





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



Ex-Brazilian President Lula likely to be freed

India chosen to



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following court ruling page 14

host the 2023 men's hockey World Cup page 20



remains 'very poor'

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

CITY ▶ PAGE 4

7 more shelter home girls reunite with families

NEW DELH 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

SC verdict on Ayodhya today

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

A Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi will on Saturday deliver its judgment in the crossappeals 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 Lalla, 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 tran-



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

slated 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-

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.

hoomi-Ayodhya property as

a "small piece of land where

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

CJI meets U.P. Chief Secretary, police chief

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

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

Govt. ends SPG protection for Sonia, Rahul & Priyanka

They did not cooperate with security personnel, says official

VIJAITA SINGH

The government has decided to withdraw the Special Protection Group (SPG) cover for Congress president So-

nia Gandhi and her children - Member of Parliament Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra – and replace it with the 'Z plus' security cover of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

The SPG, an elite force comprising 3,000 personnel, will now provide security only to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

A senior government official said following a security review, it was found that the Gandhi family did not cooperate with and was impeding the smooth functioning of the SPG.

From 2015 onwards, Mr.



On the job: CRPF personnel at the 10 Janpath residence of Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on Friday. • SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Gandhi, currently MP from Wayanad, did not use SPGapproved bulletproof vehicles on 1,892 occasions while travelling in Delhi, accounting for a violation a day, the official said.

"From 2005-2014, he travelled in non-bullet resistant vehicles during 18 visits and on 247 occasions, he violated the rules to travel outside Delhi," the official said. The official said he "travelled on the roof of the vehicle on a few occasions in violation of the Motor Vehicles Act and security advice."

CONTINUED ON ▶ PAGE 12

Onions to be imported from Dubai, Egypt

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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

disqualified Seventeen 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

Security beefed up at houses of judges

STAFF REPORTER

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

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

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

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 In-

dian companies. The compa-

ny 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

"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

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-ahalf 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 BIP and Mr. Fadnavis for denying the agreement to share the top post, and had said no talks were possible until the BJP agrees

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 the accused is not arrested within the period, Mr. Sharma quoted the BCI chairman

courts across the country if

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



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

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

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



their clients from Monday as Saturday is a holiday. Earlier in the day, the Su-

preme 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

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



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.

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.

Despite victories of DMK

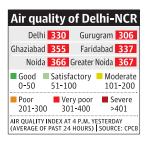
The actor, who participated in the unveiling of his mentor K. Balachander's bust at the office of Raj Kamal Films International, said that the whole controversy involving Thiruvalluvar was rather "silly"

IN BRIEF

GURUGRAM

Tender floated for Delhi-**Gurugram-SNB RRTS**

The first tender for civil construction of Delhi-Gurugram-SNB (Shahiahanpur-Neemrana-Behror Urban Complex) Regional Rapid Transit System corridor has been floated. The NCRTChas 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 — Udvog Vihar. Sector 17 and Raiiv 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.



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 cur-

rent 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 essenequipment. department has sent numerous demands to the hospiprocurement section and several meetings have been held with the medical director apprising the officials about the critical situation," 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.

JNU appeals to students to end strike

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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 showcause 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.

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

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 proBattle fought by AAP behind Centre's move: CM

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 illegalities may be taken by the Mun-Ghaziabad in coordination with the jurisdictional SDM and the State PCB."

The green panel has also sought a compliance report from authorities within one

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

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 3rd Battalion who were with undertrails, 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

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 Shahdara 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 'dharna' 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

RAW officer arrested for molesting teenager

She alleged he harassed her for 2 years

SAURABH TRIVEDI

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

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

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

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

NEW DELHI

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

Dance: "Bhakti Madhuram" a Bharatanatyam performance will be presented by Rashmi Raut Jaiswal at Triveni Auditorium. Triveni Kala Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, 6:15

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 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 cityeditordelhi@thehindu.co.in)





Protesters near the India gate on Friday.

• SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Youth raise voice against pollution

STAFF REPORTER

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 'satisfacThe 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 governmentrun 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

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 II 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 oddeven 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.

'Demonetisation wrecked lives of poor, farmers, traders'

Delhi Cong., IYC hold protest against Modi government's move

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The Delhi Congress, Indian Youth Congress and the National Students' Union of India on Friday conducted protests across the city on the third anniversary of demonetisation to highlight how the decision of implementation of the scheme taken by the Modi government "wrecked the lives of the poor, farmers, shopkeepers and traders".

The Indian Youth Congress organised its protest outside the RBI headquarters, while the NSUI held its protest at Connaught Place.

Delhi Congress chief Subhash Chopra, while addressing a 'Halla Bol' rally at Sadar Bazar, said that people will always remember demonetisation for creating economic ruin and unemployment in the country. "Demonetisation was the biggest scam in the world and its benefits were derived only by the rich friends of the Prime Minister. Due to the policy, the economy of the country got ruined and it has created the worst-ever unemployment rate as a consequence," Mr. Chopra said.

Mr. Chopra said that the Prime Minister had claimed

that demonetisation will result in the eradication of black money and the end of terrorism, but that both of his claims proved to be wrong.

Delhi Congress spokesperson Mukesh Sharma said that as a consequence of demonetisation, 70% business in the main markets of Delhi have come to a standstill.

