground, the BJP and its allies will not be able to cross 25 seats in the State, he claimed.

Mr. Singh, however, stopped short of predicting the number of seats the Opposition alliance would win. "The alliance will definitely form the government. I am not a psephologist to give a number," he said.

In the 2014 Assembly election, the BJP won 37 seats in the 82-member Assembly and got past the majority mark as a number of MLAs from other parties joined the party.



R.P.N. Singh

It has been a decade since the Congress crossed the 10-seat mark in Jharkhand. In the 2009 election, the Congress won 14 Assembly seats, its highest tally in the State. Mr. Singh, however, seems confident that the party will have a better strike rate this time around based on its performance in recent Lok Sab-

ha election.

"At a time when the whole of the North India was being swept by a BJP wave, out of the seven seats we contested, the Congress won one seat by 70,000 votes, lost one seat by less than 10,000 votes and another one by a margin of 1,400 votes. Yes, we could have done better. Still, it was not a bad performance and we are waiting to improve on it," Mr. Singh said.

Taking a dig at the BJP, Mr. Singh said that for over a month, the party had been taunting the opposition for its inability to finalise its seat-sharing arrangement. "We announced our seat sharing arrangement on November 8, while the BJP and its allies

are at each other's throat and the power tussle is still going on past the last date of nomination for the first phase," Mr. Singh said.

The recent Congress performance in Maharashtra and Haryana too has added wind to the Opposition's sails. "So soon after the Lok Sabha election, there is a turnaround among the people and they are seeing through the lies of the BJP. They have only played the role of a great distractor instead of addressing the issues of the day," Mr. Singh said.

The Congress is trying to ensure that the campaign is localised, not allowing the BJP to run away with the narrative centred on Article 370 and Ram Mandir.

J&K Lieutenant-Governor gets two new advisers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The retired IPS officer Farooq Khan and the retired IAS officer K.K. Sharma have been appointed as advisers to Girish Chandra Murmu, Lieutenant-Governor of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. According to

an order of the Union Home Ministry, the appointments will take effect from the day of their taking up the posts. They will assist Mr. Murmu in the administrative work.

Both had served as advisers to Satya Pal Malik, Governor of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir.

APPEAL

Name of Patient: **Aradhya Maji, 08 months.**
Hospital Name: Columbia Asia Hospital, Diagnosis: Suffering from transposition of great arteries large upper muscular VSD, severe PAF. She requires to undergo Arterial Switch Operation with VSD Closure + Subpul Mono Excision(High Risk) Operation. The estimated cost of the Surgery is **Rs. 5,50,000/-**.
We request Kind Hearted Philanthropists to save her. Kindly send donation by Cheque/D.D/M.O favouring **Save Poor Lives** and on the back of cheque write **Ac Aradhya Maji S/B Account No. 20000913487, State Bank of India, Raja Annamalaiapuram Branch, IFSC Code: SBIN0001855**, which is exempted under 80G of I.T. Act.
Contact: **SAVE POOR LIVES REGISTERED PUBLIC CHARITABLE TRUST, (ADMIN DIVISION), Flat No. A1, Ceebros Garden, Ground Floor, Old No.76, Kamarajar Salai, Raja Annamalaiapuram, Chennai - 600 028. Ph: 044-42044165, Mobile: 9884607377, Email: savepoorlives@gmail.com Our website: www.savepoorlives.com**
Donation given to Patients upto March 2019 for Rs. 4,26,89,335/- and Scholarship 7,30,800/- October Donation given Rs. 3,83,150/-

Save Poor Lives

IN BRIEF



Brazilian President to be R-Day chief guest

BRASILIA
Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has accepted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation to be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations in 2020. Mr. Modi met Mr. Bolsonaro on Wednesday on the sidelines of the 11th BRICS Summit. The two leaders held "fruitful talks" to strengthen bilateral ties. The Brazilian President informed Mr. Modi that a large business delegation would accompany him to India. PTI

