

IN BRIEF



Five rescued from massive fire in Mumbai

MUMBAI  
Five persons trapped in a major fire in Mumbai were rescued on Sunday night. The fire broke out on two floors of a residential building in Vile Parle and raged for almost two hours. Nobody was injured in the incident, said rescue personnel. PTI

Odisha man tied to tree, beaten, urinated upon

BHUBANESWAR  
A youth was tied to a tree and brutally thrashed by two men who also urinated in his mouth in Odisha's Khurda district, said police. The incident came to light after the video of the incident went viral on social media. The police have arrested the two accused — Rajendra Bhuyan and Gatia Paltasingh — of Kaipadar village and a case has been lodged. IANS

Panchayat promises gold to taxpayers

MUMBAI  
In a move aimed at increasing tax collection, the gram panchayat of Wangi village in Sangli district of Maharashtra has announced a lucky draw scheme, under which three taxpayers can win gold items like rings and coins. Villagers who clear their tax dues by March 15 next year will be short-listed for the lucky draw. PTI

Woman injured as guard shoots arrow

DEHRADUN  
A security guard in Uttarakhand's Pauri district injured a woman Rajni Devi, 35, by firing an arrow at her for allegedly drying clothes on the boundary wall of a plot he was manning, police said on Sunday. Ms. Devi was rushed to a hospital as the iron arrowhead hit her in the chest, police said. The guard, identified as Ramlal, has been arrested. PTI

Railway unveils new signalling system

Project will be tested on four of the busiest routes

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA  
NEW DELHI

The Railways will roll out its new signalling system from April 2020 onwards. It is expected to make train travel faster and safer, a senior official said.

The implementation will begin with four sections of about 640 route kilometres with an estimated cost of around ₹1,810 crore.

This is expected to be a pilot project for pan-India implementation of the nearly ₹78,000 crore project to modernise the signalling system, which was included in the works programme of 2018-19.

"We are yet to get approval for this [entire project] from



Tech upgrade: The new systems will reduce congestion and improve safety, line capacity and punctuality. • PTI

com), Railway Board, said. The four sections where the plan will be implemented first are the Renigunta-Yerraguntla section of the South Central Railways, the Vizianagaram-Palasa section of East Coast Railway, the Jhasi-Bina on North Central Railway and the Nagpur-Badnera on Central Railway.

Modern technologies

"These four sections are some of the busiest routes on Railways, with heavy traffic. These will act as a pilot for signal modernisation across the 70,000 km network of the Railways," Mr. Kumar said.

The modernisation of the signalling system will include implementation of technologies such as the automatic train protection system that helps in adhering to permissible speed limits without driver intervention and the 4G-based mobile train radio communication system, which can be used for emergency communications.

Besides a centralised traffic control system similar to the air traffic control system, a remote diagnostic and predictive maintenance system will be implemented.

Told to change flight seat, Pragma complains

Airplane gets delayed by 45 minutes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha MP Pragma Thakur refused to move to a non-emergency seat despite being wheelchair-bound, delaying her Spicejet flight from Delhi to Bhopal, according to the airline.

The MP was on board Spicejet flight SC 2498 (Delhi to Bhopal) on December 21 and had pre-booked a front-row seat. But when she boarded the flight in her wheelchair, she was requested to move to a different row as emergency rows are not assigned to passengers on wheelchairs as per the Directorate General of Civil Aviation norms.

The MP refused to comply for nearly 45 minutes, until other passengers grew restless and asked her to be deboarded.

On reaching Bhopal, Ms. Thakur filed a complaint



Pragma Thakur

with the airport director.

"As Ms. Thakur had come with her own wheelchair and had not booked through the airline, the staff wasn't aware of this fact that she was a wheelchair passenger. She was requested by the crew to shift to 2 A/B (non-emergency row) due to safety reasons but she refused. The duty manager and other staff also requested her to move to another seat," Spicejet said in a statement.

NITI Aayog, the extended Railway Board and the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA)," Pradeep Kumar, member (Signal & Tele-

Officers Training Academy in Gaya to shut down

Sikh Light Infantry Regimental Centre will relocate there

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Officers Training Academy (OTA) in Gaya is being shut down as it is not used to its full potential and the Sikh Light Infantry Regimental Centre, which is strapped for space at Fatehpur in Uttar Pradesh, will shift there, Army sources said.