"The protest is to seek an apology from the Modi government for implementing demonetisation scheme which was a self-inflicted wound on the Indian economy," Indian Youth Congress president Srinivas B.V. said.

Dip in fake currency seizures in Delhi since note ban

Police say they have intensified crackdown on channels used for smuggling

SAURABH TRIVEDI

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

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 cashstrapped 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

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

"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 re-

'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 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.

Farmers who had resite funds for the payment to frained from burning paddy straw despite the financial 900 FIRs filed problems they were facing needed to be given incentives and encouraged, Capt. Amarinder said, asking the Agriculture and Finance Departments to take imme-

providing compensation to such farmers. He also asked the Finance Department to ensure requi-

diate steps to ensure the im-

plementation of the

Supreme Court orders on

Capt. Amarinder asked the police department to identi-

fy 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, mostly in Muktsar and Bathinda, with some cases reported in Sangrur.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered the governments of Puniab, Harvana and Uttar Pradesh to give an incentive of ₹100 per quintal within seven days to small and marginal farmers who have not burnt crop stubble. The burning of crop residue in the three States is stated to be responsible for 44% of the air pollution in the Delhi-NCR.

Centre slashing funds: Gehlot

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

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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 Centralsponsored 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 agricultudistress 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

Two persons on Friday made an attempt to allegedly set afire Congress MLA Manoj Rawat in Rudraprayag district, police

DG (Law and Order) Ashok Kumar said the incident occurred in Agastyamuni 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 'Allow women to perform reunite with their families kirtan at Golden Temple'

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

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.

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 men," 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."

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

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 ₹2,600crore 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 direction," 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

DELHI CTimings

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 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

27°C Fall in minimum temperature expeted over the

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

area. A sunny and comfortable

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THEMOHINDU

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 the Assembly, 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. • РТІ

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 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

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

The Congress on Friday alleged that attempts are being made to put pressure on partv 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."

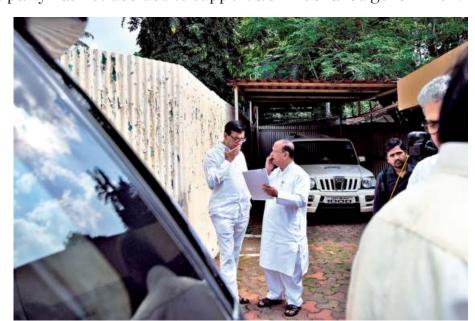
He said the Congress, which won 44 seats in the October 21 Assembly polls, has not taken any decision to support a Sena-led government. "The mandate is for the BJP-Shiv Sena to form government and they should

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

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

"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 op-

position party. He asked Congress and NCP leaders to produce proof that the BJP was trying to engage in horsetrading, or tender an apology. "The Congress has in-

met to discuss the prevailing

political situation. Some par-

ty MLAs were also present at

the meeting at the residence

of Leader of Opposition in

the outgoing Assembly Vijay

The BJP, which emerged

Wadettiwar.

sulted its own MLAs by falsely claiming the BIP 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 go-

vernment 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

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 govern-

ment together or separately

till now. The two parties are

bickering over sharing chief

MLAs to switch sides. ministerial post since October 24, when the poll results

to poaching attempts).

Either they should provide

proof of our so-called at-

tempts to engineer defec-

tions or tender apology for

insulting their own MLAs.

Those making such claims

should provide the call re-

cords of the BJP leaders

trying to poach their

MLAs," the Finance Minis-

Earlier in the day, Con-

gress leader Vijay Wadetti-

war alleged that sums of

"₹25 crore to ₹50 crore"

were being offered to

ter said.

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

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 Koshyari is not inviting the BJP, which won 105

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 "clearcut 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 clearcut 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 vou (BIP 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

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 Igatpuri MLA Hiraman Khoskar was offered inducements to switch sides.

Cong.: Modi govt.'s policies have halted growth

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE

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 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

"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 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

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-

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,

nik was hearing a petition another Division Bench filed by Rekha Mandavak upheld reservation for Ma-In what comes as a relief to and others who are class I, II rathas in the State but guashed the 16% guota 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.



George Schaller award for wildlife biologist

Wildlife biologist K. Ullas Karanth, Director, Centre for Wildlife Studies, Bengaluru was awarded the George Schaller Lifetime Award in Wildlife Conservation Science for his contribution to the field of conservation. He is the first recipient of the award instituted by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). New York.

Polavaram works: Centre reimburses ₹1,850 crore

The Union Finance Ministry has reimbursed ₹1,850 crore towards head works taken up by the erstwhile Chandrababu Naidu government at the Polavaram dam site, to the Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy government. The amount would be transferred on Monday or Tuesday.

CPI(M) not to intervene in arrest of youths

Report of Kozhikode district leadership has weighed against the youths; Kerala govt. to wait and watch

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The CPI(M) Kerala secretariat that met here on Friday is understood to have decided against directly intervening in the arrest of two party activists, Alan Suhaib and Thaha Fazal, from Kozhikode and imposition of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) against them.

The secretariat is understood to have weighed the reports furnished by the Kozhikode district leadership against the two party activists before deciding not to

The Kozhikode district committee is learnt to have apprised the secretariat of the gravity of the situation and hence decided to wait till the UAPA authority took a call on the case.