Putin invites Modi for Victory Day celebrations

BRASILIA
Russian President Vladimir Putin has invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the Victory Day celebrations in May as the two leaders had an "excellent meeting" here, during which they reviewed the progress in bilateral ties and discussed ways to further bolster the special strategic partnership. PTI

'India is the most open economy'

BRASILIA
India is the world's "most open and investment friendly" economy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Thursday, as he urged BRICS business leaders to invest in the country and take advantage of its "limitless" possibilities and "countless" opportunities. "India is the most open and investment friendly economy in the world due to political stability, predictable policy and business friendly reforms," he said. PTI

'Terror batters world economy'

It has emerged as the biggest threat to peace and prosperity, says PM Modi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BRASILIA

Terrorism has caused a loss of \$1 trillion to the world economy and the atmosphere it created has indirectly and deeply harmed trade and business, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at the BRICS Summit here on Thursday, as he welcomed increased cooperation from the members of the grouping.

Addressing the plenary session of the 11th BRICS Summit at the iconic Itamaraty Palace in the presence of the Presidents of Brazil, China, Russia and South Africa, Mr. Modi said terrorism had emerged as the biggest threat to development, peace and prosperity. "According to some estimates, the economic growth of developing nations has decreased by 1.5% due to terrorism," he said, adding that the scourge had caused a loss of \$1 trillion to the world economy. In 10 years, terrorism had claimed the lives of 2.25 lakh people and des-



Common cause: South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, China's President Xi Jinping, PM Modi, Russia's President Vladimir Putin and Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro in Brasilia. ■ AP

troyed societies, he said.

"The atmosphere of doubt created by terrorism, terror-financing, drug-trafficking and organised crime indirectly and deeply harms trade and business. I am happy that the first seminar on BRICS Strategies for Countering Terrorism was organised. We hope such efforts and activities of the five

working groups will increase strong BRICS security cooperation against terrorism and other organised crimes," he said.

Mr. Modi said sustainable water management and sanitation were important challenges in urban areas. "I propose to hold the first meeting of BRICS Water Ministers in India," he said.

"Recently, we started 'Fit India Movement'. I want to increase contacts and exchanges between us in the field of fitness and health."

He called for special attention to mutual trade and investment, saying intra-BRICS trade accounts for 15% of the world trade, while its combined population is 40% of the world's population.

India and China to hold border talks

The next round was agreed upon after the Modi-Xi meeting in Brazil

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BRASILIA/BEIJING

India and China have agreed to hold another meeting on matters relating to the boundary question after Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Brasilia, according to an official statement.

The 21st round of the bor-

der talks led by the Special Representatives – India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi – were held at Chengdu in China in November last year.

According to a statement issued by the External Affairs Ministry, Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi "noted that the Special Re-

presentatives will have another meeting on matters relating to the boundary question and reiterated the importance of maintaining peace and security along the border areas".

The statement, however, did not mention the time frame for the next round of talks.

Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi are in

Brazil for the BRICS Summit.

During the 21st round of talks, both sides resolved to "intensify" and "advance" the dialogue for an early settlement of the dispute, according to the official statements issued by both sides after the talks. The two officials also underscored the need for maintaining peace along the border.

NCP, Sena & Cong. work out draft CMP

Move may speed up govt. formation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Two days after the imposition of President's Rule in Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Congress on Thursday announced that the draft of the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) was ready, and it would be sent to the leadership of the three parties for approval.

The move is likely to speed up the process of government formation, with top leaders likely to meet in the next three days.

All the three parties on Thursday held a joint meeting on the MET campus at Bandra, where their election manifestos were compared, and a draft was prepared.

On Wednesday, the Congress and the Shiv Sena held a meeting in the morning, which was followed by a meeting between the Congress and the NCP in the evening. These meetings paved the way for the drafting of the CMP.

