



Opposition alliance firms up seat-sharing for Jharkhand polls

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Move to revoke OCI status an act of reprisal, says Aatish Taseer

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Ex-Brazilian President Lula likely to be freed following court ruling

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India chosen to host the 2023 men's hockey World Cup

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NEARBY



City's air quality remains 'very poor'

NEW DELHI

The air quality of the Capital remained 'very poor' on Friday and is expected to remain in the same category on Saturday. Delhi's air quality index on Friday was 330, up from 309 (very poor) on Thursday, according to the Central Pollution Control Board.

CITY ► PAGE 4

7 more shelter home girls reunite with families

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday allowed seven more girls, who were at the Muzaffarpur shelter home where allegations of rampant sexual assault surfaced last year, to reunite with their families.

NORTH ► PAGE 5

Onions to be imported from Dubai, Egypt

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

With onion prices breaching the ₹100 per kg mark in Delhi and soaring to ₹80 in other metros, the Centre has decided to import the staple from Dubai, Egypt, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. The first shipments are likely to arrive by November 15, according to officials in the Consumer Affairs Ministry.

Public sector trading agency MMTC has issued a tender to import 2,000 tonnes from Dubai, said an official.

NORMS RELAXED ► PAGE 13

Disqualified MLAs move SC

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Seventeen disqualified MLAs from Karnataka on Friday made an urgent mention before the Supreme Court for deferment of the December 5 Assembly byelections.

Appearing before a Bench led by Justice N.V. Ramana, counsel for the MLAs said the court had reserved its judgment on the legality of their disqualification by then Speaker K.R. Ramesh Kumar under the anti-defection law. They said the byelections should not be held until the court's judgment.

FILE PROPER PLEA: SC ► PAGE 8

SC verdict on Ayodhya today

Hindu and Muslim parties had challenged three-way partition by Allahabad HC

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

A Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi will on Saturday deliver its judgment in the cross-appeals filed by the Hindu and Muslim sides challenging the three-way partition of the disputed 2.77 acres of the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid land among Ram Lala, the Nirmohi Akhara and the Sunni Waqf Board in September 2010.

The hearings began on August 6 after a mediation attempt across the religious divide "to heal hearts and minds" failed to deliver. The Ayodhya case comes a close second to the longest heard case in the Supreme Court — the historic Kesavananda Bharati case.

The testimonies in the appeals alone ran into 54 volumes, consisting of 13,426 pages, which have been trans-



On track: Police personnel conducting security checks on the Pamban rail bridge at Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu, ahead of the Supreme Court verdict. ■ L. BALACHANDAR

lated into English and filed by the Uttar Pradesh government. There are a total of 533 exhibits translated by various parties.

The Allahabad High Court's Justice S.U. Khan, one of the three judges whose opinions in the case are under appeal in the Supreme Court, had described the disputed Ramjanmab-

hoomi-Ayodhya property as a "small piece of land where angels fear to tread".

The "innumerable landmines" involved in the case and the decades of religious tension may have played a part in the appeals having to spend eight long years in cold storage in the top court.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

CJI meets U.P. Chief Secretary, police chief

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi on Friday met with Uttar Pradesh Chief Secretary R.K. Tiwari and Director General of Police Om Prakash Singh in the Supreme Court to discuss security measures ahead of Saturday's judgment.

Mr. Tiwari and Mr. Singh were seen entering the court premises before noon. They were closeted with the CJI for less than an hour. CJI Gogoi's meeting with the State's top bureaucrat and DGP is seen as an uncharacteristic gesture.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

Security beefed up at houses of judges

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Supreme Court's verdict in the Ayodhya case, the Delhi police have beefed up security at the houses of the five judges who will pronounce the judgment on Saturday. All judges live in the Lutyens' area in the city. Security has also been stepped up at the Supreme Court.

Deputy Commissioners of Police of all districts, along with Station House Officers, have been directed to increase police visibility and patrolling in communally sensitive areas. Elaborate security arrangements have been made, said an officer.

Schools closed

The Delhi government has advised all private schools to

remain closed on Saturday. All government schools will be closed on account of second Saturday of the month.

According to an advisory released by the police, the department will also requisition extra companies of Central Armed Police Forces from the Ministry of Home Affairs. Necessary arrangements will be made to ensure safety of religious places,

the advisory said.

Social media platforms will also be monitored and users will be advised to post with discretion, the police said.

Strict legal action will be initiated against those found indulging in any activity which may adversely affect the peace and tranquillity of society, said a senior police officer.

Moody's lowers India outlook to 'negative'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Moody's Investors Service has downgraded its outlook on India to 'negative' from 'stable' on Friday.

The downgrade in the sovereign outlook was followed by a downgrade in the outlook for a number of public sector and private sector Indian companies. The company has, however, left India's current rating (Baa2) un-

changed, implying that the slowing economy has not yet affected India's current rating, but could in the future.

Soon after, the government issued a statement, defending the economy as one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world. In its rebuttal, the government said India remains one of the fastest-growing major economies in the world, something reaffirmed by the IMF.

The Moody's decision represents a downgrade in its expectations of the future performance of the economy.

"Moody's decision to change the outlook to 'negative' reflects increasing risks that economic growth will remain materially lower," a statement from Moody's Investors Service said.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

Fadnavis resigns, puts blame on Shiv Sena for stalemate

No agreement on sharing CM's post, says BJP leader

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

Blaming Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray for cutting the lines of communication with the BJP, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Friday submitted his resignation to Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari. The Governor asked Mr. Fadnavis to remain as caretaker CM till the new arrangement under President's Rule comes into force.

Reiterating that no decision on sharing the Chief Minister's post for two- and-a-half years years was ever taken in his presence, Mr. Fadnavis said he had also asked BJP president Amit Shah and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari about such an arrangement; they said they were unaware of it. "I again want to make it clear that it



Devendra Fadnavis addressing the media on Friday after submitting his resignation as CM. ■ ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY

was never decided that the CM's post will be shared."

Mr. Thackeray has been targeting the BJP and Mr. Fadnavis for denying the agreement to share the top post, and had said no talks were possible until the BJP agrees to it.

SENA HAS NO TIME TO TALK TO US: FADNAVIS ► PAGE 12

Sena chief slams BJP

Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray on Friday slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party for trying to prove him a liar and said he regretted going with the wrong people.

► PAGE 12

Storm brewing



Dark clouds hang over the skies near Bhubaneswar as Cyclone Bulbul draws near. ■ BISWARANJAN ROUT

Lawyers suspend strike for 10 days on arrest assurance

Team for dialogue with Delhi Police formed; Supreme Court frowns upon boycott of courts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Lawyers practising at Delhi's lower courts suspended their strike for 10 days after protesting for five consecutive days upon the Bar Council of India chairman's assurance that the police officer who had allegedly fired inside the Tis Hazari Court Complex on November 2 will be arrested.

"Bar Council of India chairman Manan Kumar Mishra gave an assurance in writing that he would get the police officer arrested within 10 days," said Mahavir Sharma, chairman of the Coordination Committee of All Delhi District Courts' Bar Associations. The BCI would give a call for boycott of

courts across the country if the accused is not arrested within the period, Mr. Sharma quoted the BCI chairman as saying.

Two-hour meeting

During a two-hour meeting of members of the Bar Council of India, Bar Council of Delhi and the coordination committee, a delegation to communicate with Delhi Police officers was also constituted. "The delegation includes Mishra, 12 members of the coordination committee, and members of Bar Council of Delhi," said Mr. Sharma.

The lawyers had on November 6 closed the main gates of the Patiala House and Saket district courts and



Manan Kumar Mishra

disallowed litigants from entering the premises, while a lawyer at the Rohini courts had attempted to immolate himself.

A section of Delhi Police personnel had also organised a protest at their headquarters on November 5 against their colleagues being beaten allegedly by lawyers.

Following the suspension of the agitation, advocates would begin appearing for

The BCI would give a call for boycott of courts across the country if the accused is not arrested within the period

their clients from Monday as Saturday is a holiday.

Earlier in the day, the Supreme Court said boycott of courts by advocates is "totally unacceptable" and amounts to "closure of judicial institution".

A Bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and K.M. Joseph criticised lawyers for striking work and denying access to litigants in the background of the Tis Hazari flare-up.

When the BCI chairman

tried to explain to the Bench that the lawyers were at the receiving end of the police onslaught, Justice Kaul reacted, saying "nobody claps with one hand, there were problems from both sides".

Attorney General K.K. Venugopal expressed his regrets about the November 2 clash between the police and lawyers in the national capital. "It was once an honourable profession, but today we are being looked down upon," he said.

But Mr. Venugopal said lawyers must be given some grievance redressal forum. This would probably become antidote to their going on strikes.

SEE ALSO ► PAGE 3

Neither Thiruvalluvar nor I can be saffronised, says Rajinikanth

The actor insists he is not the BJP's face in Tamil Nadu

UDHAV NAIG  
CHENNAI

Seeking to distance himself from the BJP, actor and aspiring politician Rajinikanth on Friday said that neither Tamil poet-savant Thiruvalluvar nor he would fall into the trap of saffronisation.

