

IN BRIEF



Petrol price hits ₹75/litre for first time this year

NEW DELHI
Petrol price on Monday hit ₹75 a litre for the first time in more than a year. Petrol price on Monday was hiked by 5 paise per litre and diesel by 10 paise a litre, according to a daily price notification. PTI

Court allows Robert Vadra to travel abroad

NEW DELHI
A Delhi court on Monday allowed Robert Vadra to travel abroad for medical treatment and business purposes. He is facing a probe under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. PTI

'Address the root cause of sexual assaults'

PUDUCHERRY
Stressing the need to address the root cause of sexual assaults on women, Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi on Monday said strengthening the system of policing with an eye to identifying perpetrators would stop crimes.

Senior journalist dead after fatal attack

GUWAHATI
Senior journalist Naresh Mitra died here on Monday, 17 days after he was found injured under mysterious circumstances. Mitra, a journalist with *The Times of India*, was known for his environmental reporting. He was 46. PTI

Apology

We carried a “Clarification & apology” on April 6, 2019 for disclosing the name of a minor in our report “Jammu grenade thrower is a minor, says police.” The Juvenile Justice Board, Jammu, had taken up the matter suo motu and directed us to republish the apology. We once again apologise for the error. Accordingly, this apology is published.

— Editor

218 fast-track courts in U.P. for sexual crimes

Government promises speedy disposal of cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Amid the outrage over the death of the Unnao rape victim, the Uttar Pradesh government on Monday announced that it would set up 218 fast-track courts for speedy disposal of cases of sexual crimes against women and children.

The decision was taken by the Cabinet, a day after the last rites of the Unnao victim were performed in her native village, 75 km from here.

The State at present has 42,389 pending cases of sexual offences against children and 25,749 pending cases of rape and sexual crimes



Brajesh Pathak
against women, said State Law Minister Brajesh Pathak.
Given the high number of pending cases and to ensure their speedy disposal, 218 new fast-track courts would

be set up, including 144 for sexual crimes against women, he said. “Out of this, 144 will be regular courts and will hear only rape cases. For crimes against children, under POCSO [Protection of Children from Sexual Offences], we are going to open 74 new courts,” he said.
New posts of judges of the level of the Additional Sessions Judge would be created in all the 218 courts. The government had estimated a budget of ₹75 lakh per court, said Mr. Pathak. The Centre would bear 60% of the costs and the State the remaining, he said.

Few takers for Turkish onions in Sahibabad

STAFF REPORTER
GHAZIABAD

At the Sahibabad Mandi, Haji Noor is counting his onions. The wholesaler invested in Turkish onions when the prices of the staple vegetable soared last month. “I bought 150 kattas (bags) of 20 kg each but have been able to sell only 50-60 of them over a week’s period,” he says.

Though its wholesale price is ₹10-15 less than the

Alwar variety, he says consumers are not showing much interest in it. “People come to ‘see’ it but they don’t buy it. Some of the pieces are 500-600 gm in weight making it useless for the domestic use.”
In one of the biggest markets in the region, the supply of onions has come down to less than 50% since last year. “In November 2018, the supply was 51, 836 quintals. This Novem-

ber, it was 21, 235 quintals. As the crop failed in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, we are getting the supply from Rajasthan,” says Vishvendra Kumar, secretary, Agriculture Produce Market Committee, Ghaziabad.
Bhanu Prajapati, another wholesaler, who resisted the temptation of Turkish onions, argues that farmers, *aaratiyas* (middlemen) and retailers make profits

SBI brings down lending rate by 10 bps

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The State Bank of India, the country’s largest lender, has reduced the one-year marginal cost of funds based lending rate by 10 basis points (bps) to 7.9%, with effect from Tuesday.

The SBI said the lending rate was reduced to pass on the benefit of reduction in cost of funds to customers. “This is the eighth consecutive cut in MCLR in the financial year 2019-20,” the SBI said. The rate cut will bring down equated monthly instalments of SBI’s existing home loan borrowers and other floating rate loan borrowers. All the banks have linked the home loan rate of new borrowers to the repo rate.

Ayodhya verdict: 40 prominent persons file joint review plea

Verdict has an impact on secular fabric of country, they say

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Forty prominent persons have filed a joint review petition against the Constitution Bench judgment of the Supreme Court in the Ayodhya appeals in early November, saying the verdict has a direct impact on the secular fabric of the country.