Senior leaders present

Senior Sena leaders Subhash Desai and Eknath Shinde were part of the meeting on Thursday, which was attended by former Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan, senior Congress leaders Vijay Wadettiwar and Manikrao Thakare, along with NCP State president Jayant Patil, senior party leader Chhagan Bhujbal and NCP Mumbai president Nawab Malik.

At a joint late-evening press conference after the

Raut hits out at Amit Shah

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut hit out at Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday and said the talks on alliance behind closed doors between the Sena and the BJP should have been taken to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Commenting on Mr Shah's remark that he took Mr. Fadnavis's name at every public rally and why had the Sena not objected then, Mr. Raut said, "Yes, they spoke about Mr. Fadnavis as CM, but in every sabha Uddhavji also said Maharashtra will have a Sena CM. When the alliance happened, Uddhavji used to say power-sharing will be 50-50. Why did Amit Shah not say anything then?"

meeting, Mr. Bhujbal said the State was going through a very difficult situation.

"At this position, no one is steering the State, except the Governor. The State needs a stable government at the earliest, and as a part of that process, we have all come together, met and drafted the Common Minimum Programme based on which the new government will govern. This will be sent to the leadership of all three parties and once approved by them, the things will move towards government formation," he said.

Fundamental rights under threat: Sonia

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday alleged that forces unleashed by the present regime wanted to "dictate what citizens can do or say in the name of uniformity" and thereby deny their fundamental rights.

At a gathering on the occasion of the 130th birth anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru, she said the past six years had seen "bigotry, injustice and mismanagement of the country".

"The forces unleashed by our present rulers want to dictate to us what we can do, say or think. Their idea of unity is uniformity. They disrespect and fear diversity, which means they deny our pluralism, our freedom of choice, which are integral to our fundamental rights," she said.

"Their language may be modern, but they seek to take India backward, not forward. For after all, they made no sacrifices to shape India's destiny. It falls on each and every one of us to pull away this hypocrisy and reveal the darkness lurking beneath. We must unite and speak up against the bigotry, injustice and mismanagement of the last six years," she added. She said the four pillars of Nehruvian ideology – democratic institution-building, staunch secularism, socialist economics and a non-aligned foreign policy – were under attack.

Earlier, she offered floral tributes at Nehru's memorial at Shanti Van.

Review Taseer OCI decision, says PEN letter

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON DC

More than 260 writers, journalists and artists, including Margaret Atwood, Orhan Pamuk, Salman Rushdie, Chimamanda Adichie, Perumal Murugan and Amitav Ghosh, have written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, asking that the government review its decision to rescind writer Aatish Taseer's Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) status.

"We are extremely concerned that Taseer appears to have been targeted for an extremely personal form of retaliation due to his writing and reporting that has been critical of the Indian government," says the letter from the authors who have joined PEN America, English PEN and PEN International, a network of writers, to express their "grave concern" over the government's action.

Official complaint

"In May 2019, amid a contentious Indian election season, Taseer wrote a cover story for *TIME* magazine headlined 'India's Divider in Chief', which drew an official complaint from the Indian government and sustained online harassment," the letter says.

The Home Ministry had revoked Mr. Taseer's OCI status last week, saying he had "concealed the fact that his late father was of Pakistani origin". Mr. Taseer, a British citizen and American permanent resident, has denied concealing this fact, and has days to hand in his OCI document to the Indian Consulate in New York or risk being barred from applying for an Indian visa again, *The Hindu* had reported.

"In his application for the OCI status, Taseer listed his father's name and never tried to hide his identity; in fact, a number of his books and articles have extensively covered his heritage and past," the letter says.

Modi to speak at 'Mujib year' opening event

SUVOJIT BAGCHI
KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will deliver the keynote address at the inaugural centenary event of Bangladesh founder Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 17, 2020, in Dhaka.

It will launch programmes between 2020 and 2021, described as "Mujib year" celebrations.