When journalists referred to a meeting BJP leader Pon. Radhakrishnan had with him and asked if he would consider joining the party, Rajinikanth said, "Like how it happened to Thiruvalluvar, BJP's (saffron) colour is being smeared on me. Neither Thiruvalluvar nor I will fall into the trap."

While clarifying that it was not true that BJP had



Rajinikanth

reached out to him, Rajinikanth said that the persistent accusation that he was the BJP's face in the State was only to be expected, given the current state of politics in Tamil Nadu. "This is common in today's politics. Some people are trying to portray me as BJP's face and it won't succeed," he added.

Despite victories of DMK in the recent Lok Sabha elections and Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami steadying the AIADMK by ensuring the survival of his government and also winning the two bypolls recently by a wide margin, Mr. Rajinikanth insisted that there was a still a leadership vacuum. "Tamil Nadu still lacks a leader with calibre. Yes, there is a vacuum," he said.

The actor, who participated in the unveiling of his mentor K. Balachander's bust at the office of Raj Kamal Films International, said that the whole controversy involving Thiruvalluvar was rather "silly".



IN BRIEF  
Tender floated for Delhi-Gurugram-SNB RRTS

**GURUGRAM**  
The first tender for civil construction of Delhi-Gurugram-SNB (Shahjahanpur-Neemrana-Behror Urban Complex) Regional Rapid Transit System corridor has been floated. The NCRTC has invited bids for the construction of elevated viaduct from the end of the ramp at IDPL Complex to start of the ramp at Rajiv Chowk and for three elevated stations — Udyog Vihar, Sector 17 and Rajiv Chowk. The tender has excluded architectural finishing and pre-engineered steel roof structure of stations. The NCRTC has already floated a tender for the engagement of Detailed Design Consultant for civil, architectural, and electrical and mechanical works for the design of the three elevated stations in Gurugram.

Air quality of Delhi-NCR			
Delhi	330	Gurugram	306
Ghaziabad	355	Faridabad	337
Noida	366	Greater Noida	367
Good 0-50 Satisfactory 51-100 Moderate 101-200 Poor 201-300 Very poor 301-400 Severe >401			
AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS)   SOURCE: CPCB			

JNU appeals to students to end strike

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**  
The Jawaharlal Nehru University administration on Friday appealed to the students to end their strike as academic life has come under “severe threat”.  
The students have been protesting a hike in hostel fees for over 10 days now. “While the peaceful mode of protests is always welcome, the current stir has begun to affect the academic career of thousands of JNU students,” the administration said.  
It added that as end semester exams were approaching, the university could not afford to have academic activity suspended. The students said the administration has not met their demands and were threatening them with show-cause notices. JNU V-CM. Jagadesh Kumar tweeted saying that Vandana Mishra, Associate Dean of Students, was being kept in “illegal captivity” by some JNU students since Friday morning.

Equipment shortage: MAMC OT to shut down from Dec. 1

Doctors say have been using loaned surgical items for 18 months

**BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN  
NEW DELHI**  
Lack of essential items in operation theater (OT) has forced the Department of Surgery, Maulana Azad Medical College (MAMC), to issue an order stating: “It is left with no option but to order closure of operation theater one [first floor] which includes OT A, B, C, and D from December 1 in public interest.”

The office order signed by director professor and head of the Department of Surgery (MAMC), Pawanindra Lal, said there is a serious shortage of equipment in OT-1 and the hospital has failed to procure important surgical items like laparoscopic sets, operation tables, patient transfer trolleys, post-operative ICU beds, operation theater ceiling lights, C arm and other important machines used for operation of major elective cases. The department has maintained that it is highly unsafe to op-



The OT-1 at Maulana Azad Medical College to shut down in 'public interest'.

erate in the OT in the current situation.  
“It has become increasingly challenging and stressful to maintain the standard of care of surgery and the department has been maintaining optimum care despite the lack of basic essential equipment. The department has sent numerous demands to the hospital procurement section and several meetings have been held with the medical director apprising the officials about the critical situa-

tion,” read the notice.  
The doctors have maintained that they have “managed so far using laparoscopic equipment on loan basis as a demo for a period of 18 months from various companies so that the patients’ care is not affected and they continue to get state-of-the-art treatment and the training of the resident doctors remains unaffected”.  
**‘Put on backburner’**  
“This was done with the hope that the hospital would eventually be able to get these items. To the best of my knowledge, the same has not been processed or has been put on backburner or shelved. Though some consumable items have been procured, the attention to infrastructure equipment has been lacking completely,” said Dr. Lal.  
The doctor added that one major operation theater is still closed due to the lack of a technician.

Uber told to compensate person with disability for cancelled ride

Delhi disabilities panel head sets three-month deadline

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GUWAHATI**  
The Delhi State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities has ordered Uber India to compensate a traveller who was discriminated against for his disability.  
In his order on November 5, Commissioner Thakur Datt Dhariyal set a three-month deadline for the cab aggregator to compensate Arman Ali an unspecified amount for causing mental and physical trauma besides ₹14,000 he lost on June 24 when he missed his flight to Bengaluru after a cab driver in Chennai cancelled the ride because of his wheelchair.  
Two more Uber drivers cancelled his ride that day.  
The order mentioned two sections of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPD) Act, 2016, that prescribe fines of up to ₹5 lakh

for causing trauma to a differently abled person.  
A resident of Assam, Mr. Ali is the executive director of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Delhi.  
He suffers from 80% locomotor disability.  
**Cancellation charge**  
The cab aggregator had offered to refund only the cancellation charge of ₹45, Mr. Dhariyal noted in his order while advising Uber India to introduce training modules for its employees and driver-partners on provisions of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act.  
The Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities for Delhi took cognisance of Mr. Ali’s complaint emailed on the day of the incident.  
Stressing on the princi-

ples of dignity, non-discrimination, equality and accessibility enshrined under the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Mr. Dhariyal observed that it was the obligation of all service providers, public or private, to provide services according to the rules of accessibility as mandated by Section 46 of the RPWD Act.  
Transportation has been specifically included as “public facilities and services” under Section 2(x) of this Act.  
**Disabled-friendly cars**  
The Commissioner further recommended that the Ministry of Heavy Industries and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways frame a policy for manufacturing disabled-friendly cars and vehicles that can be used by people with disabilities.

Scheme to confer rights on people of unauthorised colonies in Delhi: PM

‘Law will be enacted during winter session of Parliament’

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Friday assured a delegation of residents of unauthorised colonies in Delhi that the Pradhan Mantri Uday Yojana will confer ownership rights on them and “change the fate” of the entire city, the BJP said.  
Addressing around 200 representatives from such colonies at his residence, the party said in a statement, Mr. Modi said the BJP had started the process of finding a solution to the problem soon after the formation of the BJP government at the Centre in 2014. The delegations also consisted of the party’s seven Lok Sabha MPs.  
“We hoped that the local government will share some responsibilities but the pro-

**Battle fought by AAP behind Centre’s move: CM**  
**NEW DELHI**  
Days after the Union Cabinet approved ownership rights to people living in unauthorised colonies, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said it was possible only because of a “long battle” fought by the AAP government and people of Delhi. PTI  
cess did not speed up. Then it was decided that we will take the responsibility if nobody does it,” the Prime Minister was quoted as having told the delegation, in a statement issued by the party’s State unit.  
“We will depute as many officers as required and depute required personnel for survey work. The Government of India will complete this work with full responsi-

bility. I am assured that the policy will be based on the principle of ‘Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas,’” Mr. Modi was quoted as having said.  
This year, he was quoted as having said, the people of Delhi celebrated Deepawali twice. Those who were born in such colonies, he said, were always confronted by the “danger of demolition”. Mr. Modi said that they, however, “never lost patience” and “cooperated with the system” even as some political parties worked under “political arithmetic” on the issue without any result. He said that a law would be enacted during the upcoming winter session of Parliament to confer ownership rights to an estimated 40 lakh citizens of around 1,797 such colonies.

SRCC staff protest against appointment of guest teachers

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**  
The staff association of Shri Ram College of Commerce on Friday undertook a protest march at North Campus against a recent university direction that called for the appointment of guest teachers against full-time vacancies.  
Opposing the move, the association said it would be “unjust towards young talent aspiring to become teachers and shows a lack of concern for teaching and learning.” Under the new norms, such teachers would be paid per lecture and only for lectures held, which will also be subject to a ceiling on the number of lectures per week, the association said.

Take action on illegal processing of plastic bottles: NGT

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**  
The National Green Tribunal has directed the Ghaziabad civic body to take action on a plea alleging illegal processing of old plastic bottles and polythene.  
Following a report furnished by the Uttar Pradesh State Pollution Control Board, a Bench headed by NGT chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel said: “Remedial action against illegal-

ties may be taken by the Municipal Corporation, Ghaziabad in coordination with the jurisdictional SDM and the State PCB.”  
The green panel has also sought a compliance report from authorities within one month.  
The directions came when NGT was hearing a plea moved by Prem Nagar residents, who alleged operation of illegal activities by certain individuals in the area.