The petitioners, who range from academicians to activists from diverse faiths, have filed the review petition through advocate Prashant Bhushan.
They include Irfan Habib, Harsh Mander, Farah Naqvi, Nandini Sundar, Shabnam Hashmi, John Dayal and Jayati Ghosh among others.
They submitted that though they were not part of the original Ayodhya land title dispute suit, they have found that the judgment’s “tenor, language and operative orders have expanded the scope of the SLP from a title dispute to a battle about



the faith of the Hindus and the Muslims”.
The judgment overrides the faith of one community to favour the faith of another.
“Since it is a matter now between communities, the petitioners who belong to diverse faiths within the country are aggrieved by the decision which has a direct impact on the syncretic culture of the country,” the petition said.
“Interestingly, the belief of the Hindus that Ram was born in Ayodhya is not without doubt [as has been expressed by eminent histor-

ians such as Professor Romila Thapar and Professor Irfan Habib, mentioned above inter alia]. The existence of the Babri Masjid is a fact that has been historically documented, whereas the existence of the Hindu temple on which this mosque was built is merely a belief of the Hindus, one that has not been corroborated by any of the evidence adduced by the Hindu parties,” the petition said.
The judgment failed to appreciate that neither parties had proved exclusive ownership of the land.
Besides, the judgment effectively rewarded those who broke the law three times over, defied the orders of the Supreme Court and above all dishonoured the guarantees of the Constitution and the central article of faith of the equality of all religions in India’s struggle for freedom, the petitioner argued.

Plea seeks psychological help for J&K children

‘Many detained during lockdown’

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Activist Enakshi Ganguly on Monday highlighted in the Supreme Court the need for providing psychological assistance to children who were allegedly detained and released by security personnel during the period of lockdown and restrictions imposed in the Valley since August 5.

Appearing before a Bench led by Justice N.V. Ramana, advocate Shahrukh Alam, for Ms. Ganguly, said some of these children were as young as nine years old.
The Bench said it received a fresh report from the juvenile justice committee of four senior judges of the Jammu and Kashmir High Court, which inquired into allegations of preventive detention of children by security forces, only on late December 8. The court said it needed time to read the report. The court said it would hear submissions after looking into the report.
Senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, also for Ms. Ganguly, said the report of the committee, being under the Juvenile Justice Act, ought to



Children praying at the shrine of Sufi saint Sheikh Syed Abdul Qadir Jelani in Srinagar on Monday. • AP
be made public. The Bench said it would take a call after going through the report. The court listed the case for December 13.
The court had asked the J&K High Court Juvenile Justice Committee led by Justice Ali Mohammad Magrey to enquire into the veracity of reports in international and domestic media that children were detained after the lockdown on August 5 following the removal of Article 370. “How can there be preventive detention of children? Even the Public Safety Act does not allow the preventive detention of children,” Mr. Ahmadi had submitted.

SC asks States for report on Food Security Act

The order came on a petition on the starvation death of a girl in Jharkhand in 2017

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the States to produce proof on record that they have established a mechanism for the poor to complain about the inaccessibility to food under the Public Distribution System (PDS).

The order came on a petition filed by the mother and

sister of a 11-year-old Dalit girl who died of starvation in Jharkhand on August 28, 2017.
“This death was due to the cancellation of a ration card of a poor Dalit family because the ration card was not linked to the Aadhaar card. The family had both the ration card and the Aadhaar card, but since the lin-

kage was not done, the ration card was cancelled and the family was told to apply for a new card. This they promptly did, and yet the new card with the linkage to the Aadhaar card was not given to the family, rations were stopped from March, 2017, and an 11-year-old girl in the family, Santoshi, died of starvation,” said the peti-

tion, represented by senior advocate Colin Gonsalves and advocate Anupradha Singh.
Mr. Gonsalves said a citizen could not be denied food; it is a constitutional right. He said the petition dealt with starvation deaths in Jharkhand, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and elsewhere.

Centre begins training States on piped water quality standard

Ministry yet to respond on BIS draft quality control order

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Bureau of Indian Standards is preparing the ground for enforcement of piped water quality standards with a workshop for State officials. However, it is not yet clear whether the Centre’s own flagship mission to provide piped water to all households by 2024 will implement the BIS standard.

Providing safe drinking water to the common public is a primary requirement for ensuring health, Consumer Affairs Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said on Monday.