"It is not closure. It is relocation," a senior source said. The OTAs in Chennai and Gaya are under-utilised now because the intake has increased through other schemes like the Technical Entry Scheme (TES).

The OTA, Gaya, was set up in 2011. The officer cadets there will be trained at the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun.

Earlier, the Centre was supposed to build a new regimental Centre for the Sikh Light Infantry. The move is



Lot of room: The OTAs are under-utilised because the intake has increased through other schemes. • R.RAGU

expected to save expenses and enable utilization of readily available infrastructure.

Space constraints

Presently, the Rajput and Sikh Light Infantry Regimental Centres are located at Fatehpur, and are pressed for space. To address the problem, the Army has acquired 150 acres at Sitapur for a new Sikh Light Regi-

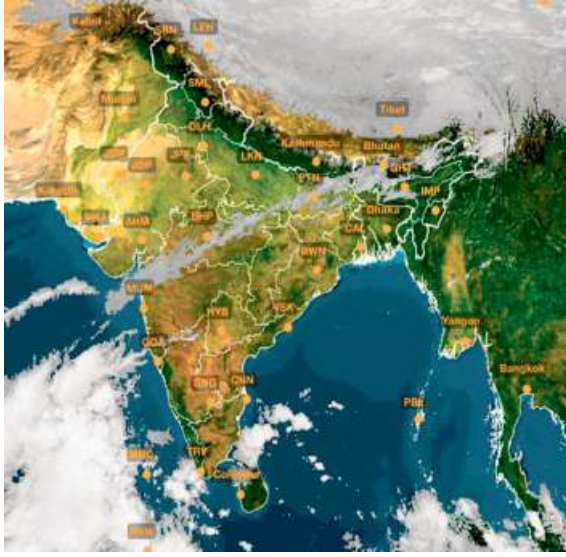
mental Centre.

"Instead of spending ₹1,000 crore, why not move to Gaya?" the source said.

Regimental Centres require a large parade ground for training and other facilities, which are readily available in Gaya. Once the Sikh Light Infantry Regimental Centre moves to Gaya, the Rajput regiment can take over the space at Fatehpur.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 16.00 HRS)

**Forecast for Monday:** Cold day conditions likely in isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. Dense fog in some pockets likely over Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Bihar, West Bengal, Sikkim, south Assam and Meghalaya. Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning likely over West Madhya Pradesh and Vidarbha.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	.....	23.0	11.0	Kozhikode	.....	35.0	24.0
Ahmedabad	.....	29.0	16.0	Kurnool	.....	32.0	20.0
Aizawl	.....	19.0	8.0	Lucknow	.....	23.0	10.0
Allahabad	.....	23.0	10.0	Madurai	.....	31.0	23.0
Bengaluru	.....	28.0	18.0	Mangaluru	.....	37.0	23.0
Bhopal	.....	25.0	12.0	Mumbai	.....	32.0	22.0
Bhubaneswar	.....	28.0	15.0	Mysuru	.....	28.0	18.0
Chandigarh	.....	14.0	10.0	New Delhi	.....	15.0	7.0
Chennai	.....	30.0	22.0	Patna	.....	21.0	9.0
Coimbatore	.....	28.0	21.0	Port Blair	.....	31.0	25.0
Dehradun	.....	23.0	7.0	Puducherry	.....	30.0	21.0
Gangtok	.....	11.0	5.0	Pune	.....	28.0	19.0
Goa	.....	34.0	23.0	Raipur	.....	30.0	18.0
Guwahati	.....	21.0	13.0	Ranchi	.....	24.0	12.0
Hubballi	.....	29.0	19.0	Shillong	.....	15.0	5.0
Hyderabad	.....	28.0	18.0	Shimla	.....	15.0	3.0
Imphal	.....	23.0	4.0	Srinagar	.....	8.0	1.0
Jaipur	.....	24.0	9.0	Thiruvananthapuram	.....	35.0	23.0
Kochi	.....	32.0	23.0	Tiruchi	.....	31.0	22.0
Kohima	.....	16.0	6.0	Vijayawada	.....	31.0	21.0
Kolkata	.....	21.0	13.0	Visakhapatnam	.....	29.0	21.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing					Yesterday
CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>2</sub>	CO	PM <sub>2.5</sub> PM <sub>10</sub>	CODE
Ahmedabad	56	31	21	111	105
Bengaluru	9	28	15	101	105
Chennai	71	36	48	142	105
Delhi	8	184	89	391	283
Hyderabad	15	46	46	232	105
Kolkata	7	72	46	313	196
Lucknow	7	74	80	407	105
Mumbai	7	87	32	243	192
Pune	65	17	50	212	149
Visakhapatnam	9	38	50	133	105

