



INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1878

on Sunday



Trinamool delegation meets kin of Mangaluru firing victims

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Express dissent in a democratic, non-violent manner: Naidu

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Fresh round of anti-government protests rocks Chile

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Mary Kom beats Nikhat to make team for Olympic qualifiers

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NEARBY



Muslims give ₹6.27 lakh for damaged property

BULANDSHAHR
A group of Muslims has handed over a demand draft for ₹6.27 lakh to the Bulandshahr district administration to compensate for damage to public property during violent protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in Uttar Pradesh this month.

NEWS • PAGE 11

Court postpones hearing on Daryaganj violence

NEW DELHI
A city court on Saturday postponed to January 7 the hearing on bail applications of 15 persons, who were arrested for alleged violence during protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in Daryaganj. A magisterial court had earlier on Monday rejected the bail pleas and extended their judicial custody by two weeks.

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+ 'Restore holiday on Sheikh's birth anniversary'

PEERZADA ASHIQ

SRINAGAR
The J&K administration's move to strike down National Conference (NC) founder Sheikh Abdullah's birth anniversary and 'July 13' from the Union Territory's holiday list for 2020 evoked angry reactions from the regional parties on Saturday.

The new holiday list excludes the December 5 birth anniversary of the NC founder who headed the movement in J&K to accede to the Union of India in 1947. The order also pointed out that July 13, which is observed as 'Martyrs Day' to commemorate the death of 22 civilians in 1931 during a rebellion against the Dogra monarch, has been dropped.

DETAILS ON • PAGE 10

No extra charge on payments via RuPay, UPI from January 1

Finance Minister's announcement will promote home-grown digital gateways

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Digital transactions made using RuPay credit cards or UPI QR codes will not attract additional charges for merchants or customers from the beginning of next year, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Saturday. All shops, business establishments and companies with an annual turnover of ₹50 crore or more have been mandated to offer these modes of payment to customers.

The Department of Revenue will soon notify RuPay and UPI as the prescribed mode of payment for digital transactions without any Merchant Discount Rate (MDR), Ms. Sitharaman said after a meeting with public sector bankers, adding that the notification would come into effect from January 1, 2020.

The Merchant Discount Rate is the percentage of the digital transaction that a merchant pays to banks. This cost is often passed on to the customer. The decision to choose RuPay and UPI as the platforms which will not attract this levy, may promote these home-grown digital payment pathways



Digital push: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman attending a review meeting with chief executive officers of public sector banks in New Delhi on Saturday. •PTI

over those promoted by foreign companies, including VISA and MasterCard.

In her budget speech in July, the Finance Minister had listed "BHIM UPI, UPI QR Code, Aadhaar Pay, certain Debit cards, NEFT, RTGS, etc." as the low-cost digital modes of payment which could be offered without the imposition of MDR in order to promote a "less cash" economy.

She had added that "RBI and banks will absorb these

costs from the savings that will accrue to them on account of handling less cash as people move to these digital modes of payment."

At that time, the Payments Council of India – an industry lobby group – had said an MDR waiver would hurt companies in the payments system.

It argued that the cost should be borne by the government instead of banks, which would have no incentive to promote digital pay-

ments without MDR revenues.

On Saturday, Ms. Sitharaman said all banks would start a campaign to promote RuPay debit cards and UPI. The government has already amended two laws – the Income Tax Act and the Payments and Settlement Systems Act – in order to implement the budget announcement, she added.

'REFORMS RESTORED HEALTH OF BANKS' • PAGE 13

Priyanka claims U.P. police 'manhandled' her

Police officer calls the charge of pushing her down 'untrue and misleading'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday alleged that a woman police officer in Lucknow had manhandled her and grabbed her "neck" while she was on her way to meet an activist and a party member jailed during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Ms. Vadra, who alleged that the police had tried to stop her from meeting the families of the arrested persons, eventually met the family of S.R. Darapuri, a retired IPS officer and Ambedkarite activist. He was arrested on December 20, along with other activists. Earlier, Ms. Vadra, whose car was stopped midway, had walked some distance and even taken a ride on a party worker's scooter *en route* to



Serious charge: Priyanka Gandhi Vadra coming out of the residence of a retired IPS officer in Lucknow on Saturday. •PTI

her destination, she said.

'Peaceful manner'

The Congress leader said she was on her way to meet Mr. Darapuri's family and proceeding "in a peaceful man-

ner" when a police vehicle stopped her car by "suddenly" halting in front of the vehicle. "They said you can't go. I asked why. They said 'we won't let you go'. I said, ok, stop me. I said I will

walk. I started walking, but they surrounded me... *mera gala dabaya* [they pushed me by my neck]," said Ms. Vadra, accusing a police officer of manhandling her. "They grabbed me and pushed me... I fell down," she claimed.

Circle Officer Archana Singh, who was the fleet in-charge of Ms. Vadra's security, however, said the Congress leader's allegations of "gala dabana" and "pushing her down" were "untrue" and "misleading."

Separately, in a written complaint to the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Ms. Vadra's office has alleged that a senior police officer forcibly entered the house where she was staying and threatened the CRPF officers in charge of her security, demanding her schedule for the day.

'BJP trying to alter Assam's culture'

The spirit of Assam Accord should not be violated: Rahul

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said in Guwahati on Saturday that the spirit of the Assam Accord should not be violated, and accused the Narendra Modi government of pushing the State back on the path of violence.

