



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

on Sunday



Fresh round of anti-government protests rocks Chile







Mary Kom beats Nikhat page 17

to make team for Olympic qualifiers

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# **NEARBY**

#### Muslims give ₹6.27 lakh for damaged property

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 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

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 re-

gional 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

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



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 dig-

ital 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 incen-

tive to promote digital pay-

ments without 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

### Arrest of septuagenarians leaves families distraught

Charged with rioting in U.P. despite being under house arrest

LUCKNOW

Malka Bi's mobile phone displays the desperate message she sent to the official numbers of five senior Uttar Pradesh police officers at 1.08 a.m. on December 20. The SMS was sent about an hour after four policemen whisked away her husband Mohammad Shoaib, 72, in a jeep, purportedly

interrogation. However, Internet and SMS services had been disabled following the violence during protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act the previous day, and her messages did not go through

#### SPECIAL

Ironically, Mr. Shoaib, a senior advocate and socialist activist, had been placed under house arrest since the evening of December 18 to prevent him from attending the protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, at Parivartan Chowk in

the capital Lucknow. And Mr Shoaib is not alone. S.R. Darapuri, a retired IPS officer and an Ambedkarite Dalit political activist, who was also under house arrest when the protests took place, was also

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Congress leader Rahul Gand-

hi said in Guwahati on Satur-

day that the spirit of the As-

sam Accord should not be

violated, and accused the

Narendra Modi government

of pushing the State back on



picked by the police on December 19 and sent to jail. He turned 76 on December 16.

#### Midnight knock

Around midnight on December 19, four policemen came to Mr. Shoaib's house and said he had been summoned by the circle officer. The elderly lawyer, who suffers from blood pressure and thyroid ailments, was already in

"He then went to his room and changed his trousers. I didn't even get to see his face when they took him. He didn't take his spectacles or

reabouts, she then called the

district police chief and in-

'BJP trying to alter Assam's culture' +

his mobile," said Ms. Malka. Clueless and desperate to know of her husband's whe-

formed him that her husband needed to take his medicines. Ms. Malka says the officer sent two policemen to her house to fetch the medicines. The two also told her not to worry and assured her that Mr. Shoaib would be back in an hour or at the latest by the next morning. For two days, however, she didn't hear anything about

"On the third day, when I heard he was in jail, I was relieved. Initially, I didn't know where they took him, or where they would dump him or kill him. Koi theek thodi hai [What's the guarantee]," said Ms. Malka, recalling the anxious moments.

**CONTINUED ON ▶** PAGE 10

### Priyanka claims U.P. police 'manhandled' her

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

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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

they surrounded me... mera gala dabaya [they pushed me by my neck]," said Ms. Vadra, accusing a police officer of manhandling her. she claimed.

walk. I started walking, but

ty, 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),

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 foun-

dation 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



The spirit of Assam Accord should not be violated: Rahul

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

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

those of the entire north-

eastern region. The Con-

gress opposed the Citizen-

ship (Amendment) Act in

Parliament, and would en-

He said the BJP had failed to understand not only the people of Assam but also

sure that it harmed no Indian citizen, Mr. Gandhi said. Mr. Gandhi said he had al-

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.

**CONTINUED ON ▶** PAGE 10

### 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 De-

partment (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 Foreand Research casting (SAFAR)

Severe cold wave condi-

tions are likely to persist on

Sunday too, with a mini-

mum temperature of 2 de-

grees 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 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

ing Centre of IMD. The maximum temperature on Saturday was 14.4 degrees Celsius, colder than

Regional Weather Forecast-

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

#### "They grabbed me and pushed me... I fell down," Circle Officer Archana Singh, who was the fleet incharge of Ms. Vadra's securi-

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, de-

manding her schedule for

### At least 90 people killed in Mogadishu blast

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

No time to lose: Paramedics carrying a person wounded in the

REUTERS

the day.

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 na-

tionals, 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

Haji Aden, founder of Aamin

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

than 90.

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** 

and African Union troops.

blamed on the group was in October 2017 when a bombladen truck exploded next to a fuel tanker in Mogadishu, creating a storm of fire that killed nearly 600 people. The al-Qaeda-linked Islamist While al-Shabaab carries out group, al-Shabaab, regularly frequent attacks, the death carries out such attacks to tolls are often lower than that undermine the government, of Saturday's blast. The group which is backed by the UN has sometimes not claimed

responsibility for attacks that

The most deadly attack

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

sparked a public backlash,

structing a road from the checkpoint to the city. A car belonging to the engineers was destroyed in-

at the time of the blast at the

Ex-Control checkpoint, con-

stantly, 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 wo-

men", 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.

#### Timings

DELIII

SUNDAY, DEC. 29

RISE 07:13 SET 17:34

RISE 09:39 SET 20:30

MONDAY, DEC. 30

RISE 07:13 SET 17:34

RISE 10:19 SET 21:26

TUESDAY, DEC. 31

RISE 07:14 SET 17:35

RISE 10:55 SET 22:19

 Delhi Weather
 max
 min

 Delhi City
 13
 02

 Safdarjang
 13
 02

 Palam
 11
 03

Delhi Palam Today 14°C Dense fog is likely at many places. Wind chill will be affecting during afternoon.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow 14°C A cold morning with dense fog lies ahead. A partly cloudy sky will prevail.

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#### **DELHI TODAY**

**Exhibition:** "Shelter", a solo exhibition of sculptures by Pintu Sikder at Shridharani Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.

**Exhibition:** "Realms of peace", a solo paintings show by Bhaskar Singha at Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

**Exhibition:** A group art how by Kushala Vora, Sangita Maity and Shruti Mahajan at Shrine Empire Galery, D 395, Defence Colony, 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

**Exhibition:** "Family is Plural", an exhibition of recent works by Artist Probir Gupta at Bikaner House, Pandara Road, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: "Sands of Time", a solo art show by Rashmi Khurana at Art Konsult, 3, Ground Floor, Hauz Khas Village, 10:30 a.m. - 6:30 p.m. (Mail your listings for this column at citydistaglable of the bindu so. in)

# Shaheen Bagh residents brave the cold as anti-CAA stir enters Day 15

Demonstration will continue till Centre repeals new law, announce protesters

STAFF REPORTER

Into the 15th day of agitation, residents of Shaheen Bagh continued with their demonstration against the amended Citizenship Act and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC).

With mattresses left to dry on dividers, protesters who are camping day and night in a makeshift tent, on Saturday afternoon said that the demonstration will continue till the Centre repeals the new law.

Amid an appeal to ensure that the narrative is not "changed into a communal one as the government is trying", Sarfaraz Ahmad, one of the protesters, while addressing the crowd, said: "If we believe in humanity we should all speak up. We have seen several of our Hindu brothers stand in solidarity with us over here and this is all because humanity is still

The agitation also saw several women taking to the streets and participating in the sit-in protest while braving the cold weather conditions in the national capital.

tions in the national capital. Fatima (32), a housewife, said she has been a part of the demonstration since day one.



People seen during a protest at Shaheen Bagh on Saturday. • R.V. MOORTHY

"The very fact that we are spending cold nights here is proof of the fact that we feel for the cause and it is something which affects us all. With reports coming in about how innocent Muslims are being targeted and being put behind the bars across the country, especially in Uttar Pradesh, we are now all the more scared. How can we not fight against this wrongdoing?," she said.

Adding that there is a growing resentment among residents towards the "apathy" shown by the government, 67-year-old resident of the area, Shabana, said: "The Prime Minister does not seem to care about

anything. While he is saying



one thing, [Union Home Minister] Amit Shah seems to be saying something else. What are we, the common citizens, supposed to believe? Who do we trust?"

Asifa, a 42-year-old mother of two, added that the protest is now "a part of daily life"

"Each member of every family is involved in the prot-

est. The ones who work go for their jobs and children to tuitions, only to come back to join the demonstration. It is all the more important for the children as their future is at stake. We are not moving from here till the new law is repealed. If required, we will bring in the new year from this very spot," said Ms.

## People gather at India Gate for musical protest against CAA

They sang songs, read poems on themes of freedom, dissent

ELISHA VERMANI

Several people assembled at India Gate on Saturday in response to a public call for a musical gathering to register their protest against the amended Citizenship Act and the National Register of

Citizens.

People sang patriotic songs and read poems along the themes of freedom and dissent.

Activist Shabnam Hashmi said: "There are many ways of expressing your dissent and singing these songs is just another form of cultural resistance."