The State government too would not take the plunge in the face of the party decision. It would adopt a wait



Deep hideout: The place inside the Attappady forest, where the Maoists had set up camp. ■ к.к. мизтаған

and watch approach and be guarded to avoid a political discomfiture.

The secretariat, later in a statement, accused the right wing as well as the extreme left wing forces of trying to

destabilise the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in the name of the issues that had surfaced on imposing UAPA on the arrested youth.

The Maoists had all along

Maoists were killed in encounter: govt. tells HC

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The Maoists were killed in a gunbattle with the police at the Agali forests in Attappady and not in a fake encounter, the Kerala government told the Kerala High Court on Friday.

The State submitted that the Maoists used firearms, which they obtained from Odisha, while engaging Thunderbolt, the special squad formed for fighting

that the Maoists fired at the police first, and denied that the activists were killed in a

tried to dislodge the Left Front governments. It had been part of a larger alliance forged by the Trinamool Congress to oust the Left Front government in West

fake encounter. The case has been posted for November 12. The Maoists, who are

the armed militants.

a petition filed by the

investigation into the

the submission.

activists seeking a special

killings that the State made

The State maintained

relatives of the slain

It was while considering

adopting a strident stance against the Left and the CPI (M), could not be deemed as a Communist party, but is a terrorist organisation, the statement said.

would increase

through setting up of Kadapa

Steel Plant, expansion pro-

jects in Visakhapatnam and

by setting up petro complex

The steel plant issue was in-

corporated in the A.P. Reor-

ganisation Act, 2014, with

the Centre promising to ex-

plore the feasibility of esta-

been a contentious issue bet-

ween the State and the Cen-

tral governments. The pre-

vious government had

accused the latter of not ho-

nouring the commitment

made in the A.P. Reorganisa-

The steel plant had since

at Kakinada, he said.

Contentious issue

blishing it.

tion Act, 2014.

'No further steps on TSRTC privatisation'

HC passes interim order on PIL plea

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The Telangana High Court on Friday passed an interim order directing the State government not to take any steps till Monday on its decision to privatise 5,100 permits of TSRTC.

After hearing a PIL petition challenging the move to privatise TSRTC, the HC instructed Advocate General B.S. Prasad to present a copy of the State Cabinet's decision on the matter.

A Division Bench, comprising Chief Justice Raghvendra Singh Chauhan and Justice A. Abhishek Reddy, which heard the PIL filed by Professor P.L. Vishweshwar Rao of the Telangana Democratic Front, posted the plea for Monday. When petitioner's counsel Chikkudu Prabhakar rose to present his arguments, the AG said the petitioner, being a single individual, could not challenge the State Cabinet's decision. "I have Supreme Court judgments to substantiate this," the AG said.

When the CJ asked Mr. Prabhakar if he had a copy of the Cabinet decision, Mr. Prabhakar said it had not been made public. Observing that it could be available with Mr. Prasad, the CJ asked him to furnish a copy.

"It is a privileged proceeding," Mr. Prasad said, observing that he could not Police deny nod for 'Chalo Tank Bund' protest

The police on Friday denied permission to the Telangana State Road Transport Corporation employees unions to organise a 'Chalo Tank Bund' protest. The RTC employees, who have been on strike since October 5 in support of merger of the RTC with the government, recruitment to various posts, among others, sought to organise the protest on Saturday. PTI

submit it to the court. "There is nothing privileged. Cabinet decision is not a secret document," Justice Chauhan said. With the AG expressing doubts if the State Cabinet's decision could be assailed by a citizen, he explained the matter was between the petitioner and the government.

Once the matter was taken up for hearing, the issue would be between the court and the government. "Nothing can prevent the court from perusing a document to decide its legality," Justice Chauhan observed.

As the AG said he had to take instructions on producing the Cabinet decision copy "since it was in State's possession", the bench said the government was dutybound to present the deci-

File proper plea, SC tells disqualified MLAs

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

Following an urgent mention from 17 disqualified MLAs from Karnataka on Friday before the Supreme Court for deferment of the December 5 Assembly byelections, the court asked them to file a proper application.

The Election Commission had earlier deferred the byelections when the petitions filed by the legislators were sub-judice.

At the hearings, the Karnataka unit of the Congress argued it was the Speaker's prerogative to decide on the

The MLAs argued that the Speaker had delayed deci-

Cochin airport

The Air Customs Intelli-

gence Unit at the Cochin

International Airport has taken into custody six air

guns that were brought al-

legedly without declara-

The air guns in a dis-

mantled state were seized

from a Malappuram resi-

dent on his arrival from

Dubai. In keeping with the conditions governing the

seizure of items of such na-

ture, the air guns have

been sent to the Forensic

Science Laboratory in Thi-

ruvananthapuram to ascer-

tain the category to which

they belong at the passen-

Though air guns of cer-

tain categories are permis-

sible with necessary decla-

rations, six guns are not

permitted under any cir-

cumstance, said Customs

ger's own expense.