Clashes test interim leader of Bolivia

Jeanine Anez pledges to ‘hold elections in the shortest possible time’, receives support from the U.S.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
LA PAZ
Interim President Jeanine Anez moved on Thursday to consolidate power in a deeply polarised Bolivia, winning recognition from the U.S. and immediately shifting the country’s foreign policy on erstwhile ally Venezuela.

Ms. Anez was expected to complete her government line-up, having named new military chiefs and half of her proposed 20-member Cabinet the night before.

In a press conference at the presidential palace on Wednesday, she reiterated a pledge to “hold elections in the shortest possible time.”

Rejecting Mr. Morales’s claims that her presidency amounted to a coup, she said: “There is no coup in Bolivia. There is a constitutional replacement.”

“The only coup d’Etat in this country has been by Evo Morales,” she said, referring to a 2016 referendum that blocked the ex-President from running for re-election, but which Mr. Morales had overturned by the Constitu-



Showing resistance: A supporter of former President Evo Morales holding a Bolivian flag during clashes with the police in La Paz on Wednesday. ■ AP

tional Court. Mr. Morales, who became the country’s first indigenous President in 2006 and ruled for nearly 14 years, resigned on Sunday and fled Bolivia after losing the support of the Army and the police.

Normal business resumed in the main cities after weeks of deadly protests, but schools and universities remained shut due to the continued threat of demonstrations. Many gas stations remained closed because of

a lack of supplies. Nearly a month of protests have left 10 people dead and nearly 400 injured.

Mr. Morales’s supporters launched fresh protests on Thursday, marching toward government headquarters in La Paz. Riot police had clashed with hundreds of Mr. Morales’s supporters the night before during a demonstration against Ms. Anez. A 20-year-old man was shot and killed in a village near the eastern city of Santa

Cruz during a clash between Mr. Morales’s supporters and the police, a doctor said.

‘Ready to return’
“If the people ask me, we are ready to return to pacify” Bolivia, Mr. Morales told a news conference in Mexico City on Wednesday. He called for a “national dialogue” to resolve the crisis, and rejected Ms. Anez’s legitimacy.

Mr. Morales called the “coup” against him “a politi-

cal and economic conspiracy coming from the United States.”

Ms. Anez told reporters on Thursday that new Foreign Minister Karen Longari would “make representations” to Mexico to insist that Mr. Morales be held to the terms of his political asylum.

The 52-year-old interim leader gave the first indication of her government’s foreign policy on Thursday, recognising Venezuelan Opposition leader Juan Guaido as his country’s President, a key shift of alliance in the volatile region. The announcement removes one of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro’s main allies as he fends off efforts to oust him amid a deadly economic and political crisis.

The U.S. on Wednesday recognised Ms. Anez as Bolivia’s interim President. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in a statement, said the U.S. looked forward to working with Bolivia and its people “as they prepare to hold free, fair elections as soon as possible.”

Tariffs removal a ‘condition’ for U.S. trade deal, says China

‘This is in line with the interests of producers and consumers’

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING

China on Thursday said eliminating tariffs was a “condition” for reaching a trade agreement with the United States, a demand U.S. President Donald Trump said earlier this month that he had rejected.

The Commerce Ministry’s remarks showed that a sizeable distance still separates Washington and Beijing despite Mr. Trump’s announcement last month that they had reached a “phase one” deal.

Beijing and Washington have been embroiled in an 18-month trade war which has weighed on the global economy, and two sides have slapped punitive tariffs on hundreds of billions of dollars in two-way trade.

Amid signs of easing tensions, the Chinese Commerce Ministry last week said the two sides had agreed on a plan to roll back tariffs in stages – only to



Commerce Ministry spokesman Gao Feng

have Mr. Trump deny that any such plan had been made. Mr. Trump warned on Tuesday that he could even increase tariffs further if a partial deal with Beijing failed to materialise.