While addressing the crowd, one of the protes-

ters said, "Sansad ki yeh deewarien bas dekhne ki hai, bharbhara ke gir padengi kadmon ke thaap se."

#### 'Police stopped us'

Adil (22), a student of Jamia Milia Islamia, said: "The police initially tried to stop us from singing and they did not allow me to carry my instruments stating that it was a security precaution ahead of the Republic Day. They cited Section 144 which prohibits the assembly of more than four people at a spot as the reason. But when asked as to why tourists were not being told to disperse, they al-

Another protester, Kapil Sharma (45), a theatre artist, said: "Gathering at the India Gate to sing songs in such an environment where we are seeing internet shut-downs in the Capital, police carrying out acts of violence against students, the crackdown on locals in Uttar Pradesh holds immense symbolic value. So we are here to register our dissent against the CAA and all these other incidents through music."

Other songs sung by the protesters here included 'Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram', 'Bhagat Singh Tu Zinda Hai' and 'Ye Vaqt ki Awaaz Hai'.

### Delhi police yet to procure Jamia violence CCTV footage

University requests HRD Ministry for a judicial probe

SAURABH TRIVEDI NEW DELHI

CCTV footage related to the alleged entry of police personnel inside the Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) premises has emerged as a bone of contention between Delhi Police and the university administration, a police officer said on Saturday.

The CCTV footage is an important evidence in the case and carries crucial investigative value and is yet to be procured by the police close to a fortnight after the December 15 confrontation between anti-CAA protesters and the police.

A senior police officer claimed that the Jamia Nagar SHO had gone to the university to get the hard drives containing the CCTV recordings as it was needed in the ongoing investigation. But students gathered at the university and even the administration was unwilling to hand over the footage, the officer alleged.

The SHO came back without the footage. "CCTV footage are important evidence and during a meeting with the university administration, it had given in writing that it would hand over the recordings to the police. If anything happens to the recordings then it will fall under the offence of destruction of evidence," said the

"When the police de-

tained JMI students on December 15, they made us sign a letter where it was mentioned that the CCTV footage would be provided to the police for investigation. They have asked for the footage and we said we are thinking about it. A policeman, who was sitting with me, got up as soon as the students arrived," JMI Chief Proctor Waseem Ahmed Khan said.

The call on the footage will be taken on Monday as JMI has requested the Ministry of Human Resource Development for a judicial probe into the matter, said Mr. Khan, adding that the NHRC is also looking into the matter

## Husband shoots woman dead, claims she killed self; four arrested

Accused arrested under charges of dowry death, say police

STAFF REPORTER

A 25-year-old woman was allegedly shot dead by her husband and the body was thrown off from the second floor of the house to make it look like a case of suicide in south-west Delhi's Kapashera area, the police said on Saturday.

They said that the victim's family had failed to fulfil a demand of dowry. The woman was two-month pregnant, they added.

"We have arrested four members of the family, including the husband, under the charges of dowry death," said Devender Arya, DCP (South West). He said that after inspecting the crime scene, they were sure that it was not a case of suicide as victim Divya's body was found lying perpendicular to the building, whereas when a person jumps from a building he or she never falls perpendicular to it.

"The autopsy report stated that the woman was first shot in the head and then thrown off the building. On

Autopsy report stated that the

woman was shot in the head and then thrown off the building. The family was questioned. Her husband confessed to killing her

DEVENDER ARYA DCP (South West)

the basis of the report, the family was questioned and Divya's husband, Rohit, confessed to killing her following a heated argument. They had been demanding an SUV from the victim's parents as dowry since their marriage in 2015," said Mr.

In-laws' role

In-laws' role
Mr. Rohit killed his wife with
a licenced weapon, which
originally belonged to his
father but after his father's
death, he got it registered in
his name, the police said.
Mr. Rohit's mother and sister-in-law cleaned the blood
on the floor after Divya was
shot. Mr. Rohit and his elder

brother then threw the body from the second floor, the police added.

"Mr. Rohit had been absconding after the incident but soon after the police got the autopsy report, they arrested him from a location in Sonepat," Mr. Arya said.

The police were informed around 5.40 a.m. on December 25 regarding a woman who had jumped from the second floor of her residence in Samalkha village. When they reached the spot, it was found that the woman had sustained multiple fractures on her head. She was taken to a hospital where she was declared brought

dead.

Based on a complaint, a case under IPC Sections 498A (husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty), 304B (dowry death) and 34 (common intention) was registered and Mr. Rohit's family

members were arrested.

A magisterial inquiry has also been initiated as the couple had not completed seven years of marriage.

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THE HINDU DELHI SUNDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2019

### BJP 'chargesheet' against AAP govt.'s report card

CM says AAP will implement 'good suggestions' in next tenure

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

The Delhi BJP on Saturday released a "chargesheet" on what it alleged were the "five unsuccessful years" of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government. This was in response to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal releasing a report card of his government earlier this week.

Union Minister Harsh Vardhan, who headed the 'chargesheet committee' that prepared the report, and Delhi BJP chief Manoj Tiwari jointly released the chargesheet Jhoot or Vishwashghat ki AAP Sarkar at Connaught Place.

Reacting to the 'chargesh-

eet', Mr. Kejriwal said his and false promises. He has party will go through the "aarop patra" and implement any "good suggestions" in it during the next five years. The CM said he believes in keeping his critics close, "We want everyone to review our work and point out shortcomings and give suggestions so that we can do more good work."

#### 'People disappointed'

"No government has disappointed the people of Delhi so much as AAP has done during its five-year tenure. Kejriwal is a person, who in the garb of common man, believes in misleading the people by making populist

forgotten that politics is done on issues not on falsehoods," said Dr. Vardhan.

"Mr. Kejriwal must explain to the people of Delhi what he has done to change the face of the city. People are facing traffic jams, dust, pollution, polluted water," he added.

Mr. Tiwari said that the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections would be a "fight between development and destruction". "AAP has run the government in Delhi on the foundation of falsehood... the CM made 70 promises to the people of Delhi out of which he could not fulfil even 50%," he claimed.

#### Sisodia challenges BJP to bring out 12-year report on civic bodies

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Manish Sisodia on Saturday termed the BJP-run municipal corporations in the city "corrupt" and challenged the party to come out with a report card on the work done by the civic bodies in the past 12 years.

"Do it in three days or else in seven days we will come up with your report card and take it to the people of Delhi," Mr. Sisodia said at a press conference. "We have prepared the report card of our five years of work... now I challenge the BJP to make a report card of their 12 years of work in the municipal corporations. The BJP will not be able to present such a report as they have not done any work in the last 12 years," he said.

Replying to a "chargesheet" released by the BJP against AAP, Mr. Sisodia said that his party welcomes criticism.

"The AAP government has worked relentlessly in the past five years. We will go through the points made by the BJP and take the positive suggestions made by them. We hope that the BJP will also review our upcoming tenure of governance," said Mr Sisodia.

## Steering society one judgment at a time

From ensuring a uniform retirement age in the armed forces and removing gender discrimination in promotions, to declaring that the term Chur Chur Naan cannot be trademarked, the Delhi High Court has had to intervene in almost every aspect of society in 2019

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH NEW DELHI

ith the year coming to an end, *The Hindu* takes a look at some of the important verdicts and decisions of the Delhi High Court.

It was a year of significant reforms in the services sector, especially the Central Armed Forces, as the HC set straight rules on age of retirement and gender discrimination in promotion.

Observing that discrimination in the age of retirement among members of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) would hit morale, the court in January directed the Centre to fix a uniform age of retirement for all personnel and officers of the

#### Retirement age

The CAPFs include forces such as the Assam Rifles (AR), Border Security Force (BSF), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), National Security Guard (NSG) and Sashastra See-

The age of superannuation in the CAPFs has been a bone of contention for many years. Among the CAPFs a differential treatment was given to those belonging to the AR and the CISF, where all members in all ranks retire at the age of 60. But, in the BSF, CRPF and ITBP two classes have been created where officers above the rank of Commandant retire at 60 and all other ranks retire at 57.

Following the High Court's decision, the Centre issued a notification in August fixing the retirement age for all CAPF personnel

In March, the HC, in a significant verdict towards gender equality in promotion in Armed forces, ruled that there cannot be "hostile discrimination" towards female officers in the CRPF in the matter of promotions. It rejected the Centre's stand that in the absence of any vacancies in the female cadre, it was not possible to grant promotions to female officers. "This cannot be a rigid immutable number but has to be flexible to ensure that a female SI (Sub Inspector) who is up for promotion is not denied that promotion," the HC remarked.