+ Six air guns

seized at

STAFF REPORTER

sion on their resignation and went on to disqualify

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the current Speaker V.H. Kageri, argued that it was the right of an MLA to resign. He argued that it was "not defection if you give up membership of a political party for reasons of conscience, then you resign and go back to face the public mandate... This is recognition of the MLAs right

Senior advocate C.A. Sundaram, for former Congress MLA D. Sudhakar, had submitted that the authority of the Speaker, faced with the resignation of an MLA, was

Dangerous drive

Pradhan assures A.P. of iron ore linkage

NMDC will supply raw material for the proposed Kadapa steel plant

STAFF REPORTER VIJAYAWADA

Union Minister for Petroleum and Steel Dharmendra Pradhan has assured the Andhra Pradesh government of iron ore linkage for the proposed steel plant in Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's home district of Kadapa.

The State government and mining major National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) will soon sign an MoU for the supply of iron ore, a critical raw material, for the proposed Kadapa steel plant.

The Union Minister held a meeting with the Chief Minister at the Secretariat on Friday and discussed a host



Taking stock: Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan with A.P. Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in Vijayawada.

of issues, including the critical iron ore linkage for the steel plant.

Many big players in the petroleum sector were showing interest in investing in Andhra Pradesh, and in

the coming five years there would be ₹2 lakh crore investments coming into the State in petrol, natural gas and steel sectors, Mr. Prad-

The quantum of invest-

Fulfil promise on women's quota, says Brinda Karat

'BJP doing nothing on it despite enjoying majority'

STAFF REPORTER

Instances of crime against women have increased steeply in the last two years, CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Brinda Karat has said.

"This apart, lakhs of women have lost their livelihood as the MGNREGS has come to a standstill. The Modi government at the Centre is, however, in the denial mode," Ms. Brinda Karat said while addressing the media here on Friday.

The BJP-led NDA government's rule led to deterioration in the status of women on several fronts, she said.

"The Central government hasn't released the statistics pertaining to crimes against women for the last two years. As many as 38,000 cases have been reported. Crimes against children and minor girls are a matter of



Seeking action: CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Brinda Karat addressing the media in Vijayawada on Friday. • v. RAJU

concern," Ms. Brinda Karat

Referring to the loss of livelihood for women, she said the government, instead of giving some guarantees or ensuring relief to the workers, was making vague statements.

On the Women's Reservation Bill, she said the government refused to pass it. In the run-up to the 2014 elections, this was the major promise to women. Despite the huge majority in the Lok Sabha, the BJP didn't do anything on the issue. On the other hand, it passed the Triple Talaq Bill.

The RSS and the BJP are not interested in women's reservation as it is against their ideology," she said.

The 9 p.m.to 6 a.m. travel

ban adds 100 km to journeys

undertaken by the people of

Bathery taluk of Wayanad to

places such as Gundalpet

and Mysuru. More than

2,000 labourers from Gun-

dalpet, Nanjangud, and Kol-

legal work in the plantation

and construction sectors in

Wayanad, Kozhikode, and

Malappuram districts of Ker-

The NH-766 is also an im-

portant route for the tran-

sportation of vegetables,

grain and construction mate-

rials between the two States.

Officials fume after WhatsApp blocks group

has been witnessing heavy rain in recent times. • K. MURALI KUMAR

The name 'Child Sex Ratio Decline' rings alarm bells at messaging platform

TANU KULKARNI

A WhatsApp group initiated by an official with the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) has run afoul with the instant messaging platform, which reportedly took objection to the group name and blocked it. What's worse, officials from the Department of Primary and Secondary Education, who were added to the group, found their numbers were blocked by WhatsApp.

The name of the group? 'Child Sex Ratio Decline'.

While officials are not clear why such stringent action was taken, they believe the use of the words 'child' and 'sex' may have triggered WhatsApp's alarm. The Department of Women and



Child Development (DWCD),

Dakshina Kannada, has ap-

proached the cybercrime

police station in Mangaluru,

where the police filed a non-

cognisable offence report

and have reached out to the

An official of the Educa-

tion Department, who was

platform.

part of the group, said all its members were part of a workshop titled 'Gender sensitisation and legal awareness' that was conducted by the DWCD along with other departments. This was part of the Union government's flagship 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' programme.

"After the workshop, we wanted to share the best practices carried out in the district, and discuss the medical and social perspectives pertaining to the issue. We also wanted to stay in touch and follow up on this. So a WhatsApp group was created in October. We were surprised when we learnt that our numbers had been blocked," said a source. The source said at least 18 officials were blocked.

Cause for concern: Vehicles plying in the misty Nandi Infrastructure Corridor Enterprises Road in Bengaluru on Friday. Karnataka

One official said he was finding it difficult to coordinate assignments at work as he could no longer use the messaging platform.

Child Sex Ratio is the number of females per thousand males in the 0 to 6 age group and is one of the most important child welfare indi-

'It is a survival route for the people of Wayanad, which lacks rail and connectivity'

Lift travel curbs on NH-766, says Kerala

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala Assembly on Friday passed a resolution demanding the Union government to lift the travel restrictions on National Highway-766 linking Kerala and Karnataka and safeguard the right of the people of north Kerala to move free-

The resolution, moved by Transport Minister A.K. Saseendran, pointed out that night travel on this main artery passing through the Bandipur National Park had been banned since 2009 in the name of protecting wil-

"Imposing regulations the likes of which are absent in any of the approximately 50 tiger reserves in the country is anti-people and discrimi-



the Bandipur National Park, had been banned since 2009.

natory," the resolution said. tee would be appointed to The Union Minister of Enexamine the concerns raised vironment and Forests had by Kerala. However, the papromised Chief Minister Pinnel was yet to materialise, it arayi Vijayan that a commit-

Wayanad is a district which sits atop four passes, the re-

solution pointed out. "The NH 766 is a survival route for the people of Wayanad, which lacks rail and

connectivity and water routes," the resolution said.