“The Chinese side has repeatedly stressed that the trade war should start with the addition of tariffs and should be abolished by the elimination of tariffs,” Commerce Ministry spokesman Gao Feng said on Thursday at a regular briefing in Beijing. “This is an important condition for the two sides

to reach an agreement.”

Mr. Trump last month held off on a round of tariff increases, and White House officials have suggested that as part of the current mini-deal he could delay fresh tariffs on \$160 billion worth of Chinese goods planned for mid-December.

Mr. Gao said the elimination of tariffs was “in line with the interests of producers and consumers, in line with the interests of China and the United States, and in line with world interests.”

Separately, China’s Customs administration on Thursday said that it was removing restrictions on U.S. poultry imports and “allowing U.S. poultry imports that abide by the requirements of our country’s laws and regulations.”

In Washington, the U.S. Trade Representative’s office welcomed the decision, saying it should help drive annual US poultry exports above \$1 billion.

ELSEWHERE



Iranian refugee detained by Australia freed

WELLINGTON

An Iranian asylum seeker and award-winning author, held in an offshore Australian detention camp for more than six years, said on Thursday he had arrived in New Zealand, and was celebrating “freedom”. Behrouz Boochani was sent to Manus Island in Papua New Guinea after fleeing Iran in 2013. The 36-year-old journalist later won the Victorian Prize for Literature for a book detailing his life under Australia’s harsh offshore detention policy. He wrote the book on his mobile phone and delivered one chapter at a time on WhatsApp.

Italy declares state of emergency in Venice

VENICE

Italy on Thursday declared a state of emergency in Venice after an exceptional tide surged through churches, shops and homes, causing millions of euros worth of damage to the UNESCO World Heritage site. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said the Cabinet had approved the immediate release of 20 million euros in funds for “the most urgent interventions” in the devastated city. Sirens warning of fresh flooding rang through the canal city early on Thursday but the water level remained low compared to Tuesday’s tide, the highest in 50 years. ■ AFP

1 dead, many injured in U.S. school shooting

Suspect believed to be a high school student

REUTERS

SANTA CLARITA

A California high school student dressed in black is suspected to have opened fire on campus on Thursday, killing at least one person and wounding several others before he was arrested, officials said.

“Suspect is in custody and being treated at a local hospital,” Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva said on Twitter.

In addition to a dead woman, two men were in critical condition and another



In shock: Students being comforted as they wait to be reunited with their parents on Thursday. ■ AP

was in good condition, Henry Mayo Newhall Hospital said on Twitter.

“We believe at this time

that there is only one suspect but we are actively investigating and following all leads,” the Santa Clarita Val-

ley branch of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Office said. The suspect was described by the police as an Asian male and a student of Saugus High School in Santa Clarita, about 80 km north of Los Angeles.

A weapon was recovered at the scene, a police officer told NBC television.

Video from local NBC television showed a line of students marching away from the school and a row of police and fire department vehicles parked out front. “I was really, really scared. I was shaking,” one female student told NBC television, adding that she saw one person lying on the ground covered in blood.

Sri Lankan author stabbed ahead of poll

Lasantha Wijeratne’s book, released last week, had criticised Gotabaya Rajapaksa

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

COLOMBO

Armed men stabbed and injured a writer in Sri Lanka on Thursday, a week after he published a book criticising the main Opposition candidate at Saturday’s presidential polls, the police said.

The attackers stormed the home of Lasantha Wijeratne, who released his book *Wasteful Development and Corruption* last week and gave a copy to ruling party candidate Sajith Premadasa.

“Four men broke into the house and stabbed him in the arm after holding a pistol to his wife’s head,” Mr. Wijer-



Lasantha Wijeratne receiving treatment at a hospital in Galle. ■ AFP

The police said they have launched an investigation into the pre-dawn attack in Galle, 115 km south of Colombo, but no arrests had been made. Mr. Nanayakkara said the attackers accused Mr. Wijeratne of harming the campaign of Gotabaya Rajapaksa who is believed to be in a close race with Mr. Premadasa for the top job.