Over 21 female CRPF SIs had moved the court contending that though the force maintained a combined seniority list of female and male SIs, their further promotions as Inspector and then Assistant Commandants (ACs) is much later than their male counterparts.

They argued that their selection into the force was through a common examination with common selection along with the male counterparts. They contended it was incumbent on the Centre to issue a common seniority list for male and female SI (General Duty).

A junior male SI cannot be allowed to "steal march" over his senior female SI in the combined seniority list only because there is a vacancy against which he can be accommodated whereas there is no vacancy available at that time for the female SI to be promoted as Inspector, the HC

#### **Faculty appointment**

In May, the HC ordered that the members of the selection panel on faculty appointment, includ-



ing names recommended by the Vice-Chancellor, have to get approval of the Academic Council (AC) and the Executive Council

The HC rejected the argument made by Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) that the selection of teachers relates to its administration and therefore falls within the exclusive province of the EC, whereas the jurisdiction of the AC relates to matters on 'education and examination'.

Five JNU professors had challenged the legality of an amendment made in the Regulation M-18, which defined the procedure for creation of a database of experts for the panel, pursuant to the 269th EC meeting in September 2017. The amended Regulation M-18 had done away with the role of the AC in the approval process for the panel of experts.

#### **Cadre-allocation policy**

In May, the High Court directed the Centre to undertake exercise for cadre allocation of IAS and IPS officers belonging to the 2017 batch, after quashing its latest cadre-allocation policy.

The HC decision came on plea by some successful IAS and IPS candidates contending that they have not been allocated the cadres as per their declared policy of merit-cum-preference.

The HC noted that the Cadre

Allocation Policy-2017 was unreasonable and arbitrary since the more meritorious candidates have been denied the cadres to which they were otherwise entitaccording to their preference.

"There can be no gain saying that the common thread running in the said Cadre Allocation Policy-2017 is to reward merit. The more meritorious candidates are entitled to consideration for allocation of cadres before the less meritorious candidates are considered," it added.

#### **Chur Chur Naan**

Most trade mark infringement cases are intensely fought and this one was no different, but it resulted in a very different outcome. In May, the HC ruled that there cannot be any monopoly on the terms 'Chur Chur Naan' and 'Amritsari Chur Chur Naan' as they are generic.

The HC ruling came while adjudicating the plea of a Paharganj-based eatery, claimed exclusive rights in the expression 'Chur Chur Naan', against a rival food outlet in the area, which uses a similar expression for its name.

The HC said that expressions such as Naan, Chur Chur Naan, Amritsari Chur Chur Naan, are similar to expressions such as Amritsari Kulcha, Malabar Parantha, Hyderabadi Biryani, Kashmiri Dum Aloo, Chettinad Chicken, Murthal ke Paranthe, Mangalore idli, etc., and such other food products which are used in common parlance by the general

"The word 'Chur Chur' merely means 'crushed' and 'Chur Chur Naan' means 'Crushed Naan' and nothing more. It is incapable of acquiring trade mark signification," the HC had noted.

#### Senior advocates

In August, the Delhi High Court did away with the previous practice of designating 'senior advocate', where a joint proposal from three senior advocates was needed for an advocate to be considered for being designated a senior advocate.

The fresh rule notified by HC has left unchanged the portion related to suo motu initiation by the High Court for designating an advocate as a senior advocate. But, amended the rules to allow an advocate to apply for senior advocate designation himself or herself. "Any advocate who fulfils the eligibility conditions prescribed hereinbefore may submit a written application for being designated as Senior Advocate to the Registrar General..," states the new rule.

Earlier, the rules mandated that three senior advocates designated by HC, with not less than five years individual standing at the Bar, as senior advocate, may jointly make a proposal to the HC for designation of an advocate as senior advocate.

The decision has led to a bump in the number of advocates applying to get senior advocate designation.

#### Rape charges

In a significant verdict that will have implications on a large portion of rape cases in India, the Delhi High Court in November ruled that the offence of rape falls under the category of "heinous and serious crime", which cannot be quashed even if the parties have settled dispute or

A large chunk of the rape cases in India are reported against offenders who were known to the victims.

The latest report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows that out of a total of 32,559 cases of rape reported across the country in 2017, in one-third, or 10,553 cases, the victim and offender were either friends, online friends, live-in partners or separated.

The HC verdict came on a petition by a man seeking to quash an FIR for rape registered against him by his live-in partner. The woman had complained that despite her repeated insistence on marriage, he refused and in August 2013, he left her following an altercation. Thereafter she registered the FIR.

During the course of the trial, they got married. In the petition before the HC, the victim gave a 'No objection' affidavit for quashing of the FIR. The man argued that since the matter had been amicably settled, the continuation of the case would rencompromise meaningless.

The HC, however, remarked that, "even when there is a settlement, the view of the offender and victim will not prevail since it is in the interest of society that the offender should be punished to deter others from committing a similar crime".

The judge also referred to a judgment of the Supreme Court which said: "Heinous and serious offences involving mental depravity or offences such as murder, rape and dacoity cannot appropriately be quashed though the victim or the family of the victim have settled the dis-

### Situation today akin to British + rule, says Ghulam Nabi Azad

'Govt. commits mistakes and puts the blame on the people'

#### ASHOK KUMAR

Rajya Sabha Opposition leader Ghulam Nabi Azad on Saturday said that for almost two decades after the Congress was founded, its leaders sought civil rights from the British rulers and opposed the enactment of the discriminatory laws, adding that even today they had been demanding the same from the present regime for the past six years. He also accused the Narendra Modi government at the Centre of employing the Britishers' "divide and rule" policy.

Speaking at the party's 135th Foundation Day function at Tau Devi Lal Stadium here, Mr. Azad, drawing parallels between the British rule and the present regime, said that founding fathers of

#### **Delhi Congress holds**

The Delhi Congress on Saturday took out a peace march from its office at Deer Dayal Upadhyay Marg to mark the 135th Foundation Day of the party. Congress workers and leaders who took part in the 'Save Constitution and Communal Amity' march, first went to Ambedkar Stadium and then to Rajghat to pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi. Delhi Congress chief Subhash a 'Halla Bol Rally' in Model Town on Sunday under its 'Jan Jagran Abhiyan'.

the Congress party adopted resolutions and fought for two decades seeking civil speech and press and the

#### peace march

Chopra said the party will hold

rights such as freedom to

#### right to hold meetings against the government.

In an obvious reference to the protests against the amended Citizenship Act, he added the situation today was no different with the police committing atrocities on the protesters.

He said the people of all religions were killed in police firing. Saying that 21 people had died in Uttar Pradesh five in Assam and three in Karnataka, Mr. Azad, the AICC general-secretary, demanded to know as to why the protests were "peaceful" in States like Maharashtra and Rajasthan, which are not ruled by the BJP. "In Delhi, where the police is under the Centre, the policemen barged into the university and broke the hands and legs of the boys and the girls," he said.



#### Kejriwal inaugurates old age home in Wazirpur

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday opened the doors to an old age home for the destitute in north-west Wazirpur.

The four-storey Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Memorial Old Age Ashram brings the total number of functional old age homes in Delhi to three even as seven others are under construction, the Delhi government said

The old age home inaugurated on Saturday can accommodate 36 elderly citizens and is equipped with "state of the art facilities", including entertainment and nutritious food, said Mr. Kejriwal.

Social Welfare Minister Rajendra Pal Gautam said that similar facilities in Gandhi Nagar and Kanti Nagar were ready and would start soon.

The old age home is spread over 600 square metres. It has medical facilities, dining, kitchen and common space. It also provides free boarding, lodging, counselling and rehabilitation facilities.

### New Noida metro corridors in 2020

#### STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

The Noida Metro Rail Corporation (NMRC) on Saturday said that new corridors and other initiatives are under consideration for commuters in the upcoming year.

Among the three proposed corridors - Noida Sector 41 to Knowledge Park-V, Noida Sector 142 to Botanical Garden and Depot Station to Boraki corridor the Uttar Pradesh government on December 23 had approved the first phase of the first corridor. While the detailed project report

(DPR) of the second corridor is under revision, the DPR for the third one is yet to be prepared.

The 14.9-km Noida Sector 51-Knowledge Park-V corridor will have nine stations to be developed in two phases, said NMRC officials. "The first phase will be 9-

km-long and have five stations starting from Noida Sector 51 to Greater Noida West. The approval for this first phase was granted by the State government on December 3," officials said.