“In the process, acid and chemicals were being used and toxic material was causing air pollution in the area. X-ray films were also burnt to extract silver, which is hazardous for environment and public health,” it was alleged.  
Earlier, the Tribunal had sought a report from the State Pollution Control Board and in a report dated September 13, the UPPCB said, “During inspection, it was observed that few activities

which include segregation of plastic bottles, glass bottles and polythene is being carried out in godowns. Prima facie the activities are illegal.”  
**Residential area**  
The UPPCB in its report said: “As the area falls under the jurisdiction of Municipal Corporation, Ghaziabad, hence necessary direction needs to be issued to the department for taking action against the illegal activities as per law.”

Saket incident: police write to court for CCTV footage


**STAFF REPORTER**  
**NEW DELHI**  
The Delhi Police has written to Saket court authorities to provide them with CCTV footage of the spot where a policeman was thrashed by lawyers, said sources.

**Video goes viral**  
The video of the incident which went viral on Monday shows that Constable Karan Yadav, who is posted with Mehrauli police station, had come to execute a court order and was returning when he was stopped by a group of lawyers who allegedly thrashed him.  
An officer said, “The matter has to be dealt with professionally which is why the footage of the spot has been sought from the court.”  
He added that letters have been written to the security in-charge of Saket court on the same.  
An FIR was registered under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code based on the complaint filed by the official.

I’ll give my version during inquiry: DCP Bhardwaj

DCW takes note of attack, seeks action-taken report from police

**STAFF REPORTER**  
**NEW DELHI**  
A day after a CCTV footage showing Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Monika Bhardwaj being chased and roughed on the premises of Tis Hazari Courts on November 2 surfaced on social media, the officer on Friday said she will put all facts of the incident before the judicial inquiry.  
“It was a crowd control situation and being a DCP of the district I responded to it. A judicial inquiry has already been ordered in the case. I will present my version and other facts related to the incident during the judicial inquiry only. I thank all for the sympathy for me on social media,” said the DCP when she was asked if she will register a separate FIR on the Tis Hazari incident.  
The Delhi Commission for Women, meanwhile, has taken note of the video clip and issued a notice to the city police seeking information on the alleged assault on Ms. Bhardwaj. In the letter to the joint Com-

 **It was a crowd control situation and being a DCP of the district I responded to it. I thank all for the sympathy for me on social media**

**MONIKA BHARDWAJ**  
Deputy Commissioner of Police (North)  
missioner of Police (Central Range), the commission sought details on whether an FIR was lodged in the matter.  
“This is a very serious and unfortunate incident and raises a question mark on the law and order situation in the Capital. In the light of the above, please provide information on whether any accused have been identified and arrested and provide an action-taken report in the matter,” read the letter.  
  
**‘Shameful act’**  
Referring to a CCTV footage, the DCW said, “It is observed in the video that Ms. Bhardwaj was pleading with the crowd presumably

not to indulge in violence but the men continued to assault her. Their act is shameful to say the least and needs to be dealt with strictly.” Ms. Bhardwaj was rescued by other police personnel and taken out of the court premises.  
In another CCTV footage, Additional DCP Harender Kumar Singh and an Assistant Commissioner of Police who went to rescue police personnel trapped inside the lockup were seen being attacked with belts. The Special Investigation Team headed by DCP (Crime) Joy Tirkey has recorded statement of total 42 witnesses in the case. A police officer said they police personnel of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion who were with under-trails, several advocates and vendors present inside the court premises have given their statements. “More people will record their statement in a couple of days. We are also corroborating the presence of suspects with the location of their mobile numbers,” said the officer.

Lawyers boycott work, judges remain on duty on day five of strike

Litigants appeared in courts, situation remained peaceful

**HEMANI BHANDARI**  
**NEW DELHI**  
On the fifth day of lawyers’ strike in the Capital on Friday, while the advocates boycotted work, judges were on duty and the premises remained open for litigants. The lawyers suspended the strike later in the day.  
“Though the lawyers abstained from the work, the litigants were appearing in the court. Judges were working. The situation was peaceful. Cases were mostly given dates for further hearing,” said advocate Navneet Kasana, Chairman of the Media Committee at Shah-

dara Bar Association.  
Advocate I.S. Saroha, former president of the Rohini Bar Association, said that at the Rohini Courts, one gate remained locked where protesting lawyers had been gathering for the last five days and continued the protest and litigants were allowed to enter from another gate.  
Advocate Priyanka Kasana from Tis Hazari Courts said that the court premises was open to public and those who could handle their matters on their own did so, while the lawyers’ abstained from working.  
Mr. Navneet said that “the

suspension of work was not only a loss to the public, but also monetary loss for the lawyers as they have not been working continuously for the last five days, adding: “We are not salaried... but we were helpless.”  
On November 2, a major clash broke out between lawyers and the Delhi police over a parking issue leaving 20 police officers and eight lawyers injured. A bullet was fired allegedly by an Assistant Sub Inspector-rank officer and it hit a lawyer. The lawyers have been protesting demanding the arrest of the officers involved in the incident of firing.

HC to hear plea for action against police in February

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
**NEW DELHI**  
The Delhi High Court on Friday said it will hear in February a plea seeking action against police officials who were agitating in public and sitting on ‘dhar-na’ after their November 2 clash with lawyers at the Tis Hazari Courts.  
A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice C. Hari Shankar refused to give a shorter date for hearing the plea and asked the lawyers to use their good officers for settling the issue with the police.  
The matter will be heard on February 12, the Bench said.

RAW officer arrested for molesting teenager

She alleged he harassed her for 2 years

**SAURABH TRIVEDI**  
**NEW DELHI**  
A 59-year-old Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) officer was arrested for allegedly molesting a minor, the police said on Friday.  
He was nabbed from his residence in south Delhi after a 16-year-old girl, whom he had given tuition for two years, filed a complaint against him, they said.  
According to the first information report registered at Safdurjung Enclave police station under Section 10 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, the accused used to “touch her inappropriately”.  
“The accused used to give her tuitions at home from 2015 to 2017. During

this period, he used to molest her. She often turned him away but he continued to harass her. The girl said because of his age, she was uncomfortable to share the incident with her parents and hence continued taking classes from him,” said an officer.  
On Thursday, the victim recorded her statement before a Magistrate under CrPC Section 164. Due to the continued harassment, the victim claimed that she got upset and is undergoing treatment at a psychiatric department in Safdurjung Hospital.  
She was unable to concentrate on her studies, the police said, adding: “A case was registered on Wednesday. It is under investigation.”

2012 gang-rape convict files mercy petition

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
**NEW DELHI**  
Vinay Sharma, a convict in 2012 gang-rape and murder of a 23-year-old woman, has filed a mercy petition before President Ram Nath Kovind, said officials.  
He is in Tihar Jail since his arrest. “Sharma has filed a mercy petition while Mukesh, another convict, has refused to do the

same,” a senior Delhi Prisons official said. In a notice issued to the four convicts on October 29, the jail Superintendent informed them that they have only seven days to file the mercy petition.  
If the mercy petition is not filed, prison authorities can approach the court, which will issue a death warrant, said sources.

**Gogi gang member opens fire at man, arrested**  
**NEW DELHI**  
A 22-year-old man, Pradeep alias Kala, has been arrested for allegedly firing at one Naresh Kumar in north-west Delhi’s Mahendra Park as an outcome of gang rivalry, the police said on Thursday. Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Jasmeet Singh said the accused is a member of gangster Jitender Gogi’s gang.

DELHI TODAY

**Talk:** The Ila Dalmia Memorial Lecture 2019: “Pictorialist Photography in Bombay at the Turn of the Century”, an illustrated lecture by Dr. Jyotindra Jain, eminent scholar at Seminar Rooms I, II & III, Kamaladevi Complex, India International Centre (IIC), 6 p.m.  
  
**Dance:** “Bhakti Madhuran” a Bharatanatyam performance will be presented by Rashmi Raut Jaiswal at Triveni Auditorium, Triveni Kala Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, 6:15 p.m.  
  
**Exhibition:** “Spirituality in the Digital World”, a group digital artwork show at Digital Art Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.  
  
**Exhibition:** “A Journey from Arms to Art”, a solo painting show by Ram Prakash Joshi, a retired army veteran from Uttarakhand at Convention Centre Foyer, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

(Mail your listings for this column at cityeditor@thehindu.co.in)





Protesters near the India gate on Friday.  
■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

## Youth raise voice against pollution

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

About 50 people, mostly in their twenties and some as young as 16-year-old, gathered at the India Gate on Friday evening to protest against air pollution with posters reading: “I demand my right to life”; “Clean Air Now, Mandir Masjid Later!”; “Fight for your Future”; “There is no planet B”.

Delhi’s air quality deteriorated to “severe” and “severe+” post Diwali forcing the State government to shut schools and even a ban on construction activities was ordered by the Supreme Court.

The protesters, who were part of the global movement ‘Fridays For Future’ (FFF), demanded that the government take strict actions to curb air pollution.

The movement was started by 16-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg in Sweden in 2018.

Mohita Kalra (16), a Class XII student, said: “Pollution in Delhi is the worst and there should be policy changes. My friends have been falling ill and not coming to school,” she said and added that she had to convince her parents to come for the protest.

Richard Miller (20) from Germany, who works with an NGO in Delhi, said: “The pollution here is way worse. We are very lucky in Germany.”

# Air quality remains ‘very poor’, govt. cracks whip on officials

Chief Secretary warns of action if agencies fail to control local sources of pollutants

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The air quality of the Capital remained ‘very poor’ on Friday and is expected to remain in the same category on Saturday.