Attack condemned

Mr. Rajapaksa’s campaign condemned the attack on the author.

“Some reports on social media attempt to claim this is a politically-motivated at-

tack,” a spokesman for Mr. Rajapaksa’s party said in a statement. “We are a disciplined party... we condemn this attack with contempt.”

‘Highly biased’

The violence came even as Election Commission chairman Mahinda Deshapriya said the campaign had been relatively peaceful compared to previous polls.

However, he said the behaviour of both private and state-controlled television networks had been highly biased, and he hoped to prosecute offenders after the election.



Counting the losses: Palestinians inspecting a crater and the rubble of destroyed houses in Al-Qarara on Thursday. ■ AP

Ceasefire takes hold after Gaza violence

34 Palestinians killed, say officials

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GAZA CITY

A ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza took hold on Thursday after two days of fighting triggered by an Israeli strike on an Islamic Jihad commander, with 34 Palestinians killed in exchanges of fire.

Both Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad and Israel’s military confirmed the ceasefire early on Thursday brokered by Egyptian and UN officials– the usual mediators between Gaza and Israel.

Five rockets were fired at Israel from Gaza after the ceasefire came into effect and air defences intercepted two of them, the army said, but the incident did not appear likely to set off another severe round of fighting.

“#Egypt and the #UN worked hard to prevent the

most dangerous escalation in and around #Gaza from leading to #war,” tweeted Nickolay Mladenov, UN envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, who travelled to Cairo for the talks.

“The coming hours and days will be critical. ALL must show maximum restraint and do their part to prevent bloodshed.”

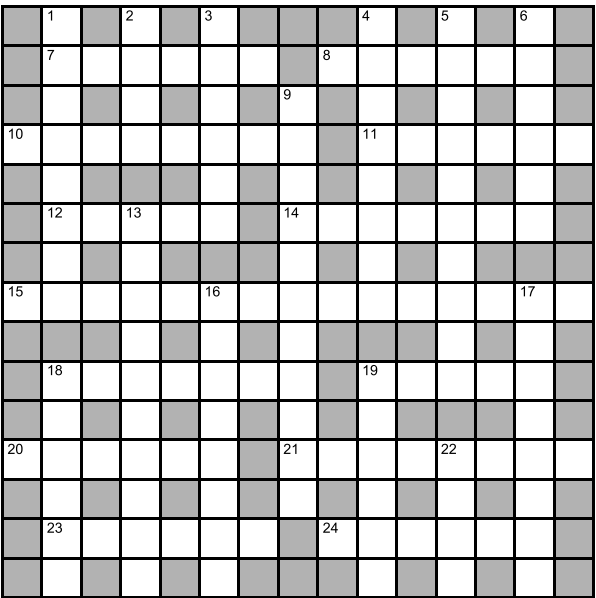
The agreement, which entered into force at 5.30 a.m., came after the death toll from Israeli air strikes rose to 34 since Tuesday. Islamic Jihad claimed a number of the dead as members.

Palestinian officials said eight members of the same family had been killed in an Israeli strike overnight, including five children.

Israel’s military said the man killed in the strike in Deir al Balah in the central Gaza Strip was an Islamic Jihad rocket unit commander.

THE HINDU CROSSWORD 12781

Log on to crossword.thehindu.com for more puzzles



To play an interactive version of this crossword online, scan the QR code

■ ACROSS

- 7 Make hay now come what may (6)
- 8 Honour the old days? Honoured! (6)
- 10 Judge’s sound common sense getting husband to show indication of attachment (8)
- 11 Smashing with a pop into reversing vehicle (6)