Ritu Maheshwari, Managing Director, NMRC, and

CEO, Noida Authority said, "We are committed to serve the public at large and are confident that in the years to come, the commuters from Delhi, Noida and Greater Noida will enjoy world-class public transport. The upcoming metro lines will

> Noida and Greater Noida." The approximately 30km-long Noida-Greater Noida Aqua Line was inaugurated in January this year and the average daily ridership increased from 11,852 in the first month to 20,390 in

change the entire face of

### Red sandalwood smugglers held

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Two persons were arrested in Janakpuri here for allegedly smuggling red sandalwood valued at nearly ₹6 crore in the international market, the police said on Saturday.

A total of 228 logs of red sandalwood, weighing around 1279.5 kg, were recovered from suspects Rishi Makhan (33) and Ram Parkash (52), the police said. The police were informed on

Thursday that a vehicle loaded with red sandalwood would come towards Asalatpur village, DCP (West) Deepak Purohit said. "Around 9.30 p.m., the vehicle was intercepted and its driver [Mr. Parkash] was nabbed," he said. Mr. Prakash said the consignment belonged to Makhan, who was later arrested.



Resul to produce film on runaway children

Oscar-winning sound engineer Resul Pookutty on Saturday said he was planning to produce a film on runaway children in India, which will be ready by next vear. He said the script is currently being written by a noted scriptwriter from Kerala, after which the film's shoot would be planned. PTI

#### TTD to build temples at Varanasi and Jammu

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Trust Board on Saturday decided to construct the Sri Venkateswara temples at Varanasi and Jammu. The board, which met at Tirumala, had given administrative sanction of ₹30 crore for the construction of the Sri Venkateswara temple and information centre at Bandra

### Kerala Governor faces protest at history congress in Kannur

The photo tweeted by the official handle of the Kerala

His comments backing CAA irk delegates, students

STAFF REPORTER KANNUR

The inaugural session of the 80th Indian History Congress (IHC) here on Saturday was marred by protests staged by a section of delegates against Kerala Governor Arif Mohammad Khan over his comments backing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

Delegates and students from various parts of the country brandished placards and raised slogans against the Governor, alleging that his inaugural address was provocative. They shouted "Kerala Governor shame shame." Historian Irfan Habib, who was on the dais, also joined the protest.

Unfazed, Mr. Khan repeat-

Governor, showing historian Irfan Habib trying to disrupt Arif Mohammad Khan's speech. •@KERALAGOVERNOR/TWITTER edly said: "You have every

right to protest. But you can-

not shout me down."

The protesters alleged that Mr. Khan had raised the Kashmir issue and the CAA to provoke them.

In his address, the Governor tried to defend the BJPled government and discredit the protests against the CAA and the NRC. He said the anti-CAA protesters in

the State had failed to respond to his invitation to hold talks on the issue.

Mr. Khan said the people of Kerala had not experienced the trauma of partition, yet had stood with their neighbours.

Placards shown

He pointed out that for Pakistan, Kashmir was still an unfinished story. At this

point, a section of delegates raised placards against the CAA and the NRC. Mr. Khan left the venue without completing his speech.

Later, the Governor tweeted that he had responded to the points raised by previous speakers, as a person duty bound to defend and protect the Constitution. He termed the attempt to disrupt his speech as intolerant and undemocratic. He said Prof. Habib had tried on stage to disrupt the inaugural address and questioned the Governor's right to quote Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, shouting that he should quote Godse. He also accused Prof. Habib of pushing his ADC and security officer.

The tweet, with a picture of the commotion on stage, said Prof. Habib had risen from his seat to physically stop the Governor from ad-

### Mangaluru firing: Trinamool delegation meets kin of victims

They handed over cheque for ₹5 lakh to each family

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MANGALURU

A Trinamool Congress delegation met the family members of the two persons who were killed in police firing during a protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on December 19 here, and handed over cheques for ₹5 lakh to each to them.

The team comprised former Railway Minister Dinesh Trivedi and Nadimul Haque, MP.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had announced compensation to the families of the victims of police firing after Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa said the decision to provide compensation to them had been put on hold till the completion of the probe into the violent incidents in Mangaluru.

The West Bengal Chief Minister's decision had invited a strong reaction from the

'Standing by them'

By paying compensation, the Trinamool Congress is standing by the family members in their hour of grief, said Mr. Trivedi and Mr. Haque.

The cheques were handed over to the family members of Nauseen, 23, and Jaleel Kandak, 43, who died when police opened fire on a group that had allegedly attempted to ransack the Mangaluru North Police Station in Bunder on December 19.

"Any amount of money cannot compensate the loss of lives. You have to fight and overcome the loss of your dear ones. Paying compensation was West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Baneriee's way of standing by the side of those who are in distress. Let they be poor, rich or any caste, she always stands by those in grief," Mr. Trivedi told the family members of

He regretted Mr. Yediyurappa's decision of keeping on hold the compensation to the victims' families.

### EC meet on Telangana civic polls disrupted

N. RAHUL

A meeting convened by Telangana Election Commissioner V. Nagi Reddy with political parties to receive suggestions for the January 22 municipal polls ended on a stormy note with the representatives of parties raising objections to the release of the election schedule without fixing reservations for wards, divisions and posts of chairpersons and mayors in various municipalities and corporations.

At one stage, Mr. Nagi Reddy expressed anger at Congress leaders M. Shashidhar Reddy and G. Niranjan when they targeted the commission for allegedly toeing the line of the ruling TRS and the government in

release of schedule. When Mr. Nagi Reddy shot back at the Congress leaders for their remarks, they walked out of the meet-

The president of Dalit Bahujan Party Krishna Swarup was forcibly made to leave by the police for demanding that the panel reissue the schedule after fixing reservations.

He alleged that he was attacked in the melee. He said he would lodge a complaint against his attackers under SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

### Tests for unmanned mission by 2020-end, says ISRO chief

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) plans to fly the first unmanned test mission ahead of its ambitious crewed Gaganyaan mission by the end of 2020, ISRO Chairman K. Sivan said here on Saturday.

The unmanned flight will carry a humanoid, Mr. Sivan said. "This is the plan. The tests required for the unmanned mission will take place next year. We are hoping to carry it out by next year-end," he said.

He was speaking after inaugurating a felicitation organised by the Aeronautical



Society of India (AeSI) to IS-RO scientists to celebrate the 50th PSLV flight. The launch vehicle completed its 50th mission (PSLV-c48) on December 11.

The ISRO had announced

plans for a December 2021 launch for the crewed Gaganyaan mission.

"The selection process is nearing completion. Their training will start soon," he

Chandrayaan-3 would be a copy of Chandrayaan-2, except that it would not carry an orbiter. It would have a rover and a lander. "We are working on that. There will be no orbiter. Otherwise it will be the same as Chandrayaan-2," he said.

The ISRO hoped to complete the 100th mission of its reliable workhorse Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle by 2024, he said.

### Chidambaram inaugurates 'Save India' march in Kerala

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Congress leader and former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Saturday slammed Chief of the Army Staff General Bipin Rawat for his criticism of the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests in the country.

Inaugurating the "Save India Save Constitution" march organised by the Congress to Raj Bhavan here, Mr. Chidamabaram said it was a disgrace that the BJP government at the Centre had pathetically turned to Army officials and State police chiefs for support against citizens who dissented democratically against the sly attempts of the Sangh Parivar to subvert the Constitution.

"Let me appeal to General Rawat. You head the Army and mind your business; what politicians will do, pol-



Joint front: Oommen Chandy, P. Chidambaram and Ramesh Chennithala in Thiruvananthapurm on Saturday. ■ S. GOPAKUMAR

iticians will do. It is not the business of the Army to tell politicians what we should do just as it is not our business to tell you how to fight a war," he said.

Mr. Chidambaram said the BJP sought to dislodge the secular foundation of the Constitution. However, the party lacked the requisite two-thirds majority to do so. Hence, it attempted to

amend the Constitution through the back door by muscling "anti-Muslim" legislation like the CAA through Parliament without informed debate and in a cursory manner. The CAA and the National Register of Citizens were Siamese twins. The conjoined law was the head and tail of the same coin, and both were patently anti-Muslim.