Delhi Chief Secretary Vijay Dev has ordered officials of different agencies to take action to control local sources of pollution before November 13, including lifting of construction waste and controlling dust, after the Supreme Court pulled up the government earlier this week.

“Today the wind speed was less in the morning [5-6 km/hr] and towards the evening, it increased to 10-12 km/hr. We are expecting a wind speed of about 20 km/hr tomorrow [Saturday]



The air quality of the Capital is expected to remain in the ‘very poor’ category on Saturday too.  
■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

and day after [Sunday],” said Kuldeep Srivastava, head of regional weather forecasting centre of the IMD. Faster winds help to disperse pollutants and improve the air quality.

Delhi’s air quality index (AQI) on Friday was 330, up

from 309 (very poor) on Thursday, according to the bulletin at 4 p.m. by the Central Pollution Control Board that is the average of the past 24 hours. An AQI between 0-50 is considered ‘good’ and 51-100 ‘satisfactory’.

The contribution of stubble burning in neighbouring States to Delhi’s air pollution was only 3% on Friday and is expected to be 8% on Saturday, said government-run monitoring agency SAFAR. The contribution of stubble burning was as high as 44% earlier this season.

The contribution is less as the wind direction is from the south-east and the number of farm fires was less, but SAFAR warned that it could be because of the cloud cover. “The effective biomass fire count observed on Thursday was 200. It should be noted that Punjab and Haryana were under a heavy cloud cover; and satellite’s capability to detect fires reduces in such a situation,” SAFAR said.

## Delhi govt. to lift odd-even for two days on Prakash Parv

Scheme to be in force for 9 days as opposed to 11 days

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The odd-even scheme will be suspended for two days next week – November 11 and 12 – so that members of the Sikh community are not inconvenienced during the Prakash Parv celebrations, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced on Friday.

He also announced the Delhi Cabinet’s in-principle decision to include Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib under the ongoing Mukhyamantri Tirth Yatra Yojana which, he said, will enable Delhi’s senior citizens to visit the sacred site free of cost.

“The 550th Prakash Parv of Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji is being celebrated through a grand Nagar Kirtan on November 11 and Guru Parv on November 12. Lakhs of peo-



Arvind Kejriwal at a press conference in New Delhi on Friday.  
■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

ple are expected to join the celebrations. Several Sikh organisations came to me with a request to suspend the odd-even scheme for these two days and we have decided to do that,” Mr. Kejriwal announced.

Following the decision to suspend it for two consecutive days, the road rationing scheme will now be in force for a total of nine days as opposed to eleven days.

Mr. Kejriwal also said that

the Delhi government was in the process of working out the modalities related to providing free travel under its flagship Tirth Yatra Scheme to senior citizens of the Capital. All charges, he said, will be borne by the Delhi government. He added that after the Delhi Cabinet gave its in-principle approval for the move, the Revenue Department had been directed to work out the details based on the final arrangement between the Indian and Pakistani governments.

Meanwhile, a total of 532 fines – 294 by the Delhi Traffic Police, 159 by the Transport Department and 79 the Revenue Department – have been issued to violators for not following the provisions of the road rationing scheme, till Friday evening.

## Dip in fake currency seizures in Delhi since note ban

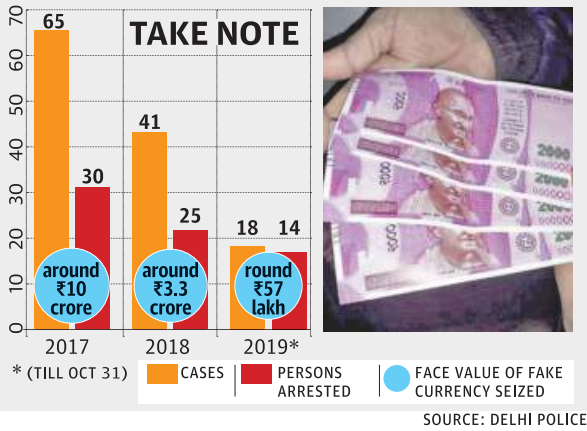
Police say they have intensified crackdown on channels used for smuggling

SAURABH TRIVEDI  
NEW DELHI

In three years since the demonetisation move in 2016, the Delhi police have recovered 12,172 and 874 counterfeit notes in denominations of ₹2,000 and ₹200 respectively. There has been a significant drop in number of fake currency seizures since the note ban, said a police officer.

According to the Delhi police records, in 2016, total 80 cases of counterfeit currency notes were detected. In 2017, the cases came down to 65, and in 2018 total 41 cases were registered. In 2019, total 18 cases have been registered till October 31.

“We have busted many modules and supply channels



used by criminals to smuggle counterfeit currency in the country,” said a senior police officer.

“Because of our efforts the cases of counterfeit currency

smuggling are coming down. Fake notes are printed in Pakistan and smuggled in India through Bangladesh and Nepal border. We had a meeting with BSF officers in Delhi

where concerns were raised and surveillance on borders was tightened,” the officer added.

In 2017, a total of 3,124 fake notes of ₹2,000 denomination were recovered. The number grew significantly in 2018 when 6,605 fake notes were seized and in 2019, 2,443 fake notes were recovered till October 31. More fake notes of ₹200 denomination have been recovered since its introduced in 2017 – 56 in 2018 and 818 till October 31, 2019.

“Sometimes the quality of fake notes is so fine that it can easily be mistaken for original currency. Fake note suppliers manage to get the same quality of paper,” said the officer.



# Implement Supreme Court order on bonus to farmers: Amarinder

Apex court ordered ₹100 per quintal to those who did not burn crop stubble

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
**CHANDIGARH**  
Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Friday ordered the State Agriculture Department to work out the modalities for immediate implementation of the Supreme Court orders on providing financial assistance to small and marginal farmers who had not burnt any paddy straw.

**Action against violators**  
The Chief Minister also ordered stringent action against violators of the ban on stubble burning, in compliance with the apex court’s directives on penalisation of such farmers, according to an official statement issued here.  
Capt. Amarinder chaired a high-level meeting to discuss the implications of the Supreme Court orders which would put an additional burden on the cash-strapped State. Punjab is already reeling under fiscal problems in the GST regime. He stressed that the central government would have to support the State for a permanent solution of the problem.

## Stop stubble burning: Kamal Nath

**STAFF REPORTER**  
**BHOPAL**  
Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath has appealed to farmers to desist from burning stubble in fields to curb pollution and maintain soil fertility.  
“Stubble burning destroys organisms necessary to maintain soil fertility. Therefore, instead of burning it, you could use it for alternative uses such as cattle fodder,” he said.  
Referring to farmers as

Farmers who had refrained from burning paddy straw despite the financial problems they were facing needed to be given incentives and encouraged, Capt. Amarinder said, asking the Agriculture and Finance Departments to take immediate steps to ensure the implementation of the Supreme Court orders on providing compensation to such farmers.  
He also asked the Finance Department to ensure requi-

“guardians of greenery” and “protectors of environment”, he called upon them to save the State in time from the toxic air that had already choked several other regions.  
**‘Produce energy’**  
He added that according to scientists, stubble could also be used to produce energy and paper and cardboard. Furthermore, instead wheat could be sown along with it. “Doing this will help convert

site funds for the payment to farmers.  
**900 FIRs filed**  
Capt. Amarinder asked the police department to identify those who needed to be penalised for stubble burning, which had contributed to the severe air pollution in the State and neighbouring regions.  
The meeting was informed that more than 900 FIRs had so far been registered against erring farmers,

stubble into manure at the time of irrigation. And its nutrients will benefit the crop,” he said.  
Mr. Nath said that even the Supreme Court had reaffirmed everyone’s right to breathe clean air. “Stubble burning releases carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and sulphur dioxide, and leaves behind ash, which are toxic in nature. They pollute the environment by augmenting dust particles in the air,” he explained.

## Minister misleading people on EPF scam: U.P. Cong.

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
**LUCKNOW**  
Unfazed by a defamation notice served on him by Uttar Pradesh Power Minister Shrikant Sharma, State Congress chief Ajay Kumar Lallu on Friday accused the former of misleading people in connection with the ₹2,600-crore EPF scam.  
“Most of the money of the employees’ PF was invested in the defaulter DHFL under the BJP government when Mr. Sharma was the Power Minister. Now, he is trying to take the issue in another di-

rection,” Mr. Lallu said.  
The Congress leader, who was asked to apologise in the notice by the U.P. Minister within 24 hours for making “indecent allegations” regarding the scam against him, said Mr. Sharma was not disclosing facts about the investment. “Our demand was that cases be lodged against those responsible for it and the Minister be sacked,” he said.  
He said none of the queries raised by him had been answered by the Minister so far.

# Centre slashing funds: Gehlot

‘Rajasthan likely to get ₹7,348 cr. less in the current fiscal’

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
**JAIPUR**  
The Congress government in Rajasthan has accused the Centre of slashing the State’s share in the Central taxes and grants, while deciding to revise priorities for developmental works in view of the economic recession. The State has also demanded a financial assistance of ₹2,645 crore from the National Disaster Relief Fund as compensation for farmers.

