

IN BRIEF



**RBI moots dropping NEFT transaction charges**

**MUMBAI** In a bid to give an impetus to digital transactions on the third anniversary of demonetisation, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has mooted a proposal to drop charges for transactions done through the NEFT from January 2020. The RBI has also proposed that 'FASTags' may be enabled to pay for parking fee and transactions at fuel stations. PTI

**7 teachers found to have used fake qualifications**

**BERHAMPUR** After several RTIs filed by locals, seven government school teachers in Odisha's Ganjam district were found to have secured appointment using fake qualification certificates. According to sources, investigation is on to ascertain the authenticity of certificates of around 20 more teachers serving in government schools. A special cell has been set up in the district to verify certificates submitted by junior teachers.

# Maternal death rate declining: report

2,000 deaths averted per year, says SRS bulletin

AFSHAN YASMEEN  
BENGALURU

India's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has seen a decline from 130 per 1 lakh live births in 2014-2016 to 122 per 1 lakh live births in 2015-2017. A decline of 8 points (6.2%) was observed during this period, according to the latest Sample Registration System (SRS) 2015-2017 bulletin for MMR released on Thursday.

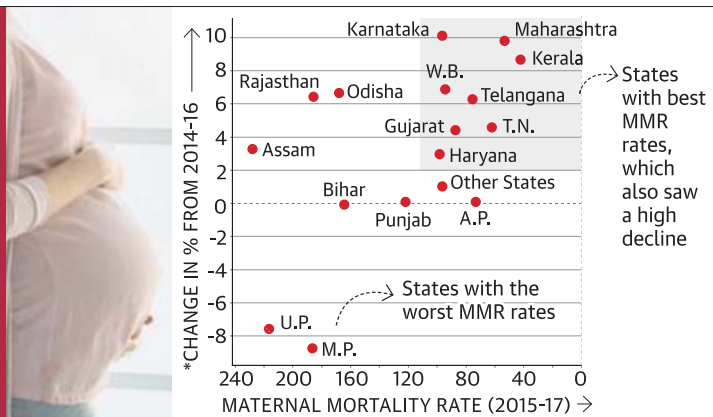
This is good news for India as nearly 2,000 maternal deaths have been averted per year, according to the bulletin. The figure has declined from 167 in 2011-2013 to 130 in 2014-2016 and to 122 in 2015-2017, registering a 6.15 per cent reduction since the last survey figures of 2014-2016.

While Karnataka has shown the highest percentage decline in MMR, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have shown an increase by 15 points each in MMR.

To understand the mater-

**Between life & death**

The Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) of U.P. and M.P. increased by more than 7% in 2015-17 compared to 2014-16, while it declined in other States. Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have the lowest MMR



nal mortality situation in the country better and to map the changes, especially at the regional level, the government has categorised States into three groups: empowered action group (EAG), southern States and other States.

Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh/Uttarakhand and Assam fall under the EAG and Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are in the southern States group. "Others" comprise the remaining States and Union Territories.

The decline has been most

significant in EAG States from 188 to 175. The ratio has reduced considerably from 77 to 72 per 1,00,000 live births among southern States and in the other States from 93 to 90.

Independent MMR data of Jharkhand (76), Chhattisgarh (141) and Uttarakhand (89) has been released for the first time in the SRS 2015-2017 bulletin.

While Rajasthan's MMR has shown the highest decrease by 13 points, followed by Odisha (12 points) and Karnataka (11 points), the States of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Punjab have not shown any change in the ra-

tio. Retaining its first position, Kerala has reduced its MMR from 46 in 2014-2016 to 42 in 2015-2017. Likewise, Maharashtra retained its second position with 55 (down from 61) and Tamil Nadu its third position with 63 (down from 66).

**Development goal**

Union Joint Commissioner (Maternal Health) Dinesh Baswal told *The Hindu* that the decline is important for India as 11 States have achieved the National Health Policy target of MMR 100 per lakh live births well ahead of 2020. "This has been possible in view of the gains made

in institutional deliveries and focused approach towards aspirational districts and inter-sectoral action to reach the most marginalised and vulnerable mothers," he said.

Focus on quality and coverage of health services through public health initiatives under the National Health Mission such as LaQshya, Poshan Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan, Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram, Janani Suraksha Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana have contributed to this decline, he said.

"India is now committed to ensuring that not a single mother or newborn dies due to a preventable cause and move towards zero preventable maternal and newborn deaths through the recently launched Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan Initiative (SUMAN)," he added.

The WHO had last year lauded India's progress in reducing the MMR, saying the progress puts the country on track towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of an MMR below 70 by 2030.