#### M.P. police arrest 6 for Vyapam scam

Madhya Pradesh police's Special Task Force (STF) filed FIRs against six persons in the Vyapam scam, STF chief and Additional Director General Ashok Awasthi said after receiving complaints that some of the accused had not faced any action, a probe was ordered in September this year. PT

#### Woman thrown off train in Uttar Pradesh

A woman was pushed from the women's coach of a moving train on Friday near Pitambarpur station. The victim was allegedly harassed by an unidentified man and on opposing him, he thrashed and pushed her out of the train "The victim has been identified as Jyoti. She has been admitted to the District Hospital," said the police. ANI

#### **Gardener found with** assets worth ₹1 crore

BHUBANESWAR Vigilance sleuths in Odisha have unearthed properties worth over ₹1 crore in possession of a gardener Udhab Behera, working in the State government, allegedly disproportionate to his known sources of income, an official said. Gold ornaments and over ₹1.5 lakh in cash were also recovered, he said, adding that a search operation was carried out after complaints were received, PTI

#### Dalit man's shop torched over inter-caste marriage

Tension prevailed at a village in Madhya Pradesh's Betul district after a Dalit man's shop was set on fire following his marriage with a woman from an OBC community, police said on Saturday. Seven people were arrested under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and prohibitory orders were imposed on Bisnur village, an official said. PTI

### Gehlot, Pilot lead flag march on foundation day of Congress

Pledge to protect the Constitution, fight against the BJP govt.'s 'anti-people' policies

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Congress workers, led by Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and Deputy CM Sachin Pilot, took out a flag march from Shaheed Smarak to the Pradesh Congress Committee's headquarters here on Saturday to mark the party's 135th foundation day. The participants pledged to protect the Constitution and fight against the "anti-people" policies of BJP-led government at the Centre.

#### 'Save India'

The march was organised with the theme of "Save India, Save Constitution", as the party workers raised slogans against the Centre's policies, which, they said, had put the nation into turmoil and created unrest across the



Raiasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, PCC chief Sachin Pilot and senior leader Avinash Pandey during the 135th party foundation day celebration in Jaipur on Saturday. • PTI

country. Mr. Pilot, who is also the PCC president, hoisted the Congress flag at the headquarters and administered an oath to the Preamble of the Constitution.

In addition to the Ministers and MLAs, the presidents of District Congress Committees and office-bearers of the party's frontal organisations tioned by the BJP and RSS. 'Those who were informers of the British during the freedom movement are misleading the people about our legacy... This is outrageous," he Mr. Gehlot said the BJP was

losing power in the States one after the other because of its wrong policies which were harming the people. He took an exception to Prime Minister Narendra Modi questioning the decisions of Jawaharlal Nehru in the years after Independence and said the first PM's legacy was that of sacrifice and going to jail for the country.

Mr. Pilot called upon the party workers to take the message of saving the nation to the masses and work for upholding the constitutional

#### Cong. leader shot dead in Vaishali

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE

A Congress leader was shot dead by bike-borne assailants on Saturday morning in Bihar's Vaishali district, the police said.

The accused shot Rakesh Kumar, a former vicepresident of Youth Congress, at the Cinema Road here.

According to the information, Kumar was on his way to a gym when the assailants fired at him from point blank range and shot him dead. The police have launched a probe.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Raghav Dayal said, "The assailants fired four bullets at Rakesh Kumar. He died on the spot."

After the incident, hundreds of people gathered at the crime scene and started raising slogans against the police. They also vandalised a police vehicle.

### Locust attack under control: Gujarat govt.

'Over 5,000 hectares cleared'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Much of the locust swarm which invaded north Gujarat's Banaskantha district has been destroyed by spraying 4,900 litres of pesticides over 5,000 hectares, the State government said on Saturday.

The few remaining locusts have moved to Jalore district of Rajasthan, an official said.

A huge swarm of locusts invaded the State's Banaskantha district bordering Rajasthan two weeks ago, feeding on crops such as mustard, castor and wheat.

Punamchand Parmar, Additional Chief Secretary, State Agriculture department said that eight teams of central government officials had been deployed in Jalore to tackle the invasion.

"So far, we have surveyed

weeks ago. 10,000 hectares ... The insects were destroyed over 5,000 hectares by spraying

A huge swarm had invaded a

district in north Gujarat two

pesticides," said Mr. Parmar. The farmers whose crops were destroyed will be compensated under the State Disaster Response Fund provisions, under which ₹6,800 are paid per hectare if 33% of crop or more is damaged, said Mr. Parmar.

### Ahmedabad-Mumbai Tejas to ply from Jan. 19

The train will run six days a week

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

The second privately operated IRCTC's premium Tejas train, which will ply bet-Ahmedabad and ween Mumbai, will be launched on January 17, sources said on Saturday.

As with the first Tejas Express, which runs on the Delhi-Lucknow route, the Railway will compensate the passengers if the train gets delayed.

The first commercial run of the Tejas train will be on January 19.

It will ply for six days a week with Thursdays off for maintenance, the sources

All passengers traveling on the train will be provided with Rail Travel Insurance



There will be no tatkal or premium tatkal quota in the

of up to ₹25 lakhs, free of cost by the IRCTC, including an exclusive coverage of ₹1 lakh against robbery during the travel period of passengers, said sources.

There will be no tatkal or premium tatkal quota in the train, they said.

### Mahagenco's mining project in Raigarh put on ice

Panel flags 'incorrect' details; affected families claim consent for coal mine operation was falsified

SIDHARTH YADAV

also attended the function.

The Congress workers sang

the national song and repeat-

ed the words, "We, the peo-

ple of India, having solemnly

resolved...", after Mr. Pilot

while taking oath. Addressing

the gathering, Mr. Gehlot said

the Congress party had a le-

gacy of sacrifice for the coun-

try, which was being ques-

Amid enduring protests by villagers against another coal mine project in their vicinity, an environmental panel of the Central government has sent back the proposal to seek clearance to operate a coal mine in Raigarh district of Chhattisgarh, citing "hasty" submission of information – that too "incomplete" and "incorrect".

The Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), during its meeting in early December, decided to "return the proposal in its present form" to Generation Company Limited (Mahagenco) to operate the Gare Palma Sector-II coal mine in the Tamnar block. with 22 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) open cast and 1.6 MTPA underground

In September, during a

public hearing for 2,245 project-affected families in 14 villages, residents highlighted the impact of the existing projects on groundwater and air quality, besided damage to fields due to spillage of fly ash, cracks in houses caused by blasting and fires in coal mines and stockpiles.

Hundreds of claimed that their consent was falsified and protested on the spot, resulting in the police booking 54 of them.

#### **Clarifications sought**

Seeking clarifications and inputs on 20 points, the EAC has asked for compliance report on the issues raised during the hearing with a "certain timeline and allocation" and a social impact assessment study for the proposed displacement of tribals and the Scheduled Castes.

Furthermore, the company has to provide details re-



**Heavy losses:** Fly ash from power plants has affected many agricultural fields in Raigarh district. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

lating to the impact on villages present in the core zone (not proposed to be displaced) of the mine, from where coal will be transported to three thermal power plants in Maharashtra to help "reduce the gap in demand and production of electricity" in the State.

As for impact on water, a

"hydrological study and impact of mining activity on hydrology shall be submitted from the expert agency" and permission for the extraction of groundwater shall be obtained from the Central Ground Water Board.

For using surface water from Kelo river for three initial years as proposed, the company will need to seek permission from the authority concerned.

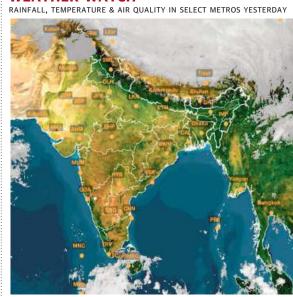
The project, with an area of 2.583.48 hectares, will entail the diversion of 214.87 hectares of forest land. While 80% of the land (2077.69 hectares) is agricultural, settlements are spread across 90 hectares.

#### 'Beyond capacity'

Recently, a five-member panel set up by the National Green Tribunal found the Tamnar-Gharghoda region, which has 13 coal mines and 12 power plants, close to exceeding its environmental carrying capacity.

The team also highlighted the negligence by the existing projects, with at least 27% of the fly ash from power plants being dumped in low-lying areas in a highly unscientific manner, destroying agricultural fields.