THE HINDU DELHI SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2019

IN BRIEF

RBI moots dropping NEFT transaction charges

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

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-

(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

all mortality situation in the
country, better and to map

| States | S

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.

Between

The Maternal

Mortality Rate

life & death

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

erage 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.

in institutional deliveries and

focused approach towards

aspirational districts and in-

ter-sectoral action to reach

the most marginalised and

vulnerable mothers," he

Focus on quality and cov-

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.

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

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 sixdecade-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."

able 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.

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.

| 20.0, | | | | | | | |
|--------------|------|------|------|--------------------|------|------|------|
| 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

Ahmedabad.... 132 160 .38 .129 ...91 Bengaluru6 .30 .51 .234 - Chennai7 .25 .40 .342 - By derabad6 .46 .36 .169 .129 Kolkata17 .19 .22 .178 .164 Lucknow29 .38 .41 .389 ... - Mumbai8 .46 .1127

Visakhapatnam .28 .83 .49 .156 .127

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Talcher, Odisha recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 412 indicating a severe

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 prematur death in people with heart or lung disease

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.





AIRPORT DIRECTOR



Thumbs down

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

atings agency Moody's has reacted predictably to the turbulence in the economy by revising the Loutlook 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

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

n 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 wicketkeeper 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 Chandila 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

f there is one feature that unites regimes based on right-wing Lideology 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 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



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.

Between 1970 and 2007, the chances of being killed by a terrorist in the U.S. were 1 in 3.5 million (that is including on 9/11). During the 2008-2015 period, the risk of being killed by a foreign-born terrorist on U.S. soil was one in 104 million. Compare this with the chances of dying from choking on food: 1 in 4,404, or in a car accident, 1 in 272.

Against the conventional wisdom that it is because of the huge amount of resources spent on counterterrorism that the risk is so minimal, scholars John Mueller and Mark Stewart argued earlier in this decade that cumbersome security protocols in airports had led to more people travelling by road, leading to around 500 extra road fatalities every year. They also contended that if the money spent on saving people from terrorism attacks had been diverted to countering other dangers with extremely high risks, that could have "saved 1,000 times more lives."

Despite the severe challenges that India faces in terms of terrorism, the numbers have to be similarly seen with perspective. In 2018, terrorism/militancy killed 400 civilians and security personnel. Compare this to the fact that 1,02,677 children (under five) died from easily preventable diarrhoeal diseases in 2017, or that 8,75,659 children (under five) were killed by communicable, neonatal and nutritional diseases. Or consider that while the number of terrorism/militancy-related have come down substantially to around 500 from 2011 onwards, the burden of deaths from diseases like cardiovascular ones has drastically increased from about 13 lakh in 1990 to 26.32 lakh in 2017.

An IndiaSpend report based on a global study showed that Indians work for just six-and-a-half years at peak productivity. This compared poorly to the corresponding figures for the Chinese and the Brazilians - 20 hours and 16 hours. The report also said that India has the unhealthiest work force in South Asia, and its human capital rank was 158th out of 195 countries (with only a marginal improvement from 162 in 1990). India's public spending on health and education has been abysmal (despite superficial programmes with meagre actual funding ke Ayushman Bharat and Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao), the prime cause for its poor human capital. While the national security paradigm will talk about economics in terms of GDP or ease of doing business, it curiously refuses to see the link between human capital and economproductivity.

The current dystopian visions emanating from New Delhi's unprecedented climate emergency are the singular example of the apathy fostered, ironically, by the ruling party's brute, hyper-nationalist parliamentary majority. This is when latest studies indicate that life expectancy in North India will likely reduce by seven years because of air pollution. Even if prime-time nationalist television is forced to come out of its perpetual "state of high alert" on terror and acknowledge "mundane" issues like air pollution, it will be back to normal soon.

Human development and ecology have always been given the short shrift in India. But what has changed under the nationalist conjuncture is that these issues are not even talked about. A nation that is in a state of suspended animation looking out for both external and internal enemies cannot afford to talk about the state of its citizens.

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The China factor in India's RCEP move

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



HARSH V. PANT

rime Minister Narendra Modi's ASEAN sojourn this year will be remembered for India ililany rejecting the Regional Com prehensive 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 con-

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 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



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 dominanceBoth 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.

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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,

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

Thiruvananthapuram

for the time being. Agriculture provides employment to almost twothirds 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

Partnership (RCEP), at least

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

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,
SERDENT HOWERD

CM YK

Under forest cover

Are the armed Maoists operating in the Western Ghats marked for death by the commando unit of the Kerala police? **Abdul Latheef Naha**, **E.M. Manoj** and **Mini Muringatheri** piece together information on the recent encounter killings in the Attappady forest area

The concertina wire on the unusually high perimeter wall of the Agali Police Station at Attappady in Palakkad district is the first tell-tale sign of unrest in this predominantly tribal region nestled below the Nilgiri Hills in the Western Ghats in Kerala. Armed commandos scour the locality from watchtowers. Police officers clad in battle fatigues and brandishing automatic assault rifles scan visitors with wary eyes.