**‘Myopic decisions’**  
Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, who also holds the Finance portfolio, has asked the Department officials to focus on stepping up revenue collection by mobilising the State’s own resources. He said Rajasthan had been adversely affected by the weakening economy and the Centre’s “myopic decisions”, including a flawed GST implementation.  
After a review meeting of the Department, Mr. Gehlot said the State was likely to



Ashok Gehlot •PTI

get ₹7,348 crore less from the Centre during the current financial year, against ₹5,600 crore less in 2018-19. “The Union government will not only pay ₹4,172 crore lesser in the State’s share in Central taxes, but it will also reduce the grants under the Centrally sponsored schemes by ₹3,176 crore,” he said.  
The Chief Minister said while the priorities in taking up developmental works would be reworked, some new action plans would be formulated to strengthen the State’s economy through an efficient financial manage-

ment, which was also adopted during the tenure of his previous government.  
The Congress, which is facing a difficult financial situation partly because of its decisions on farm loan waiver and unemployment allowance to the youths, is likely to raise the issue of slashing of funds in a big way during the party’s nationwide agitation against the Narendra Modi government. The issues of economic crisis, unemployment and agricultural distress are being highlighted in the protests.

**Compensation sought**  
The State government has also demanded an assistance of ₹2,645 crore from the NDRF as compensation for farmers whose crops were damaged in the heavy rains and floods during this year’s monsoon. The demand for compensation included ₹369 crore for losses incurred because of soil erosion at agricultural land.

## Attempt to set Uttarakhand MLA on fire

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
**DEHRADUN**  
Two persons on Friday made an attempt to allegedly set afire Congress MLA Manoj Rawat in Rudraprayag district, police said.  
DG (Law and Order) Ashok Kumar said the incident occurred in Agastya-muni area but the MLA escaped unharmed. Two persons tried to pour petrol over Mr. Rawat and set him on fire but one of them was held by the MLA’s gunner and the other one escaped, the DG said. He was arrested later, he said.  
Prima facie, it appears to be a case of personal enmity as the MLA had a tiff with some people on Thursday, Mr. Kumar said.  
Pradesh Congress president Pritam Singh condemned the incident, saying law and order has collapsed in the State and the morale of wrongdoers is high like never before.

## SC allows 7 more girls to reunite with their families

The girls had faced sexual assaults at Muzaffarpur shelter home

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
**NEW DELHI**  
The Supreme Court on Friday allowed seven more girls, who were at the Muzaffarpur shelter home where allegations of sexual assault surfaced last year, to reunite with their families.  
The top court had earlier allowed eight girls, out of 44 in all, to be reunited their families but only six of them have been able to do so.

**TISS project**  
‘Koshish’ – a field action project of TISS – in its report told the court that 12 more girls, besides these 15, have been identified to be restored with their families.  
Several girls were reportedly sexually assaulted at the NGO-run shelter home in Bihar. The issue had come to light following a report by TISS, which had conducted a social audit.  
A Bench of Justices N.V. Ramana and Krishna Murari said that as and when their families are identified and the verification done, these girls can be reunited with

them.  
Counsel for TISS told the Bench that out of the eight girls, only six have so far been restored with their families.  
It asked the State Child Protection Societies of West Bengal, Assam, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Punjab to provide all necessary help to identify and verify the family members of the girls.  
The Bench clarified that it cannot monitor the restoration on day-to-day basis but in case of any problem, the matter could be mentioned for hearing.  
On September 12, the apex court had allowed eight of the 44 girls of Muzaffarpur shelter home to be reunited with their families. The top court had directed the Bihar government to provide all necessary financial and medical assistance to these eight girls identified by ‘Koshish’ as fit for being sent to their families.  
It had also directed the State government to assess the compensation liable to be paid to the girls under the victim compensation scheme and submit a report to the court in eight weeks. The decision came after TISS filed its report before the SC in a sealed cover, saying the eight girls were fit to be handed over to their families.

## ‘Allow women to perform kirtan at Golden Temple’

Punjab Assembly adopts resolution on the issue

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
**CHANDIGARH**  
The Punjab Assembly on Thursday unanimously passed a resolution urging the Akal Takht and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee to allow Sikh women to sing hymns in the sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple in Amritsar.  
The resolution was moved by Minister Tript Rajinder Singh Bajwa who said Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev fought against caste and gender inequality throughout his life and this discrimination against women should also end.  
He rejected an Akali leader’s claim that according to Sikh ‘*rehat maryada*’ (religious code of conduct), women are not allowed to perform ‘kirtan’ at the Darbar Sahib. He pointed out that even Akali leader Jagir Kaur had sought permission for Sikh women to perform ‘kirtan sewa’ at the shrine.

**‘No discrimination’**  
“There was no mention in the Sikh history of any discrimination against women,” said Mr. Bajwa.

Only Sikh men perform ‘kirtan’ at the Golden Temple as of now.  
Akali MLA Parminder Singh Dhindsa said that efforts were being made to depict that the Akal Takht or the SGPC are deliberately refusing women to sing hymns at the Golden Temple. He said he agreed with the feelings of Mr. Bajwa, but asserted that the Akal Takht was already aware of the issue.  
The Akali Dal later came out in support. Lok Insaaf Party MLA Simarjeet Singh Bains thanked Mr. Bajwa for the same.  
As per the resolution, “Guru Nanak Dev had visualised a society in which there would be no place for discrimination or distinction on the basis of caste or creed, social status or gender, a society that is to be based upon the principle of egalitarianism and committed to welfare of all... It is, however, unfortunate that the Sikh women are not allowed to perform ‘kirtan’ in Darbar Sahib, Amritsar. This session of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha appeals to the Jathedar of Akal Takht and the SGPC to end this discriminatory practice that violates the essence of Gurbani and allow Sikh women to perform kirtan.”

DELHI ☀️🌙 Timings

SATURDAY, NOV. 09

☀️ RISE 06:38 SET 17:31

🌙 RISE 15:59 SET 03:30

SUNDAY, NOV. 10

☀️ RISE 06:39 SET 17:31

🌙 RISE 16:29 SET 04:22

MONDAY, NOV. 11

☀️ RISE 06:40 SET 17:30

🌙 RISE 17:02 SET 05:16

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	30	16
Safdarjang	30	16
Palam	28	16

**Delhi Palam Today**  
**28°C** Haze/ smoke haze in the morning. Moderate north westerly during afternoon. A sunny sky and a comfortable day.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
**27°C** Fall in minimum temperature expeted over the area. A sunny and comfortable day.

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**THE HINDU**  
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# Judicial remand for ex-Minister

CPI(M) veteran is key accused in PWD scam

**SYED SAJJAD ALI**  
AGARTALA

A court on Friday sent CPI (M) veteran and former Minister Badal Choudhury to judicial remand till November 11 in a case relating to an alleged ₹640-crore PWD scam. He was taken to the court of the West Tripura district and sessions judge after his discharge from a government hospital, where he was admitted for the past 10 days. The alleged scam took place in 2008.

Mr. Choudhury, Deputy Leader in theAssembly, was admitted to the GBP Hospital after he fell sick in police custody within minutes of his transit from a private hospital.

Mr. Choudhury alleged that he was manhandled by the police at the private hospital after discharge and at the police station.

His spouse and daughter filed a complaint with the



Badal Choudhury at the Tripura High Court in Agartala on Friday. •PTI

Police Accountability Commission and a case in the court, based on the allegations

Another important accused in the alleged scam, former PWD chief engineer Sunil Bhowmik was arrested and is in jail custody. Y.P. Singh, who was the Principal Secretary in-charge of PWD in 2008, is also wanted in the same case and remains elusive.

## HC seeks report on moving metro tunnel-boring machine

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
KOLKATA

The Calcutta High Court on Friday asked the Kolkata Metro Rail Corporation (KMRC) to submit expert opinion by November 15 on the feasibility of moving a tunnel-boring machine at Bowbazar, where an aquifer burst during tunnelling led to the collapse of several houses in August.

The corporation said the boring machine has been at the site since the August 30 accident and is required to be moved by five metres to

ensure it remains functional.

The corporation sought the court's permission since it had ordered the KMRC to not commence work in the tunnel without its approval.

A Division Bench, comprising Chief Justice T.B.N. Radhakrishnan and Justice Arijit Banerjee, asked the KMRC to submit a report, including expert opinion, on whether it would be feasible to move the machine by November 15, the next date of hearing.

## Ghosh stands by cow milk remark

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
KOLKATA

West Bengal Bharatiya Janata Party president Dilip Ghosh on Friday justified his comment that Indian cow milk have “traces of gold”, saying it was backed by conclusions of research taking place in the foreign countries.

He said those who are trolling him over the remark should first prove him wrong by producing counter research papers.



# Attempts being made to get Cong. MLAs to defect: Thorat

State unit chief says party has not decided to support a Shiv Sena-led government

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

The Congress on Friday alleged that attempts are being made to put pressure on party legislators to switch sides. Maharashtra Congress president Balasaheb Thorat said his party has not taken any decision to support a Shiv Sena-led government in the State, where there is an impasse over formation of the next dispensation.

Talking to reporters, he said, “To avoid harassment, some MLAs have gone out (of Mumbai). Legislators have told us that they are being given proposals to defect from the party.”