#### **WEATHER WATCH**



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS) Forecast for Sunday: Cold day conditions likely in many pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha and Jharkhand. Dense fog likely in some pockets over sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MII
Agartala		19.0	12.0	Kozhikode		34.0	26.0
Ahmedabad	–	25.0	10.0	Kurnool		32.0	21.0
\izawl	2.0	18.0	6.0	Lucknow		12.0	5.0
Allahabad		12.0	5.0	Madurai		32.0	20.0
Bengaluru		28.0	18.0	Mangaluru		37.0	24.0
Bhopal	–	21.0	6.0	Mumbai		31.0	18.0
Bhubaneswar		26.0	10.0	Mysuru		30.0	19.0
Chandigarh		11.0	5.0	New Delhi		13.0	2.0
Chennai		31.0	23.0	Patna		15.0	5.0
Coimbatore		30.0	21.0	Port Blair		30.0	23.0
Dehradun		19.0	4.0	Puducherry		30.0	20.0
Gangtok		10.0	3.0	Pune		27.0	18.0
30a		35.0	24.0	Raipur		23.0	9.0
Guwahati		22.0	10.0	Ranchi		19.0	6.0
Hubballi		28.0	21.0	Shillong		13.0	4.0
Hyderabad		27.0	18.0	Shimla		14.0	4.0
mphal	8.8	18.0	5.0	Srinagar		9.0	6.0
laipur	–	21.0	3.0	Thiruvananthapura	m	33.0	23.0
(ochi	–	32.0	25.0	Tiruchi		30.0	21.0
Kohima	–	17.0	4.0	Vijayawada		30.0	21.0
Kolkata		21.0	11.0	Visakhapatnam		30.0	22.0
'Rainfall data i	n mm:	temper	ature in	Celsius)			

Pollutants in the air you are breathing									
CITIES	<b>50</b> <sub>2</sub>	$NO_2$	co	PM2.5	PM10	CODE			
Ahmedabad	76	.61	30	–					
Bengaluru	12	.65	94	–	94				
Chennai	39	.55	51	86					
Delhi	16	.65	96	470	.439				
Hyderabad	3	.76	52	167	.134				
Kolkata	21	.67	51	321	.214				
Lucknow	28	.24	63	392					
Mumbai	11	.44	49	189	.150				
Pune	77	.29	81	185	.132				
Visakhapatnam	9	.40	58	148					

#### Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 450 indicating a severe level of pollution. In contrast, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 40.

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI) 502: 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

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

### Powerful off in Imphal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

cials.

## bomb goes

A powerful bomb exploded in the heart of Imphal at 5 a.m. on Saturday, police sources said. No casualties were reported. However, some shops on Ngari Street near the all-women markets of the city were pockmarked. No arrests have been made so far, said offi-

#### FROM PAGE ONE

### Septuagenarians' arrest leaves kin distraught

Mr. Shoaib is among the more than 1,200 persons arrested by the Uttar Pradesh police over the protests in the State. He heads the Rihai Manch, an organisation which has helped acquit more than a dozen persons falsely implicated in terror cases, bringing him under the police radar several times.

In 2008, he was also brutally assaulted by fellow lawyers in Lucknow and Faizabad, as they did not want him to appear for terror accused.

According to the FIR lodged at the Hazratganj police station on December 19, Mr. Shoaib faces several serious charges, including rioting, attempt to murder and criminal conspiracy, though his name does not feature in it.

In its submission before the Allahabad High Court, which was hearing a habeas corpus writ filed on behalf of Mr. Shoaib, the additional government advocate quoted police records to say he was arrested at 8.45 a.m. on December 20 from the Hotel Clark Avadh intersection, a couple of kilometres away from his residence.

Ms. Malka alleges foul play in the police version as her husband didn't even attend the protest and was under house arrest.

"When a person was at home, how can he be part of a riot? Police said they found him near Clark Avadh. If he is in police custody, how can he reach Clark Avadh?" she asked.

#### Not at protests

The family of Mr. Darapuri is asking similar questions. Siddharth Darapuri, his grandson, says the senior Mr. Darapuri found out about the police picket outside when he stepped out for his morning walk. The policemen, however, left the premises by evening.

"He was quite disturbed by the violence that happened during the protest. And at 12.35 a.m, he appealed to people through Facebook for peaceful protest and said violence was said Mr. Siddharth. next morning,



Malka Bi, wife of advocate Mohammad Shoaib.

around 11.45 a.m., eight or nine policemen came and arrested Mr. Darapuri without informing his family where he was being taken. His son Ved Kumar said Mr. Darapuri did not attend the protest but posted a photo of him holding a placard, which read "Save Citizenship," on Facebook to express solidarity.

#### 'Political angle'

Known for voicing issues concerning the marginalised, Mr. Darapuri also contested the Lok Sabha election in 2019 from the backward area of Sonbhadra. Mr. Kumar claims his father was implicated due to his activism. "There is a political angle," he said. 'He works a lot for Dalits and forest rights of tribals in Sonbhadra."

Civil society in Lucknow is outraged over their arrests - as well as that of cultural activist Deepak Kabir, Congress worker Sadaf Jafar, Ambedkarite scholar Pawan Rao Ambedkar and Robin Verma, a teacher-activist who works with Mr. Shoaib - and has demanded their immediate release.

DGP O.P. Singh on Friday justified the arrest of several activists and political detenus, saying they were picked up from the spot, but hinted that leniency could be shown. "They did the work of incitement at the scene. But even then, we will have a look at the evidence, and on the basis of that take action against them and see what kind of Sections are invoked

against them," he said. While Mr. Shoaib's writ is listed for January 2, Mr. Darapuri's bail plea will be

### BJP trying to alter Assam's culture: Rahul

The protesters should be dealt with love and understanding rather than bullets, he said. "Wherever the BJP comes to power, it spreads hatred. Youth are protesting in Assam as well as in other States. There was no need to fire at them and kill them. But the BJP people do not want to listen to the voice of my mothers and sisters. They are scared of your voice," he said.

He said the economic collapse was the vital reason for the ongoing violence. The economy, which was growing at 9%, had come down to an abysmal level, he said, pushing the unemployment rate to a 45vear high.

On Friday, he equated the government's intent to bring in the National Register of Citizens demonetisation.

"With demonetisation and the faulty implementation of the GST, [Prime Minister] Narendra Modiji has broken the backbone of the economy. But he will never utter a word about the sinking economy. His only job is to spread hatred and cause division among the people," Mr. Gandhi said.

### Odisha Cong. marches to 'save Constitution'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Hundreds of workers and leaders of the Congress took part in a 'Save Constitution, Save India' rally to register their protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the proposed National Register of Citizens here on Saturday.

The protesters, holding placards and banners demanding withdrawal of the CAA and the proposed NRC exercise, marched from Congress Bhavan to Raj Mahal Square in the city.

The march was led by Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee president Niranjan Patnaik and many senior

leaders of the party. The rally was held after a party meeting to mark the 135th foundation day of the Congress.

Addressing the gathering, Mr. Patnaik said the BJP government at the Centre was trying to muzzle the Constitution. He urged the Congress workers to stay watchful in this regard.

The State Congress president also criticised the BJD saying that it was showing double standards by supporting the BJP at the Centre and opposing NRC in the

Similar marches were organised by the Congress in different districts of Odisha.

### Opposition plans a grand show of unity at Soren's swearing-in

Big contingent of Chief Ministers and veteran party leaders headed for Ranchi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR

Hemant Soren, executive president of the Jharkhand Mukthi Morcha, will take the oath of office as the 11th Chief Minister of Jharkhand at the Morabadi ground in Ranchi on Sunday.

The swearing-in is expected to turn into a big display of Opposition unity, similar to the gathering in Bengaluru in May 2018 when Janata Dal(S) leader H.D. Kumaraswamy took office as Karnataka Chief Minister.

Over 10,000 guests are expected, and elaborate arrangements have been put in place for a grand function. Rameshwar Oraon, Jharkhand Pradesh Congress Committee president who won the Lohardaga seat, is likely to be sworn in as a Minister.

Sources said the JMM and the Congress were still in discussions on induction of Ministers, and the Ministry would be expanded later.

The Chief Ministers of several States ruled by the BJP's rival parties are expected at the swearing-in, along with

Vijay Kumar

Kashmir IGP

appointed

All set to go: IMM leader Hemant Soren and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee greeting each other in Ranchi on Saturday. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

heads of many Opposition parties.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will be present, said R.P.N. Singh, who is in charge of party affairs in **Iharkhand** 

The Chief Ministers Bhupesh Baghel of Chhattisgarh, Ashok Gehlot of Rajasthan, Mamata Baneriee of West Bengal and Uddhav Thackeray of Maharashtra are likely to attend the function. Harivansh Narayan Singh, Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman, will participate.

Former Chief Ministers Akhilesh Yadav (Uttar Pradesh), Harish Rawat (Uttarakhand) and Jitan Ram Manjhi (Bihar) are expected.