Agali is one of the dozen-odd high-security police stations in Kerala fortified against a potential attack from Maoists. The fear of a retaliatory strike on the station is palpable following the controversial "encounter killing" of four Maoists, including a woman, by police commandos in the nearby Mele Manjikkandi forests on October 28.

Further to the north of the State is what the police call the 'tri-junction', a forested expanse linking Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The broad swathe of dense jungle spans the Muthanga forest reserve in Kerala and the adjacent Bandipur and Mudumalai wildlife sanctuaries in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, respectively. The forests are home to many tribal sects including the particularly vulnerable Kattunayakkan and Cholanayakkan groups that have a storied history of resistance to colonial masters

Since the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government took power in 2016, a deadly cat and mouse game between the elite Thunderbolt commandos of the Kerala police and the elusive foot soldiers of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army of the proscribed Communist Party of India (Maoist) has played out in the dense forests with lethal consequences. So far, the commandos have killed seven Maoists in three separate operations over three years without casualties or injuries to those on the side of law enforcement. The tense stand-off has transformed the hilly locality into a veritable guerrilla war zone.

Conflicting claims

In 2016, the police gunned down Maoist leaders Kuppuswamy Devaraj and Ajitha in the Nilambur forests of Malappuram district. In March 2019, they shot dead C.P. Jaleel near a forest resort in Vythiri in Wayanad district. Last month, a Thunderbolt team killed Maoist cadres Manivasakam, Karthi, Arvind alias Suresh, and Rema in "retaliatory fire"

The Pinarayi Vijayan government said the "encounter killings" were an "act of self-defence". However, civil society in Kerala appeared revolted by the latest paroxysm of bloodshed in the law enforcement's long-running campaign to prevent operational space for armed Maoist rebels in the State's vast forests and tribal settlements.

Last Friday, a fact-finding team of the Communist Party of India (CPI), a principal partner in the ruling LDF coalition, visited the "encounter spot". CPI State Assistant Secretary K. Prakash Babu seemed unconvinced by the official version of the encounter. Legislators E.K. Vijayan and Muhammed Muhassin and CPI district secretary, Palakkad, K.P. Suresh Raj, conducted the public enquiry. Last Tuesday, the CPI submitted its report to the Chief Minister in his chamber at the Kerala Legislative Assembly. Later, outside the Assembly gates, Prakash claimed the commandos had killed the rebels in cold blood.

According to the report of the CPI, the arbitrary police action caught the Maoists off guard. They were eating when they died in a hail of bullets. Local tribal leaders Shivani and Murugan were purportedly negotiating the surrender of the rebels with a senior officer when death came unexpectedly to the Maoists in the form of the commandos.

Prakash said Manivasakam was ailing from severe diabetic complications. Forensic doctors found his legs broken. The commandos seemed to have shot him from close range. The woman Maoist was in no condition to fight as she had given birth to a child recently, he said. "It is a cruel homicide by the police meant to force the Left government on the defensive," Prakash later told *The Hindu*. He rubbished the police claim that the commandos had fired in self-defence.

But the Chief Minister was in no doubt that the Maoists had fired upon a police jungle patrol and the commandos had killed them in retaliatory fire. The police had seized an array of weapons, including an AK-47 assault rifle, few .303 bolt action rifles, 12 gauge shotguns and country-made muzzle-loading rifles from the "rebel camp".

While terming the loss of life as unfortunate, Vijayan said it was fallacious to portray armed Maoists, intent on toppling the democratic State, as "benign angels and harmless lambs". The official narrative of a serious Maoist threat found substantiation in the combat training videos released by the police, which featured some rebels who broke out of their encirclement and fled.



The 'encounter' site in Attappady in Palakkad district of Kerala, where four Maoists were killed by the police. (Below): The presence of cooked food had been cited to support the theory that the police had gunned down the rebels while they were eating. • K. K. MUSTAFAH



The government has ordered a magisterial inquiry into the killings. But similar investigations into the encounter killings in Nilambur and Vythiri in Wayanad have revealed little. The killings took place in lonely spots in rugged forest terrain far away from human habitation, making it challenging to investigate conflicting claims. *The Hindu* could not independently validate the statement that the Maoists in Attappady were poised to surrender when the commandos shot them.

Fear in Attappady

Fear seemed to have gripped Attappady after the killings. Tribals were afraid to speak to outsiders. They seemed to be scared of both the Maoists and the police. "We did not see any Maoist. We did not even hear the gunshots," said Chellan and Vijayalakshmi, an Adivasi couple living in a thatched hutment close to the spot where the police killed the Maoists. The tribal leaders who tried to broker amnesty for the Maoists with a senior police officer have also turned silent after the killings.

"It's a fake encounter. Only a judicial investigation can expose it," said CPI (ML) Red Flag general secretary M.S. Jayakumar after visiting the area. C.P. John, general secretary of the Communist Marxist Party, echoed a similar sentiment after a fact-finding visit to the remote locality.