He said the Congress, which won 44 seats in the October 21 Assembly polls, has not taken any decision to support a Sena-led government. “The mandate is for the BJP-Shiv Sena to form government and they should do it.”

Another Congress leader, Manikrao Thakre, said some legislators are of the view that the party should take steps to prevent installation of a BJP-led government.

“But, the final decision will be taken by the party high command in Delhi and that will be binding on all legislators,” the former president of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee said.

Mr. Thakre said the mandate given in the last month’s polls was for the BJP and the Sena to form government, but they are delaying this process.

“Our MLAs are airing their views, but the final decision will be taken by the Delhi leadership,” he said, adding all party legislators are together to prevent attempts to lure them away. Earlier in the day, Congress leaders



**Devising strategy:** State Congress president Balasaheb Thorat (left) after meeting Congress leaders at Vijay Wadettiwar’s residence at Nariman Point in Mumbai on Friday. ■PRASHANT NAKWE

## Mungantiwar seeks proof of poaching

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and State minister Sudhir Mungantiwar on Friday rejected the Congress’s allegations that the saffron outfit is trying to poach its MLAs and said the charge is in fact an insult to legislators of the opposition party.

He asked Congress and NCP leaders to produce proof that the BJP was trying to engage in horse-trading, or tender an apology. “The Congress has in-

sulted its own MLAs by falsely claiming the BJP is trying to wean away some of its legislators. Does it mean that the Congress has put up its MLAs for sale?” Mr. Mungantiwar asked while speaking to reporters.

About the delay in government formation, he said his party will not discuss the details of negotiations with the Shiv Sena before the media till a deal is sealed. “The Congress and the NCP are spreading false information (related

to poaching attempts). Either they should provide proof of our so-called attempts to engineer defections or tender apology for insulting their own MLAs. Those making such claims should provide the call records of the BJP leaders trying to poach their MLAs,” the Finance Minister said.

Earlier in the day, Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar alleged that sums of “₹25 crore to ₹50 crore” were being offered to MLAs to switch sides.

met to discuss the prevailing political situation. Some party MLAs were also present at the meeting at the residence of Leader of Opposition in the outgoing Assembly Vijay Wadettiwar.

The BJP, which emerged

as the single largest party in the Assembly polls winning 105 seats, and its ally Sena, with 56 seats, have not staked claim to form government together or separately till now. The two parties are bickering over sharing chief

ministerial post since October 24, when the poll results were out.

The NCP and the Congress won 54 and 44 seats, respectively, in the election to the 288-member House where the majority mark is 145.

# Don’t know why Governor is not calling single largest party: Pawar

Ramdas Athawale meets NCP chief ‘to seek his advice’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

With the impasse over government formation continuing even a fortnight after the Assembly poll results, NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Friday asked why the Governor is not calling the single largest party.

Mr. Pawar said he is not aware why Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari is not inviting the BJP, which won 105 seats.

Union Minister Ramdas Athawale on Friday met Mr. Pawar “to seek his advice” on ending the deadlock over government formation.

Speaking to reporters af-



ter the meeting, Mr. Pawar suggested through Mr. Athawale that the BJP and the Shiv Sena respect the “clear-cut majority” people have given them.

Mr. Pawar said, “Such a situation should not prevail in a State like Maharashtra.

He (Mr. Athawale) asked for advice. We have consensus that the people have given the BJP and the Sena a clear-cut mandate.”

For how long can the President or Governor wait, Mr. Pawar asked, adding they will have to take some decision soon. “Our advice is you (BJP and Sena) have the mandate. You follow it.”

Mr. Athawale said, “I have had a close relationship with Pawar Saheb for years...I came here to take his advice. Mr. Pawar’s opinion is that the Sena and the BJP should form government. He asked me to advise the two parties to do it.”

# Cong.: Modi govt.’s policies have halted growth

SHOUMJOIT BANERJEE  
PUNE

The Narendra Modi government’s disastrous economic policies have retarded the country’s growth rate, said the Pune Congress on Friday, adding the BJP and the Shiv Sena’s “selfish politics” is depriving Maharashtra’s public of a stable government.

Members of the Congress took out a march to protest what they called the Centre’s wrong-headed economic policies which have allegedly ruined lakhs of farmers and small traders.

“Farmers in 16 districts in the northern and western parts and the Marathwada region have been hit hard by unseasonal rains that have destroyed more than 15 lakhs hectares of cropland. Despite this, the ruling par-



**Staunch opposition:** Members of the Congress taking out a march in Pune on Friday. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ties continue to bicker over government formation while there seem to be no concrete efforts on part of the administration to assess the damage,” Pune Congress chief Ramesh Bagwe said.

“The Modi government’s policies have slowed down the country’s growth rate to an alarming 5%, which was once thriving at 10.08% at the time of the UPA-II government in 2010-11 under Prime Minister Manmohan

# State heading for President’s rule: Bhujbal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

Senior NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal on Friday said Maharashtra is heading for President’s rule.

“I think we are heading for President’s rule. After President’s rule is imposed, I think things will normalise in a month. Somebody will have to retreat or change tracks (to form government),” Mr. Bhujbal told a news channel.

The former deputy chief minister said the NCP will adopt “wait and watch” approach. Mr. Bhujbal also alleged that Congress’s Igat-puri MLA Hiranman Khoskar was offered inducements to switch sides.

Singh,” Congress leader and AICC secretary for Maharashtra, Sonal Patel, said.

Ms. Patel said the Pune agitation was one part of a series of nationwide protests against the Centre’s economic policies, which had commenced on November 5 and would continue in other States till November 15.

Mr. Bagwe said farmers are not getting their minimum support prices while farmer suicides show no signs of abating. “Unemployment is at a 45-year high, while investment has plummeted.”

Pune Congress general secretary Ramesh Iyer said no action is being taken against the accused in the multi-crore Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank scam as the culprits belong to the ruling party.

# High Court grants interim stay on GR appointing employees under SEBC

SONAM SAIGAL  
MUMBAI

In what comes as a relief to thousands of government employees, the Bombay High Court on Friday granted interim stay on a government resolution (GR) that would terminate their services under open category to fill the quota under Socially and Educationally Backward Class (SEBC).

A Division Bench of Justices Ranjit More and M.S. Kar-

nik was hearing a petition filed by Rekha Mandavak and others who are class I, II and III employees. They are all challenging the resolution passed on July 11 to fill government posts for SEBC from open category.

On November 30, 2018, the Assembly had passed a Bill granting 16% reservation in education and government jobs to Marathas, and came up with SEBC.

On June 27, this year,

another Division Bench upheld reservation for Marathas in the State but quashed the 16% quota by calling it “not justifiable” and said it should not exceed 12% in education and 13% in jobs as recommended by the Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission.

The court granted interim stay on the GR and directed the government to maintain status quo. The matter will be heard on December 5.









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

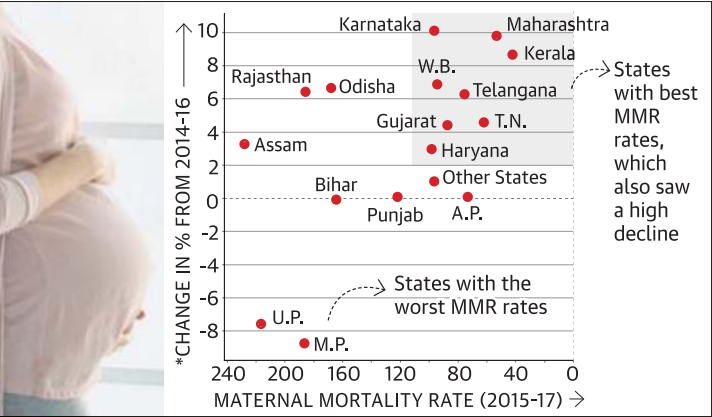
India's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has seen a decline from 130 per 1 lakh live births in 2014-2016 to 122 per 1 lakh live births in 2015-2017. A decline of 8 points (6.2%) was observed during this period, according to the latest Sample Registration System (SRS) 2015-2017 bulletin for MMR released 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 2015-17, 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, Telangana, 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.