Sharad Pawar, Nationalist Congress Party chief; M.K. Stalin, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam president, and party MPs T.R. Baalu and Kanimozhi; Tejashwi Yadav, Rashtriya Janata Dal leader and former Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar: Kanhaiya Kumar, Communist Party of India leader; and Ministers from Chhattisgarh and West Bengal figure on the guest

The Jharkhand CM-designate received a huge number of books following his appeal to visitors that he be greeted with books instead of flowers.

"These books will be preserved in a library to be built by the State government," he

In the 81-member Jharkhand Assembly, JMM has won 30 seats while its alliance partners, Congress and RJD, have won 16 and one, respectively. The Jharkhand Vikash Morcha (Prajatantrik), led by former Jharkhand Chief Minister Babulal Marandi, with three MLAs has extended unconditional support to Mr. Soren-led alliance.

The BJP with 25 seats will be the principal Opposition party in Iharkhand.

### 'Restore holiday on birth anniversary of Sheikh'

Regional parties demand review

PEERZADA ASHIQ SRINAGAR

The J&K administration's decision to strike out 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.

According to the order from the General Administration Department, the new list of official holidays 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 was being observed as Martyrs Day to commemorate the death of 22 civilians on that date in 1931 during a rebellion against the Dogra monarch, had been dropped. Instead, October 26 has been declared "Accession Day" and will be observed as an official holiday.

While the NC issued no statement in Kashmir, the Jammu chapter of the party demanded a "review of the decision"

"Sheikh [Abdullah] rejected the two-nation theo-



Sheikh Abdullah

ry of Mohammed Ali Jinnah over secularism of the father of nation Mahatma Gandhi," the NC's provincial president Devender Singh Rana, said in Jammu. "For decades, Kashmir's politics has come to be identified with the personality of the Sheikh. The towering personality cannot be confined to the myopic prism of regional politics, as he fought for democracy when the entire nation was struggling to break the shackles of British," he added.

Peoples Democratic Party leader Firdous Tak said the move "showcases the change being imposed on the people of J&K". CPI(M) leader and former MLA M.Y. Tarigami said the current administration was out "to distort the history of J&K".

### 'Express dissent in democratic way'

Vice-President says Constitutional methods and violence do not go together

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

manner.

"Constitutional methods

and violence do not go to-

gether," he said at a function

to release the book Renais-

sance Man: The Many Facets

of Arun Jaitley on the late

The comments, though

not explicitly stated, came in

the context of the protests by

various groups against the

passage of the Citizenship

Paying rich tributes to Jait-ley, Mr. Naidu said, "Whe-

never there is a need for en-

lightened debate, Jaitley will

(Amendment) Act.

'Enlightened debate'

leader's birth anniversary.

Vijay Kumar, an Indian Pol-Vice-President M. Venkaiah ice Service (IPS) officer of Naidu said here on Saturday the 1997 batch, was apthat there was a need for an pointed the Inspector-Genenlightened debate on all eral of Police (IGP), Kashlarger issues in public life, and stressed that dissent mir, on Saturday. Mr. Kumar has received should be expressed in a democratic and non-violent

three gallantry medals from the Central government for his role in anti-terror operations. He replaces S.P. Pani,

who has been transferred and posted as IGP, Armed Wing, Kashmir, according to an order issued by Shaleen Kabra, principal secretary to the J&K government. Mr. Pani, a 2000batch IPS officer, joined as the IGP in February 2018 at the age of 41, becoming the youngest ever to hold the post. He remained in charge of the law and order situation through the difficult phase of 2018, which saw the peaking of local militancy, and then to the run-up of August 5, when the Centre decided to revoke J&K's special status.

Giriraj hits

out at Rahul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Union Minister Giriraj

Singh on Saturday accused

the Congress of wanting to

"divide the country" by

spreading lies over the Citi-

zenship (Amendment) Act

and said if Rahul Gandhi

has "love for infiltrators",

he can take them to Italy.

Asking the Congress to re-

frain from a "policy of dou-

ble-standards", he claimed

that the UPA had talked

about the citizenship law,

but did not go ahead due to

In response to a report hea-

dlined "Income Tax offi-

cials pursuing Ambani mo-

published in the The Hindu

on December 28, a spokes-

person for Reliance Indus-

tries Ltd. said: "We once

again strongly deny any

suggestion that any mem-

ber of Mukesh Ambani fa-

mily had or has any undis-

closed foreign income or

asset and that they failed to

disclose. The query sent to

us is baseless and has been

sent only with malicious in-

tent. We reserve our rights

to take action as legally ad-

vised."

overseas"

"appeasement politics".

RIL clarifies

trail



Pages of tribute: Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Arun Jaitley's wife Sangeeta Jaitley at the book release in New Delhi on Saturday. • PTI

Sangeeta Jaitley, wife of Jait-

He recalled his own long association with the late leader, adding that he was yet to come to terms with his passing.

"He was a man of impecbe missed." The book, put together by cable integrity and a thorough gentleman," Mr. Naidu Mr. Naidu's daughter Deepa and son Harshvardhan, was said adding that he was

released in the presence of staunchly opposed to cor-

ruption. Referring to Jaitley's deft

handling of the economy at a critical time, Mr. Naidu said his persuasive skills and the spirit of camaraderie were in full display to evolve a consensus during the tough negotiations with the States for the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime.

He referred to various measures taken by laitley as Union Finance Minister to ensure that the banking sector did not slip into a deeper morass due to non-perform-

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code introduced during his tenure proved to be a revolutionary step, Mr. Naidu added.

#### **Editors Guild** condemns BJP leader's tweet

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Taking cognisance of a tweet by BJP social media in-charge Amit Malviva against senior journalist Rajdeep Sardesai, the Editors Guild of India in a statement on Saturday questioned the party's commitment towards "debate dissent".

It also asked the BJP to +strongly caution Mr. Malviya for his tweet.

In his tweet, Mr. Malviya had held a social media poll on Mr. Sardesai seeking to discredit him, which the Guild called a "deplora-

"The poll on Twitter was not only tasteless it also questioned the integrity and patriotism of Mr. Sardesai, who is a journalist of standing and a former president of Editor's Guild of India," it said.

The Guild demanded that Mr. Malviya immediately withdraw

### Drop in visitors from Bangladesh due to CAA stir

Protests, remarks on migrants spark unease in travellers

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE SUHASINI HAIDAR

The number of travellers from Bangladesh to India has dipped as protests erupted across the country against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

In October, India announced easing of restrictions on visitors from Bangladesh with valid papers through land ports. However, reports suggest travel disruption and cancellations.

Following the protests against the CAA, the Dhaka Tribune has reported a nearly 50% reduction in the flow of visitors from Bangladesh through the Hili Immigration Check Post in South Dinajpur, West Bengal.

The check post surveyed by the newspaper used to facilitate at least 800 visitors from Bangladesh daily earlier. According to the officials in Hili, 3,383 visitors from Bangladesh came to India during the first fortnight of December when 808 Indians went to Bangladesh. In the second fortnight, however, the number of Bangladeshi citizens fell to 1,832



waiting at the check post at Hili in Dakhsin Dinajpur, West Bengal. • FILE PHOTO

while the number of Indians plummeted to 47. A source in the Bangla-

desh High Commission here said the land immigration check posts were used mainly by visitors seeking Indian services close to the border.

Akhaura unaffected

"People in Bangladesh are following developments and are temporarily postponing non-essential visits in view of reports of protests in Assam and Bengal against the citizenship law," said the diplomatic source who however, maintained that movement through the Akhaura and Benapol transit points remained unaffected.

Bangladesh officials said the dip in visitors could be for a number of reasons, including a slide in public perception of bilateral ties. One official pointed to Home Minister Amit Shah's repeated reference to immigrants as "termites" as "hurtful to Bangladeshis".

"While our relations are historic and remain strong at the official level, average Bangladeshis might look at all that is happening in India and not feel as welcome there as before," added the official, who asked not to be identified.

The decline in the number of travellers and growing apprehension goes against the spirit of the Joint Statement released during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to New Delhi in October, when India agreed to remove remaining restrictions for overland travellers to foster better people-to-people and business ties. India removed similar restrictions against Bangladesh air tra-

vellers in 2017.

### Court postpones hearing on Daryaganj violence

15 persons have applied for bail

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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 (CAA) in Daryaganj.

A magisterial court had earlier on Monday rejected the bail pleas and extended their judicial custody by two weeks.