Tribal leader Eswari Resan, former block panchayat president of Attappady, was vocal in her resentment of the police. "The tribespeople have had no issues with the Maoists. The Maoists have never attempted to turn the Adivasis of Attappady against the government. But the police action has brought fear to the hamlets in Attappady," she said. The armed rebels often sought rice and other meagre rations from forest-dwelling tribes, she added.

The ongoing anti-Maoist operations have disrupted the life of forest dwellers. The tribal people are fearful of grazing their cattle on the grassy knolls of the Western Ghats or venturing deep into the undergrowth to harvest forest produce. They fear they might get caught in a sudden crossfire between the police and armed Maoists.

In a court filing in the District and Sessions Court, Palakkad, District Police Chief G. Siva Vikram said the Maoists were killed in retaliatory fire by commandos in two separate encounters on October 28 and 29. "It was a risky action by the commandos. The Maoists engaged them while they were patrolling the Gottiyarkandy, Mele Manjikkandi, and Mele Abannoor areas," he told The Hindu. The 14-member Thunderbolt commando team that gunned down the Maoists had a definite edge over the ultras not only in training but in equipment as well. Vikram said the .303 rifles recovered from the Maoist tent were reported stolen from a police station in Odisha. The police were tracing the provenance of the AK-47 and other weapons. The police had complied with the 16-point guidelines set by the Supreme Court in the event of an encounter death, Vikram said. The court had accepted the police report and rejected at guments to the contrary, he added.

Pappan, a local whom the police had cited as a witness in their inquest report, said during the inquest formalities on October 29, "We were forced to lie down for over an hour when the firing took place. After the firing was over, the body of Manivasakam was recovered from behind a bamboo bush." According to him, the body of the three Maoists killed on October 28 had begun to decompose when he saw them. "In the forest, decomposition takes place very fast," Pappan said.

The Maoists had camped at a vantage point that afforded them a good view of the forest. The police had found cooked rice and sprouted green gram in the tent along with raw and cooked bush meat. The presence of cooked food had been cited to give some credence to the theory that the police had gunned down the rebels while they were eating in peace.

Outside the morgue

Sitting under a tree on the sprawling Thrissur Medical College campus, Meenamma sobbed inconsolably on October 30. She kept insisting that her son, Karthi, killed in Attappady, was no "Maoist". Inside the hospital morgue, Karthi's body lay on the autopsy table.

The police had brought the bodies of the four rebels to the hospital for a forensic post-mortem examination. They had thrown a security blanket over the morgue area fearing Maoist retaliation or disruption of the legal process by the supporters of the proscribed organisation.

Meenamma and her elder son Murugeshan had come to receive Karthi's body. The family hails from Pudukottai in Tamil Nadu. Meenamma said Karthi had left home in 2014 and had rarely been in touch with his family. She said she could not reconcile with the police version that her son had turned an armed rebel and died in a gun battle with commandos. She pleaded with the police to let them see her son's body. Murugeshan, a member of the CPI(M), said he could not believe his brother had embraced the Maoist cause. Karthi was apolitical in his student days, he said.

Lakshmi, Manivasakam's sister, was also on the campus with her husband. The police did not allow anybody to access the morgue or see the bodies. Manivasakam, a post-graduate in English literature, had joined the Maoist movement in early 2000 after organising farmers under the communist banner in Salem in the late 1990s, the police said.

The police allowed the relatives to inspect the bodies of the slain Maoists only after Manivasakam's wife procured a favourable order from the High Court in Chennai. The relatives said the bodies were so disfigured and decomposed that even they found it difficult to identify them. Murugeshan said the sight of the disfigured corpses had terrified him. Karthi's face was beyond recognition, he said. He could not state for sure if it was his brother.

On October 31, Manjunath, a farmworker from Chikmagalur in Karnataka, arrived to identify the body of Suresh, another slain Maoist. "The man wept uncontrollably and fell at the feet of everybody standing inside the mortuary and lamented loudly in Kannada," an eyewitness said. Manjunath said his brother Suresh, the youngest of five siblings, was a graduate in political science and had left home in 1999. He never returned.

It was a risky action by the commandos. The Maoists engaged them while they were patrolling the Gottiyarkandy, Mele Manjikkandi, and Mele Abannoor areas.

G. SIVA VIKRAM District Police Chief, Palakkad



Another family also turned up claiming that the body resembling that of Karthi was their relative. But they said they could not make a definite identification. It appeared that only the relatives of Manivasakam were positive about the identity of their family member. Lakshmi, who identified the body, said it was a gruesome sight. "They had scooped out the eyes of my brother," she said. "Both legs were fractured. There were wounds

all over his body."

So far nobody has turned up to claim the body of Rema. An unconfirmed version said she was with a six-month-old baby when the gun battle occurred. Forensic doctors found undigested food in her stomach. They recovered five bullets from her body. They reportedly concluded that the Maoists, except for Manivasakam, were shot from behind.

Jaleel's killing and after

Meanwhile, several numan rights activists and relatives of the slain have moved the court to preserve the bodies for another post-mortem. Not far from Palakkad, the verdant hilly district of Wayanad represented by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Parliament has been a hotbed of Maoist activity since the 1960s. Maoists had famously attacked the Pulpally police station in 1969. The anti-Maoist action led to the extrajudicial killing of A. Varghese, a Naxalite leader, in 1970. Wayanad witnessed a resurgence of covert Maoist activity in 2013. The armed rebels frequented tribal hamlets, camped in the forests and disseminated propaganda material in urban localities.