"The Assam Accord laid the foundation for peace in the State. We strongly believe that the true spirit of the Assam Accord should not be violated because it had brought peace to the State, and it was chalked out by all," he said at a meeting to mark the Congress's foundation day.

'People will run the State'

Mr. Gandhi accused the BJP of attempting to attack and alter Assam's culture. "Assam will not be administered from Nagpur. Assam will not



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is presented with a replica of a rhino in Guwahati on Saturday. •PTI

be run by '*RSS ke chaddi-wale*'. It will be ruled only by the people of Assam," he said in his speech delivered in Hindi.

He said the BJP had failed to understand not only the people of Assam but also those of the entire north-eastern region. The Congress opposed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in Parliament, and would en-

sure that it harmed no Indian citizen, Mr. Gandhi said.

Mr. Gandhi said he had always maintained that if the BJP came to power in Assam, it would destroy the peace and harmony of the State. "I am pained to repeat that my words have come true." He appealed to the people to maintain unity. "Assam cannot progress while treading on the path of hate and anger. We all have to unite and deliver a loud and clear message to the BJP leadership that it cannot attack your culture and history."

Mr. Gandhi criticised the State governments under the BJP and the Union government for the violent police action against those who had protested against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

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Delhi shivers as temperature plummets to 2.4°C

Severe cold wave conditions likely on Sunday too with a low of 2 degrees Celsius

STAFF REPORTER

NEW DELHI

Saturday morning was the second coldest day in Delhi since 1992, with the minimum temperature touching 2.4 degrees Celsius, five notches lower than the season's normal, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The air quality in the city also plummeted to "severe" category and is expected to remain at that level on Sunday and Monday, according to government-run monitoring agency System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR).

Severe cold wave conditions are likely to persist on Sunday too, with a minimum temperature of 2 degrees Celsius and a maximum of 13 degrees Celsius, the IMD said.

"Dense to very dense fog prevailed at Delhi, Lucknow,



Saturday morning was the second coldest day in the national capital since 1992. •R.V. MOORTHY

Gorakhpur, Varanasi, Chandigarh and Gaya, with visibility between 0 and 50 metres. Latest satellite images indicate dense cloud cover engulfing most parts of north-west India and extending all along the Indo-Gangetic plains," said Kuldeep Srivastava, head of the Regional Weather Forecasting Centre of IMD.

The maximum temperature on Saturday was 14.4 degrees Celsius, colder than

the season's normal by six degrees, according to IMD. Also, dense fog reduced visibility to zero metre at Palam and 100 metres at Safdarjung.

The IMD has forecast dense to very dense fog and severe cold wave over most places of Delhi-NCR on December 29 and 30.

The mean maximum temperature for December till now is 19.18 degrees Celsius and it is most likely to be-

come the second coldest December since 1901 (coldest is 17.3 degrees Celsius in December 1997). Also, rain has been forecast for December 31 and January 1.

Severe pollution

"SAFAR model predicts extreme calm surface winds for the next two days. The AQI on December 29 is forecast to be in the severe category. Under these extremely cold conditions, strong near-surface inversion is predicted for December 29 and 30 night, which will trap pollutants close to the surface and severe AQI category is likely to continue till December 30," said SAFAR.

The city's AQI on Saturday was 409 (severe), up from Friday's 373 (very poor), according to the 4 p.m. bulletin of the Central Pollution Control Board, which is the average of the past 24 hours.

At least 90 people killed in Mogadishu blast

Bomb-laden vehicle explodes at checkpoint; the dead include many students

REUTERS

MOGADISHU

At least 90 people were killed and dozens wounded when a bomb-laden vehicle exploded at a bustling checkpoint in the Somali capital Mogadishu on Saturday, an international organisation working in the country said, in one of the most deadly recent attacks.

The dead included many students and two Turkish nationals, the Somali Foreign Minister said. Rescuers carried bodies past the twisted wreckage of a vehicle and a minibus taxi smeared with blood.

A report by the international organisation, which did not want to be named, said the death toll was more than 90.

A Somali MP also tweeted that he had been told the toll stands at more than 90, including 17 police officers.

Abdikadir Abdurrahman Haji Aden, founder of Aamin



No time to lose: Paramedics carrying a person wounded in the blast at the Somali capital, Mogadishu, on Saturday. •AFP

ambulances, told Reuters that dozens of people were also wounded. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the blast.

Continuing attacks

The al-Qaeda-linked Islamist group, al-Shabaab, regularly carries out such attacks to undermine the government, which is backed by the UN and African Union troops.

The most deadly attack blamed on the group was in October 2017 when a bomb-laden truck exploded next to a fuel tanker in Mogadishu, creating a storm of fire that killed nearly 600 people. While al-Shabaab carries out frequent attacks, the death tolls are often lower than that of Saturday's blast. The group has sometimes not claimed responsibility for attacks that

sparked a public backlash, such as a 2009 suicide bombing of a graduation ceremony for medical students.

Three witnesses told Reuters that a small team of Turkish engineers were present at the time of the blast at the Ex-Control checkpoint, constructing a road from the checkpoint to the city.

A car belonging to the engineers was destroyed instantly, the witnesses said.

Foreign Minister Ahmed Awad later tweeted that two Turkish engineers died in the blast. Many of the dead were "students with ambition, and hard-working men and women", he wrote.

Turkey has been a major donor to Somalia since a famine in 2011 and, together with the government of Qatar, is funding infrastructure and medical projects. In 2017, Turkey opened a military base in Mogadishu to train Somali soldiers.