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)  
**SO<sub>2</sub>:** Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

**NO<sub>2</sub>:** Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

**CO:** Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

**PM<sub>2.5</sub> & PM<sub>10</sub>:** Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Arunachal to mark schools as 'hard' and 'soft'

The Education Department has been facing difficulties in posting teachers in remote areas

RAHUL KARMAKAR  
GUWAHATI

Arunachal Pradesh will soon have schools marked 'hard', 'soft' and 'medium'. Geography, lack of infrastructure and reluctance of teachers to work beyond their comfort zones are the reasons for this categorisation, officials said.

Teacher absenteeism has been a major issue across 3,513 government schools, including 211 community schools, in the State. The student-teacher ratio has conse-

quently been skewed in favour of urban centres with better connectivity.

A government spokesperson said that under the new policy, all government schools will be divided into three categories — hard, medium and soft — based on topography, accessibility and degrees of difficulty in staying at the place of posting. "All new recruits will be given a hard posting for a mandatory three years, inclusive of their probation period.



The teacher-student ratio is skewed in favour of urban centres in the State.

The next five years will be in schools with levels of medi-

um difficulty, followed by posting in soft schools," the spokesperson said.

The Education Department has been facing difficulties in posting 16,594 regular teachers in remote areas where schools have adequate students, but hardly anyone to teach them.

Last week, a meeting of the Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Pema Khandu, approved the Arunachal Pradesh Teachers' Transfer & Posting Policy, 2020, for en-

suring "need-based distribution of teachers to protect the academic interest of students and optimise job satisfaction among the teachers in a free and transparent manner." The policy also entails transfer of teachers through online requests.

"We are taking steps to revitalise the sector through a policy that will ensure each school, no matter how remotely situated, has adequate teachers," Mr. Khandu said.

Contraband worth ₹150 cr. seized near the Andamans

Coast guard nabs 6 from Myanmar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Coast Guard apprehended six people from Myanmar with banned contraband worth approximately ₹150 crore, about 125 nautical miles east of Little Andaman.

They were detained under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.

Around noon, on December 20, a Dornier aircraft sighted a non-Indian vessel operating east of Little Andaman.

The vessel was not responding on Very High Frequency (VHF).

Coast Guard Ship Aruna Asaf Ali, on patrol, was diverted for investigation, the force said in a statement on Sunday.

Quick seizure

"At about 6 p.m. on December 20, ICGS Aruna Asaf Ali sighted the boat 125 nautical miles from nearest land, Little Andaman. The vessel failed to stop on being challenged by the ship. The ship fired three warning shots in the air and forced the vessel to stop," the statement said.

A total of 250 packets weighing 1 kg each and 106



The people were held about 125 nautical miles east of Little Andaman.

packets weighing 500g each were recovered from the ship.

The total weight of the contraband is approximately 303 kg. Each packet contained a white crystalline substance. The total worth is approximately ₹150 crore, an official said.

A Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) team from Kolkata carried out preliminary investigation and reported that the substance is believed to be banned drug methaqualone, ICG said.

This is the second major recovery of contraband by the Coast Guard in the Andaman and Nicobar region in the last three months.

3 of family electrocuted near Tiruchi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
TIRUCHI

Three members of a family, including a father and son, were electrocuted when an overhead electric wire snapped and fell on a farmland at a village on the outskirts of Tiruchi in Tamil Nadu on Sunday.

A. Ramamurthy, 54, had gone to his farm at Navalur-kuttapattu Keezhakadu village to spray fertilizer on his paddy crop.

He stepped on a live wire, which had fallen from a power pole and was electrocuted.

His son R. Gunasekaran, 23, and the latter's grandmother A. Oppayee, 70, who rushed to his rescue, too were electrocuted. Police have registered a case.