**WEATHER WATCH**

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



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

**Forecast for Saturday:** Heavy to very heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Gangetic West Bengal, Odisha, Tripura, south interior Karnataka, Kerala, Mahe, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karikal. Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning at isolated places over Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	23.0	30.0	23.0	Kozhikode	34.0	25.0	25.0
Ahmedabad	31.0	23.0	23.0	Kurnool	33.0	24.0	24.0
Aizawl	27.0	15.0	15.0	Lucknow	30.0	18.0	18.0
Allahabad	31.0	17.0	17.0	Madurai	48.0	22.0	22.0
Bengaluru	29.0	20.0	20.0	Mangaluru	31.0	24.0	24.0
Bhopal	30.0	18.0	18.0	Mumbai	32.6	25.0	25.0
Bhubaneswar	26.0	20.0	20.0	Mysuru	29.0	20.0	20.0
Chandigarh	5.5	14.0	14.0	New Delhi	0.8	16.0	16.0
Chennai	35.0	25.0	25.0	Patna	31.0	19.0	19.0
Coimbatore	0.3	22.0	22.0	Port Blair	0.1	24.0	24.0
Dehradun	30.0	13.0	13.0	Puducherry	34.0	24.0	24.0
Gangtok	19.0	13.0	13.0	Pune	31.0	18.0	18.0
Goa	33.0	23.0	23.0	Raipur	29.0	19.0	19.0
Guwahati	30.0	20.0	20.0	Ranchi	27.0	16.0	16.0
Hubballi	29.0	20.0	20.0	Shillong	20.0	11.0	11.0
Hyderabad	32.0	22.0	22.0	Shimla	5.4	5.0	5.0
Imphal	28.0	15.0	15.0	Srinagar	28.0	15.0	15.0
Jaipur	28.0	18.0	18.0	Thiruvananthapuram	33.0	25.0	25.0
Kochi	0.2	24.0	24.0	Tiruchi	5.7	23.0	23.0
Kohima	22.0	13.0	13.0	Vijayawada	32.0	22.0	22.0
Kolkata	27.0	22.0	22.0	Visakhapatnam	32.0	23.0	23.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing Yesterday**

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>2</sub>	CO	PM <sub>2.5</sub>	PM <sub>10</sub>	CODE
Ahmedabad	132	160	38	129	91	100
Bengaluru	6	30	51	234	—	100
Chennai	7	25	40	342	—	100
Delhi	24	133	34	369	315	100
Hyderabad	6	46	36	169	129	100
Kolkata	17	19	22	178	164	100
Lucknow	29	38	41	389	—	100
Mumbai	8	46	112	17	28	100
Pune	10	65	28	28	28	100
Visakhapatnam	28	83	49	156	127	100

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Talcher, Odisha recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 412 indicating a severe level of pollution. In contrast, Vapi, Gujarat recorded a healthy AQI score of 23.

**Air Quality Code:** ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)  
**SO<sub>2</sub>:** 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.  
**NO<sub>2</sub>:** 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.  
**PM<sub>2.5</sub> & PM<sub>10</sub>:** 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

# Dhrupad maestro Ramakant Gundecha no more



**The last performance:** (From left) Akhilesh, Ramakant and Umakant Gundecha at the Tagore International Literature and Arts Festival in Bhopal on Thursday. ■ A.M. FARUQUI

The brothers gave their last performance on Thursday

STAFF REPORTER  
BHOPAL

Dhrupad maestro and Padma Shri awardee Ramakant Gundecha, 56, passed away in Bhopal on Friday. He was the younger one of the Gundecha brothers.

Their cousin Akhilesh Gundecha, a pakhawaj player who performs with them, confirmed to *The Hindu* that Mr. Ramakant suffered chest pain at the Habiganj railway station while waiting for a train to Pune and died in the ambulance.

Pandit Suresh Chand Tanted, convener of the six-decade-old Abhinav Kala Parishad said: "It is a terrible loss to the arts and culture fraternity. Everyone is upset with the parting of the brothers."

Sitar player Smita Nagdev said: "It was a wonderful evening yesterday when we heard the brothers sing at a literature fest. It is an irreparable loss for us."

On Thursday, the brothers had performed at the Vishva Rang - Tagore International

Literature and Arts Festival in Bhopal.

Chief Minister Kamal Nath, giving his condolences, said: "His demise has left a vacuum in the field of music in the country. I pray that his soul rests in peace and the family has the moral courage to bear the loss."

The brothers performed Dhrupad, one of the oldest classical Hindustani musical forms in the world.

They are also the founders of the Gurukul Dhrupad Sansthan in Bhopal.

# Students oppose Sanskrit teacher's appointment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
LUCKNOW

A controversy has erupted in the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) with some students opposing the appointment of an assistant professor in the Sanskrit faculty, allegedly because of his Muslim identity.

Protesting against the appointment of Firoz Khan as an assistant professor in the Sahitya (literature) department of the Sanskrit Vidya Dharm Vigyan, some students staged a sit-in at Holkar Bhawan near the residence of the Vice-Chancellor on Thursday.

Pressed to issue a clarification on the matter, the BHU administration on Thursday said in an official statement that it had "unanimously" appointed the "most qualified candidates" through a "transparent" screening process headed by the Vice-Chancellor.

The university also stressed that it was founded with the objective that "equal opportunity would be provided to all to study and teach" for the purpose of nation-building.

Punit Mishra, one of the protesters, said the stir was held to protect the "values" of BHU founder Madan Mohan Malaviya. He claimed that a stone-slab in the faculty mentioned that only Hindus and followers of Jainism, Buddhism and Arya Samaj were allowed entry into the department.

"We don't oppose him [the Muslim candidate] but support the values of Mahamana [Malaviya]. We are fighting for his values," Mr. Mishra said.

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