"The Maoists are very persuasive. Many among them talk to us in Malayalam, says Sankaran (name changed)," a tribal youth in Sugandhagiri, Wayanad. "They explain issues and suggest possible measures to be adopted. When they visit our colony at odd hours, they treat us respectfully. Women are always engaged in conversation only in the presence of women cadre. And they try to explain things patiently," he said.

explain things patiently," he said.

The situation in Wayanad appears to be in many ways similar to that in Palakkad. District Police Chief, Wayanad, R. Karuppasamy, said the police have fortified close to 10 police stations in the district. They have intensified patrolling and area domination exercises involving armed commandos. Anti-Naxal forces and Thunderbolt commandos are on standby.

In 2014, the police and Maoists engaged each other in a gun battle in Chappa forests. Five years later, in March 2019, the police shot dead Maoist leader C.P. Jaleel, in Vythiri. Jaleel's killing had triggered a public outcry. The Congress-led United Democratic Front and the CPI discounted the police version that commandos had killed him in retaliatory fire. Human rights activists found common cause with them. A forensic examination later concluded that Jaleel had been shot from behind, possibly when he attempted to flee the police that arrived at the resort suddenly. It turned out that Jaleel and a party comrade had turned up at the resort to extort cash and provisions. Jaleel's brother and a human rights activist C.P. Rasheed told *The Hindu* that the police had killed Jaleel in a fake encounter. Circumstantial evidence showed that a fire fight 9

The Maoists are very persuasive. Many among them talk to us in Malayalam. They explain issues and suggest possible measures to be adopted. They treat us respectfully.

SANKARAN Tribal youth in Sugandhagiri, Wayanad

had never occurred at the place and his brother was shot at sight, he said. The police had released three videos regarding the encounter, and the third video revealed that the police had shot Jaleel dead while he was trying to escape from the resort, he added. The Kerala government had ordered a Crime Branch inquiry into the incident, but the police are yet to collect evidence from him or his mother, said Rasheed. Though a magisterial probe was also initiated into the death, it has not been completed.

Development initiatives

Wayanad District Collector A.R. Ajayakumar said militants often try to influence tribals and estate workers by focusing on underdevelopment in settlements and colonies. In a bid to wean them away from the Maoist influence, the district administration has launched several welfare schemes, he said. The police have also undertaken several programmes to win over the local youth. Karuppasamy said the police outreach included setting up of libraries, disbursing sports kits for youths, regular coaching classes for Public Service Commission examinations for youth, and medical camps and improved infrastructure facilities for estate workers. The district administration has launched welfare schemes worth ₹21 crore for tribal people under the Sugandhagiri cardamom project in Lakkidi. Citing the findings of a recent survey, Ajayakumar said Wayanad is home to 3,215 landless, homeless tribal families. He said the government is planning to provide 10 cents of land and a house for 1,000 families in the initial phase. It has identified the area for the

The lack of regular intervention of various departments in the tribal sector is the primary reason for infiltration of Maoists in tribal settlements, says Edakkal Mohanan, a tribal activist and a member of a district-level Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste monitoring committee. The LDF government has appointed nearly 160 tribal youth in the police, excise and forest departments. But that alone will not suffice to address the issues that plague ethnic groups such as the Paniya and Kattunayakkan tribal sects, he said.

The government has to grapple with issues like increasing school drop-outs among tribal students, alcohol addiction among tribal people and the shortage of basic amenities in tribal settlements. Mohanan said a collective effort by all State agencies was the need of the hour to counter Maoist influence among forest dwellers.

Misuse of the UAPA?

Meanwhile, the arrest of two students, both CPI(M) members, on suspicion of having Maoist links, has reignited a sharp public debate in Kerala on the misuse of the harsh provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Both this incident and the killing of the four Maoists saw the UDF and the CPI on the same page.

the CPI on the same page.

The developments also served as a backdrop to a raging dispute in the mainstream and social media on the question of whether a police "deep state" was increasingly threatening the democratically vibrant State.

In an unusual show of support for the jailed members of the ruling party, Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala slammed Vijayan for "inertly allowing the police" to "blight the future" of two promising youths. The controversy has also "exposed" the LDF government's "non-fulfilment" of its promise in 2017 to review 162 odd UAPA cases registered in Kerala since 2012.

One of the jailed students is Alan Suhaib, 21. He is a law student and grandson of veteran communist "Savithri teacher". The other is Taha Fasal, 20, a journalism student who hails from a family of CPI(M) workers. He did manual labour to afford tuition fee and support his ailing parents. Chennithala said the top police bureaucracy had from its privileged seclusion cast down two "children" into a purgatory meant for the hardest of criminals.

hardest of criminals.

Perhaps, Alan's aunt Sajitha Madathil, a thespian, best encapsulated the fraught political situation in Kerala following the Maoist killings and UAPA arrests, in a poignant Facebook post. She wrote that she would warn her jailed nephew against even wearing a red dhoti in Kerala's arguably Kafkaesque environment. Ironically, the CPI(M), often accused of interference in law and order matters while in power, now faces flak for giving a free hand to the police.