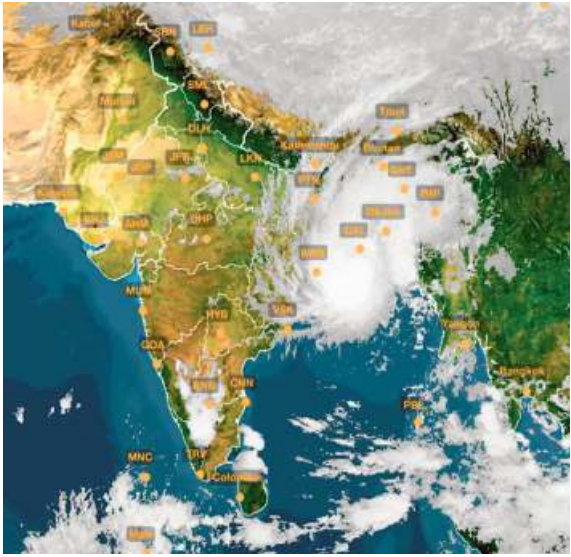
Focus on quality and coverage of health services through public health initiatives under the National Health Mission such as LaQshya, Poshan Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan, Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram, Janani Suraksha Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana have contributed 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 Karaikal. 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	Kozhikode	...	34.0	25.0
Ahmedabad	...	31.0	23.0	Kurnool	...	33.0	24.0
Aizawl	...	27.0	15.0	Lucknow	...	30.0	18.0
Allahabad	...	31.0	17.0	Madurai	48.0	33.0	22.0
Bengaluru	...	29.0	20.0	Mangaluru	...	31.0	24.0
Bhopal	...	30.0	18.0	Mumbai	32.6	33.0	25.0
Bhubaneswar	...	26.0	20.0	Mysuru	...	29.0	20.0
Chandigarh	5.5	28.0	14.0	New Delhi	0.8	30.0	16.0
Chennai	...	35.0	25.0	Patna	...	31.0	19.0
Coimbatore	0.3	33.0	22.0	Port Blair	0.1	29.0	24.0
Dehradun	...	30.0	13.0	Puducherry	...	34.0	24.0
Gangtok	...	19.0	13.0	Pune	...	31.0	18.0
Goa	...	33.0	23.0	Raipur	...	29.0	19.0
Guwahati	...	30.0	20.0	Ranchi	...	27.0	16.0
Hubballi	...	29.0	20.0	Shillong	...	20.0	11.0
Hyderabad	...	32.0	22.0	Shimla	5.4	15.0	5.0
Imphal	...	28.0	15.0	Srinagar	...	...	...
Jaipur	...	28.0	18.0	Thiruvananthapuram	...	33.0	25.0
Kochi	0.2	32.0	24.0	Tiruchi	5.7	34.0	23.0
Kohima	...	22.0	13.0	Vijayawada	...	32.0	22.0
Kolkata	...	27.0	22.0	Visakhapatnam	...	32.0	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	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	132	160	.38	.129	.91	...
Bengaluru	...	.6	.30	.51	.234	...
Chennai	...	.7	.25	.40	.342	...
Delhi	...	24	133	.34	.369	.315
Hyderabad	...	.6	.46	.36	.169	.129
Kolkata	...	17	.19	.22	.178	.164
Lucknow	...	29	.38	.41	.389	...
Mumbai	...	.8	.46	.112	.17	...
Pune	...	.83	.10	.65	...	.28
Visakhapatnam	...	.28	.83	.49	.156	.127

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

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 Habibganj 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 Vishwa 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.

भारतीय विमानपत्तन प्राधिकरण
AIRPORTS AUTHORITY OF INDIA
E-TENDER NOTICE
(e-Bid No.2019\_AAI\_35536\_1)
Airports Authority of India, Trivandrum Airport invites tender (through e-tendering process) for grant of Licence for Operating Money Exchange Counter in the arrival area of International Terminal Building. For detailed information, log on to CPP e-portal reference https://etenders.gov.in/eprocure/app or www.aai.aero. Further clarification / corrigendum if any will be notified through e-procurement portal at https://etenders.gov.in/eprocure/app. AIRPORT DIRECTOR





## Thumbs down

Moody's has flagged known risks, and the Centre has to push harder for reforms

Ratings agency Moody's has reacted predictably to the turbulence in the economy by revising the outlook on its sovereign rating for India from stable to negative. Moody's India rating is a notch higher than that of Standard & Poor's and the outlook revision now may well be to compensate for its past optimism on India. Yet, the outlook revision has to be seen for what it is: a warning that if the economy fails to bounce back soon enough, the sovereign rating could be up for an unfavourable review. With due respect to Moody's, none of the issues that it has highlighted is unknown. The growth slowdown and its effects on the fiscal deficit and borrowings are the main worries. On the one hand, tax revenue growth is nowhere near budgeted levels and with the slowdown extending into the third quarter, it is clear that tax revenues will undershoot by a wide margin. On the other, the government has been forced to spend more to give a leg up to the economy. Apart from pushing expenditure on capital projects, the government last month gave away corporate tax concessions amounting to a whopping ₹1.45 lakh crore. Even with the boost from the ₹1.76 lakh crore dividend payout from the Reserve Bank of India, the budget arithmetic is optimistic and it now appears certain that the government will miss the fiscal deficit target of 3.3% of GDP. The only question is: by how much? Moody's has projected that the deficit will slip to 3.7% of GDP this fiscal. Ratings agencies are ultra-sensitive to fiscal deficit overruns but the positive factor here is that India's borrowings are almost wholly domestic. External debt to GDP is just 20% but the ratings do have an impact on investor sentiment.

But the Moody's outlook revision comes when there are faint signs of a revival in the economy. To be sure, it may be another quarter or two before growth picks up – the second quarter numbers due later this month may show GDP growing at less than 5%. But the festive season uptick in sales of automobiles and white goods does point to the return of the consumer to the market. Of course, the possibility that it was an artificial boost driven by the big discounts that were on offer cannot be ruled out. But there are other positive signals such as the increase in bank credit offtake reported by the RBI for the second successive fortnight. The government needs to press the pedal harder on reforms and in debugging GST. It may also have little option than to go big on disinvestment in the remaining four months of this fiscal. The target of ₹1.05 lakh crore that it set for itself in the budget has to be bested by a wide margin if the fiscal deficit slippage is to be contained. The supportive measures announced in the last two months should be closely monitored for implementation.

## Endless greed

In the absence of successful prosecution, life bans are not a deterrent for corrupt cricketers

In less than a fortnight, cricket has suffered twin blows, both at the international and domestic level. First up was Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan's belated admission of corrupt approaches by bookies. The International Cricket Council immediately suspended him and the game was left in an uneasy state. Worse was to follow and, this time around, it was closer home as C.M. Gautam and Abrar Kazi, two players who represented Ballari Tuskers in the Karnataka Premier League, were arrested on Thursday following their involvement in match fixing and for specifically underperforming and throwing their final against Hubli Tigers at Mysore in August this year. That Gautam, who led Ballari Tuskers, has also played first-class cricket for a decade makes his crime all the more tragic. The wicket-keeper batsman has played for India A in the past while Kazi was always considered a talented all-rounder. The inducement was an amount of ₹20 lakh and the duo allegedly succumbed to greed. The KPL has been under the scanner for a while and the police believe that more grisly tales could be unearthed from the wretched bookie-player nexus. The crisis also drives home the sobering truth that cricket is not insulated from the betting syndicate's nefarious tentacles.

When the match-fixing scandal first broke in 2000 and scalped big names such as Mohammad Azharuddin, Hansie Cronje and Saleem Malik, the punitive measures then taken, like a life-long ban, were seen as an adequate deterrent. But history has proved otherwise and, in the subsequent years, the inability to conclusively prove match-fixing with strong evidence in the courts has often allowed tainted players to reverse punishments and reclaim their lost space. Cricket's heart has been repeatedly mauled, be it through the spot-fixing incidents involving Pakistan's then-skipper Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Amir in the 2010 Lord's Test or the 2013 IPL controversy that witnessed the arrests of S. Sreesanth, Ajit Chaudharia and Ankeet Chavan, which eventually forced a clean-up of the Board of Control for Cricket in India. The unholy bond between players and bookies is an ill that cannot be wished away, especially in the Twenty20 leagues mushrooming across the cricketing globe. Players are constantly lectured on blowing a whistle on approaches by bookies or other agents of the betting mafia and an immediate ban has always been the reflexive punishment meted out by various cricketing associations. Yet, many have crossed over to the corrupt side and made a mockery of the sport's moral fibre. It is time for the authorities to get more stringent. Else the list of Gautams and Kazis will grow longer.

# At the altar of national security

Human development and ecology have always been given the short shrift in India. But now, they are not even discussed



NISSIM MANNATHUKKAREN

If there is one feature that unites regimes based on right-wing ideology across the world, it is their relentless and near-daily focus on emotive issues like nationalism, religious identity, terrorism, national security, and so on. While the effect of this in terms of heightened hate and violence against "anti-national" minorities is by now well-documented, what is less commented upon is how this discourse of nationalism and national security catastrophically pushes under the carpet the most vital issues of development: health, education and the environment.

The 2019 general elections were the most apt illustration of this. According to the ruling party, Pulwama, Balakot and Pakistan (and not unemployment, farmers' distress, or economic slowdown) were to be the election priorities of the world's largest democracy, and its supporters and large sections of the media duly propagated the same.

Contrast this with the federal elections in Australia and Canada in 2019. According to a survey of 1.4 million voters in each country, the top election issue was climate change, and the second was the economy. The other top issues were inequality, pensions, health care, taxes and employment. Immigration, which could be a potentially divisive issue, and a hot topic for the far right in both the nations, was not in the top five.

Even after the Lok Sabha elections, the discourse on national security has only hardened with the

National Register of Citizens (NRC), Kashmir (note: not the plight of Kashmiris), Article 370, and Pakistan (still) dominating the news space. Otherwise, how can one explain the fact that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s campaign in Haryana, a State with among the highest unemployment rates in the country, and Maharashtra, a State that is facing severe farmers' distress, was on issues like Kashmir and Bharat Ratna for Savarkar?