He was speaking at a workshop organised by BIS

to disseminate information about the requirements of IS 10500:2012, the quality standard. States were informed about the certification schemes and testing facilities required for compliance with it.
Unlike the BIS standard for bottled water, which is mostly produced by private companies, the standard for piped water – largely supplied by government agencies – is not yet mandatory.
Mr. Paswan emphasised that the Central government and BIS were ready to take all steps and provide hand-holding support to the State governments and various agencies. However, interact-

ing with journalists after his inaugural speech, he admitted that there has been no response as yet from the Union Jal Shakti Ministry with regards to a draft quality control order to make the piped water standard mandatory.
Senior Ministry officials and spokespersons failed to respond to *The Hindu’s* queries on the draft quality control order, and its adoption by the Jal Jeevan Mission.
Jal Shakti is the nodal Ministry for the Jal Jeevan Mission to provide functional household tap connections to 14.6 crore rural households by 2024.

Carry music instruments with care on flights: MP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha MP and Indian classical dancer Sonal Mansingh on Monday urged the government to evolve a policy for the safe carriage of musical instruments by airlines.

The MP, nominated to the Upper House by the President, drew its attention to an incident last month when renowned sitarist Shubhendra Rao found his musical instrument severely damaged after an Air India flight between New Delhi and New York. “The equipment of artistes, whether instruments or costumes, are professionally very important to their lives, art and vocation. There is hardly any arrangement or convenient way to ensure them. The Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Civil Aviation should come together to discuss this important issue,” Ms. Mansingh said.

Responding to the remarks, the Ministry of Civil Aviation posted on Twitter that it had found that the airline was not at fault.

“It was observed that the SOP to handle fragile musical instruments was followed by the airport teams at Delhi and JFK.” It further claimed that “no damage was reported at the baggage counter at JFK airport”. Air India issued a statement saying: “The sitar did not get damaged while in its custody and it is not at all responsible.”

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



Forecast for Tuesday: Squally wind (wind speed 35-45 kmph gusting to 55 kmph) very likely to prevail over west central and adjoining southwest Arabian Sea. Sea condition is likely to be rough to very rough over the same region. Fishermen are advised not to venture into these areas.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala.....	28.5	17.5		Kozhikode.....	00.0	00.0	00.0
Ahmedabad.....	29.1	16.0		Kurnool.....	31.6	20.2	
Aizawl.....	10.1			Lucknow.....	25.1	13.2	
Allahabad.....	26.4	13.6		Madurai.....	31.4	20.6	
Bengaluru.....	23.8	17.0		Mangaluru.....	37.5	22.3	
Bhopal.....	27.0	12.8		Mumbai.....	33.6	21.6	
Bhubaneswar.....	30.0	18.6		Mysuru.....	28.2	17.2	
Chandigarh.....	23.0	8.9		New Delhi.....	23.5		
Chennai.....	30.6	23.5		Patna.....	26.6	13.6	
Coimbatore.....	27.8	19.9		Port Blair.....	29.8	25.5	
Dehradun.....	25.2	7.5		Puducherry.....	31.0	21.2	
Gangtok.....				Pune.....	30.4	18.0	
Goa.....	34.4	22.8		Raipur.....	29.2	15.6	
Guwahati.....	26.8	11.6		Ranchi.....	23.8	12.2	
Hubballi.....	28.0	19.0		Shillong.....	16.6	7.4	
Hyderabad.....	27.5	19.7		Shimla.....	13.7	4.9	
Imphal.....	23.2	6.1		Srinagar.....	4.0	-2.9	
Jaipur.....	24.0	10.0		Thiruvananthapuram.....	33.4	24.1	
Kochi.....	33.0	25.2		Tiruchi.....	30.8	21.2	
Kohima.....	20.5	7.2		Vijayawada.....	30.9	21.6	
Kolkata.....	28.1	19.2		Visakhapatnam.....	30.3	23.4	

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad.....	49	94	12	171	114	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Bengaluru.....	04	52	86	43	59	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Chennai.....	—	78	56	62	—	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Delhi.....	18	—	74	416	327	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Hyderabad.....	03	71	43	139	112	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Kolkata.....	31	81	21	166	166	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Lucknow.....	30	36	46	375	—	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Mumbai.....	22	45	39	246	148	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Pune.....	98	16	52	134	106	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Visakhapatnam	11	35	36	19	47	■ ■ ■ ■ ■

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