- 12 About amateur’s outer limit to variety, collecting diamonds for set (5)
- 14 Shelters beginning to give us free rum (7)
- 15 Not always free, a choice ultimately made to leave reluctantly (4,7,4)
- 18 Unprepared individual getting married about to show craft in fighting (3,1,3)
- 19 America in free tailspin, finally reflecting rock bottom (5)
- 20 Combination of two alternating notes or lines in a set of three (6)
- 21 Already decided because English lost (8)
- 23 Play placing two chess pieces alongside in a row (6)
- 24 Quietly move from point to point (6)

■ DOWN

- 1 Took place of accountant discharged, attrition of old (4,4)
- 2 Black phosphorus leaving burning heap in cowed (4)

(set by xChequer)

- 3 Centre to show flower in a religious manner (6)
- 4 Sailor’s effective invective (8)
- 5 Part of immune system’s damaged, damn ugly, help’s anyhow useless? (5,5)
- 6 Loves a party, others not having time (6)
- 9 Summary dealing with inadequate resistance in movement (5,6)
- 13 Hormone producing near denial (10)
- 16 Crew member at initiation, one being fresh? (8)
- 17 About amateur’s outer limit to variety, collecting diamonds for set (8)
- 18 Pays for the Reverend’s benefits (6)
- 19 Elevating India in ranking, essentially fabulous country (6)
- 22 Put away after grand opening (4)

SUDOKU

			6	7		8			1
				1	5				3
							3		5
		7				5			2
3									9
8				9			3		
	5		6						
1					7	9			
9			3		1	4			

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to puzzle 12780

R	I	P	S	A	W	B	A	K	I	N	G
E	S	O	L	C	B	G	R				
I	S	M	S	A	P	O	L	L	O	N	I
O	I	M	U	E	O	M					
B	L	O	T	T	O	N	O	S	T	R	U
V	I	D	T	T	A	A					
D	E	C	A	D	E	N	C	E			
F	L	A	V	A			U				
F	L	A	V	A			A	B	A	S	T
A	S	A	O	T	I	L					
O	N	C	E	O	V	E	R				
M	M	E	I	I	E	A	M				
P	A	C	E	M	A	K	E	R	S		
I	N	T	S	K	O	N					
L	I	T	T	E	R						

Solution to yesterday’s Sudoku

9	7	1	4	2	3	6	5	8
8	5	3	6	7	1	9	2	4
2	4	6	5	8	9	3	7	1
7	2	9	8	3	4	1	6	5
1	6	4	7	9	5	8	3	2
5	3	8	2	1	6	7	4	9
3	8	5	9	4	7	2	1	6
6	1	2	3	5	8	4	9	7
4	9	7	1	6	2	5	8	3

FAITH

Purity of mind

From time immemorial, it has been acknowledged that the highest human achievement is the conquest of the mind. “He who has conquered his mind can easily conquer the world” say the wise. In simple terms, to conquer the mind means keeping it clean and free of impurities caused by sinful thoughts. He who strives to do this is sure to find success, and above all peace while dealing with day-to-day activities; and in addition, it pays rich dividends in his search for salvation as well, said Swami Mukundananda in a discourse.

In this context it is interesting to observe and analyse the staunch prevailing belief about the sacredness and the sanctifying power of the waters of the Ganga based on what the scriptures claim. The river is personified as a goddess and bathing in the Ganga is believed to purify and absolve people of sins. Pitted against this idea are also arguments that question the truth and validity of this belief. Does this mean that those who happen to live on the banks of the Ganga and have occasion to bathe in the waters daily are cleansed of their sins? Or is the fish that lives in the Ganga able to achieve moksha by virtue of its association with the Ganga?

To answer these, one has to understand the meaning of ‘bathing’ in the Ganga and the state of one’s mind when bathing. It is not just washing the physical self to clean the external impurities. It is the awareness of the symbolic impurity such as sinful thoughts that reside in the individual’s mind. One has to consciously empty the mind of these to attain purity. Otherwise his Ganga ‘Snan’ is like immersing a bottle of dirty water in the Ganga.

No matter how long it is immersed in water, if the dirty water does not come into contact with the Ganga, it continues to be dirty.