### The Pakistan obsession

An analysis done by political satirist Ramit Verma showed that of the 202 popular prime-time news debates across four major Hindi channels till October 19, at least 79 were about attacking Pakistan; 66 about attacking the Opposition; 36 about praising the Prime Minister and the ruling party; and 14 about Ram Mandir. There was not a single debate on economy, unemployment, education, health, gender, farmers or the environment. This is simply staggering by any measure.

Therefore, unsurprisingly, the annual Global Hunger Index (GHI) reports come and go without any debate or outrage. But for a ruling establishment obsessed with Pakistan, the latest report should have rung the bells. If in 2015, India was ranked 80th (out of 104 countries) and well ahead of Pakistan, every year since then, the gap has closed, with Pakistan finally overtaking India in 2019, and being eight ranks ahead.

The costs of obsessing with and competing with Pakistan, an economy eight-and-half times smaller than India, are also that you begin to mimic its politics and Human Development Indicators. The GHI 2019 notes that India's child wasting rate is at 20.8%, "the highest wasting rate of any country" for



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

which data is available. Its child stunting rate, at 37.9%, is also categorised as "very high". The government, rather than taking up these issues on a war footing, dismissed the GHI as an inadequate representation of India's data in 2017. True, hunger, and its manifold dimensions, are not a creation of the present regime. But the brazen and wilful negation, or deflection of human development issues by national security is its unique contribution. The contrast within the neighbouring nations is itself telling. The GHI report talks about the "significant advances" in nutrition and "remarkable reduction" in child stunting made by Bangladesh and Nepal. Unsurprisingly, they are 14 and 29 ranks ahead of India respectively.

### Misplaced emphasis on terror

But the national security paradigm will persist, with prime-time television news almost every day warning us of the impending setting up of base by the Islamic State in India. This is not atypical – the U.S. under President Donald Trump is a classic example of scaremongering and blanket travel bans on entire (Muslim) nations to eliminate terror threats.

Such vastly disproportionate response to terrorism has been exposed by research as misplaced.

# The China factor in India's RCEP move

New Delhi seems to be signalling that Beijing's rise in the Indo-Pacific has to be tackled politically and economically



HARSH V. PANT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ASEAN sojourn this year will be remembered for India finally rejecting the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade deal. Apart from the 10 member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the mega deal was to include the bloc's six free trade partners – China, India, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand and Australia. In his speech at the RCEP summit in Bangkok, Mr. Modi argued that while "India has been proactively, constructively and meaningfully engaged in the RCEP negotiations since inception," the draft RCEP agreement did "not fully reflect the basic spirit and the agreed guiding principles of RCEP" even as it did "not address satisfactorily India's outstanding issues and concerns."

The RCEP negotiations were launched in 2012 and, this year, there was a big push to get it finalised. After India's rejection, the remaining 15 members decided to go ahead and underlined their intent to sign a trade deal sometime next year, keeping the door open for India to join at a later date.

At a time of escalating Sino-U.S.

trade tensions, China was particularly keen to see a successful conclusion of the RCEP summit and had been vigorously pushing for that. But that's precisely where the problem for India lay as well. India's demands at the RCEP negotiations included shifting the base year for tariff cuts from 2014 to 2019; avoiding a sudden surge in imports from China by including a large number of items in an auto-trigger mechanism; calling for stricter rules of origin to prevent dumping from China; and a better deal in services. The China factor, therefore, was key to New Delhi's assessment of costs and benefits.

### Large trade deficits

While India runs large trade deficits with at least 11 of the 15 RCEP members, China alone accounts for \$53 billion of India's \$105 billion trade deficit with these. Given China's needs for greater access to Indian market to sustain its manufacturing industries, India was keen to protect its industry and farmers from a surge in Chinese imports.

India's experience with Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) has been underwhelming, with the Niti Aayog suggesting that FTA utilisation, which is in the 5%-25% range, was measly. Domestically, the RCEP generated considerable opposition with major stakeholders coming out against it, be it farmers, dairy industry or the corporate sector. The Opposition



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Congress Party, which joined the RCEP negotiations seven years ago, too decided that it was politically expedient to oppose the pact. Difficulties in the Indian economic landscape further compounded the problems. If global negotiations are a "two level" game, both the levels were facing severe challenges, making this rejection a veritable necessity.

Comprising half of the world population and accounting for nearly 40% of the global commerce and 35% of the GDP, the RCEP would have become the world's largest free trade area after finalisation, with India being the third-biggest economy in it. Without India, however, the RCEP does not look as attractive a trade pact as it had seemed during negotiations. Not surprising, therefore, that there are divisions within the ASEAN on moving ahead without India.

ASEAN has always been keen on

a diversified portfolio of partners so that its member states can leverage their centrality in their dealings with major powers and maintain their strategic autonomy. While China's clout has been growing in the region, ASEAN member states have tried to keep the U.S. engaged in the region as well. But with the Trump administration giving mixed signals about Washington's commitment towards the region, ASEAN has been looking at New Delhi with a renewed sense of anticipation.

The Modi government's proactive outreach to the region in the form of its 'Act East' policy has been well received. Anxious about China's increasingly overweening economic and security presence in the region, ASEAN member states have been keen on a substantive Indian involvement in the region. India's decision to keep away from the RCEP will, hence, certainly cause concerns about its larger game plan vis-a-vis the region. New Delhi's entire Indo-Pacific strategy might be open to question if steps are not taken to restore India's profile in the region. For China, this looks like a win at a time when the Trump administration is pushing Asia into making a choice in its favour by jettisoning Chinese largesse on infrastructure and technology.

### Beijing's dominance

Both geopolitically and geo-economically, China now looks set to

dominate the Indo-Pacific, which may not be good news for the region and India. This is the reason why Japan is now suggesting that it would work towards a deal which includes India. Even as China is pushing for an early conclusion of RCEP among the remaining 15 members, Japanese Trade Minister Hiroshi Kajiyama made it clear that Tokyo "wants to play a leading role toward reaching an early agreement between all 16 countries, including India, with the aim of signing it in 2020."

Economic isolation is not an option for India and so there are reports that New Delhi will be moving towards bilateral trade pacts. India will have to prepare itself more fully to take advantage of such pacts. Domestic reforms will be the need of the hour. This is an age when the whole raison d'etre of economic globalisation is being challenged. India needs a strategy that brings together the economic and political aspects of its strategic thinking. In rejecting the RCEP, New Delhi seems to be signalling that despite the costs, China's rise has to be tackled both politically and economically. How the rest of East and Southeast Asia responds to India's move will determine the future balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

Harsh V. Pant is Professor at King's College London and director of research at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi

## 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.

### Patel and Article 370

In the context of misinformation being spread in the hope that it will pass for gospel truth, Karan Thapar's article brings out some illuminating facts behind the promulgation of Article 370 and the referral of the Kashmir issue to the United Nations ("Unwriting history, creating myths," Nov. 8). Authentic historians would vouch for the fact that the decision on Article 370 was taken with the full concurrence of Sardar Patel. Of particular note is the admission by Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the founder of Jana Sangh, that he was party to the move to refer the issue to the UN. Prime Minister

Narendra Modi has said that "whole of Kashmir" would have been "ours" had Patel instead of Jawaharlal Nehru been at the helm. The fact is that Patel had for long been reconciled to relinquishing claims on Kashmir in exchange of Hyderabad and Junagadh. Yet another popular misconception is that Nehru erred in calling a halt to the military operations in 1948 when he should have gone the whole hog and cleared the entire Kashmir. The truth is that liberating the whole of Kashmir was never going to easy even for a superior army. And, a fledgling nation struggling to get up on its feet after the trauma of Partition did not have the

luxury of squandering its meagre resources on such an operation.

R. RAVICHANDRAN,  
Chennai

■ Patel might not have opposed Article 370, but it is facile to propose that he played a key role in its formulation. A reading of excerpts from the two books quoted by the author indicates that Patel knew Nehru's mind on the issue and saw no reason to oppose it because of his desire to have a good working relationship with the latter. The question we should consider asking is whether Patel would have treated the introduction of Article 370 as a tactical mistake had he lived longer, because leaders

review major decisions in the light of new developments. Considering that he was a unifier and integrator, it is safe to presume that he would have realised the paradox of a provision that gave autonomy to the people of a Princely State and prevented their emotional integration with India. It is futile to judge historical figures for moves they made in the national interest. But, it is future rulers who have to deal with the consequences of their actions.

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,  
Thiruvananthapuram

### Opting out of RCEP

The government has made the right decision by opting out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic

Partnership (RCEP), at least for the time being. Agriculture provides employment to almost two-thirds of its population and there were genuine concerns which farmers and the dairy sector raised against such a partnership. Most of them are small and marginal farmers practising subsistence agriculture who, rather than benefiting from exchange of technology, would have been completely devastated. Our star performer, the dairy sector, would also have suffered huge losses. India must continue to put its demands forward, including on stricter point-of-origin rules, to avoid dumping. In the meantime, the government must also promote the

agriculture and manufacturing sectors to help them face future challenges from such agreements.

DIVYA SHARMA,  
Dehradun, Uttarakhand

### A breather

The Kartarpur corridor's opening comes at a juncture when other peace initiatives like the Samjhauta Express and Thar Express have become victims of geopolitical animosity. At a time when people-to-people ties are at their lowest ebb, the move comes as a breather.

ABHISHEK SAROHA,  
Sonapat, Haryana



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