According to the police, the accused were picked up during the violent protests in Daryaganj on December

However, lawyer Rebecca John, who represented the bail applicants before the Metropolitan Magistrate, had submitted that they were randomly picked up. She also asked if the police had identified them through the CCTV footage

through any witnesses. Stating that they had eyewitnesses, the police said the 15 persons were arrested as they were pelting stones during the protest.

Ms. John had also asked that since a vehicle set ablaze during the protest was private property, why the police had invoked the

#### Waqf Board sets up hubs for legal aid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

The Delhi Waqf Board has set up help desks to extend free legal aid to people booked in the city and other States during protests against the amended citizenship law. The help desks at the Waqf Board head office in Daryaganj, Okhla and Jafrabad have been set up at the direction of chairman of the panel Amanatullah Khan.

Prevention of Damage to Pu-

blic Property Act. The police submitted in the court that the protesters damaged barricades, pelted stones close to the area police station and that 17 personnel were injured in the

The charge of criminal conspiracy and common intention was contested by the defence counsel, who pointed out that the accused persons did not know each other.

### Gather empty cartridges: DGP to officials

WhatsApp message from U.P. police chief also called for photographs of children throwing stones

VIJAITA SINGH

As videos and evewitness reports went viral about police action, including firing, in Uttar Pradesh during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on December 20 and 21, senior police officers asked district officials to collect evidence to justify their action.

On December 21, Director-General of Police (DGP) O.P. Singh wrote in an internal WhatsApp group of the Uttar Pradesh police, asking "all SSPs to do the following: 1. Empty cartridge collection. 2. Pictures of 12-13 years old children as agitations [sic] with stones in their hands or in such aggressive forms. 3. Insisting on DMs [district magistrates] to clear the roads or streets from construction materials lying there."

BJP destroyed

secularism:

Okram Ibobi

IBOYAIMA LAITHANGBAM

Congress Legislature Party

leader and former Manipur

Chief Minister Okram Ibobi

said on Saturday that the

party would continue the

agitation demanding that

the Citizenship (Amend-

organised to mark the Con-

gress's foundation day, he

said the BJP had destroyed

There was no democra-

cy in the State, Mr. Ibobi

said, citing the arrest of CPI

State secretary L. Sotinku-

mar for organising a peace-

Mr. Ibobi ridiculed the

BJP's claim that the 15 years

of Congress rule had creat-

ed a division between the

hills and the valley in the

State. This was not true be-

cause the people used to

live in peace and harmony,

ful strike against the Act.

Speaking at a function

ment) Act be repealed.

secularism in India.



Show-down: In this file photo, policemen are seen clashing with protesters in Rampur. • PTI

This message was preceded by another one from the DGP asking all Superintendents of Police to "recover empty cartridges fired by agfrom battleground".

The police have denied opening fire at the protesters. So far, the police have admitted 19 deaths during the protests, mostly due to bullet wounds. Video clips, however, show several instances of policemen opening fire and residents have spoken of the police entering and ransacking their homes.

Also on December 21, Additional Director-General of Police (Law and Order) P.V. Ramasastry asked other members of the WhatsApp group to "recognise the efforts of men who performed their duties with courage, sincerity and dedication and recommend the names of policemen for commendation discs and medals"

The officer also cautioned that violence could repeat in some areas and the "situation may degenerate into a communal situation through retaliatory action from the majority community".

#### **Caution on arrests**

As complaints of police highhandedness began circulating on the social media, the DGP sent another message on the group, asking officers to be careful in arrests and not harass the innocent people. On December 23, a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at a political rally in Delhi that there had been no discussion, no talk on a National Register of Citizens (NRC) for India since his government had taken power in 2014, the DGP sent another message asking officers to be careful in arrests.

#### 'No harassment'

"We should not arrest people simply to increase the number. No innocent to be picked up, harassed or used. Responsibility of police chiefs to ensure this," the message said.

The number of persons arrested across the State since December 10 stands at 1,246, with another 5,558 persons held in preventive custody, the police said.

More than 370 cases have been registered.

### Meerut's Ahmed Nagar mourns its dead sons

Fear is palpable in the Muslim locality in the wake of the police action on Dec. 20

The road to Ahmed Nagar, a Muslim-majority locality in Meerut, is like a ride to a dystopian future.

Adjacent to a choked drain that is as wide as the road, the locality perched next to the Kanch Ka Pul (bridge of glass) is a warren of narrow lanes, where, for a first-time visitor, the stench of human faeces overpowers the fragrance of freshly prepared haleem.

Ahmed Nagar lost two of its young men, Aleem, 24, and Asif, 20, on December 20, when the protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act turned violent in Meerut, resulting in the death of six persons from gunshot injuries.

"We are living a third class life and have made peace with it," said Mohammed Salahuddin, the elder brother of Aleem, who used to make sheermal at a shop in the



Still tense: A Muslim woman walking past policemen in riot gear on a street in Meerut. • REUTERS

Kotwali area. "What more the government wants to take away from us," he won-

"Now, a video is circulating on mobiles, where the SP is telling Muslim boys to go to Pakistan. It is wrong to say something like this, but if it was shot before the protest, wasn't it a provocation," he asked. *"Kya kaali patti* bandhna bhi galat hai [Is wearing a black armband too wrong]?"

Family's breadwinner

Partially disabled because of polio, Mr. Salahuddin said the family got to know about Aleem's death when a neighbour showed them a video of his brother lying near the City Hospital, a little more than a kilometre from the shop he

wound on his temple. "It was 4.30 p.m. We rushed to the government hospital but we were shown the body of Asif, who lived in the nearby lane," said Mr. Salahuddin. Asked to return the next morning, it was only after the intervention of the Samajwadi Party MLA that they got to see the body. "By that time, post mortem was done. It has been more than a week and we are yet to get the post mortem report."

Very good at his job, Aleem's mentor Raees said he would earn up to ₹13,000 a month and was devoted to his work. "As I am disabled and our younger brothers are still learning, Aleem was the breadwinner," said Mr. Salahuddin. In lane No. 10, Asif's family was yet to come to terms with his death. "He used to run a battery-operated auto and was fatally shot on the chest on Hapur Road," said his father Id Ul

### 15-month-old child awaits return of parents lodged in Varanasi jail

Ravi and Ekta were arrested for participating in anti-CAA protest

AMARANTH TEWARY

It's difficult to sit for long in the drawing room of retired irrigation department official Krishna Kumar Tiwari in Adarsh Nagar colony of Mehmurgani locality in Varanasi.

A stream of visitors has been pouring in ever since his younger son Ravi Shekhar and his wife Ekta were arrested and sent to jail for participating in a peaceful protest march against Citizenship (Amendment) Act and National Register of Citizens on December 19 at Beniabagh area in the city. The couple's 15-month-old child, Champak, has lost weight in the last 10 days.

"We still don't understand why we are being made to suffer like this. Is it a crime under the present regime to participate in a peaceful protest march?" asks Subhangi Tiwari, a cousin of Mr. Shekhar. "Both on emotional and physical level we're drained now. For the last 10 days we have been repeating the same thing to visiting journalists and other people," she adds.

Ms. Subhangi, Mr. Shekhar's mother Sheela Tiwari and his sister-in-law Debadri-



Champak, with aunt Debadrita Tiwari, at a prayer meeting in Varanasi on Saturday . • RANJEET KUMAR

ta Tiwari have been the biggest support for Champak in the absence of her parents. "We take turns to be with her," they say.

#### Trauma for family

Elder brother Sashikant Tiwari, who runs an English speaking coaching institute in Varanasi, is busy pursuing legal proceedings to get Mr. Shekhar and his wife released from jail. "It's been traumatic for the family, especially for Champak," he

On Saturday afternoon, Champak joined her family members, social activists and local schoolchildren at a prayer meeting with a placard "Mummy-papa kab aayenge? (When will mum-

my-papa come?)". On Monday, she and her grandmother will visit Prime Minister Narendra Modi's local office in Ravindrapuri to request him to release her parents, says Mr. Sashikant. Mr. Modi has won parliamentary election twice from Varanasi.

Septuagenarian Mr. Krishna Kumar says, "In our whole life we have never been to police station or court. This is very painful and disheartening. It seems we have ceased to be citizens of this country."

Both Mr. Shekhar and Ms. Ekta are activists espousing the cause of environment and climate change. They have organised over 200 campaigns in different parts of U.P. this year alone.

### Modi govt. damaging spirit of the Constitution, says Punjab Cong. chief

'It is playing up emotional issues to cover up its mistakes'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee president Sunil Jakhar on Saturday said the NDA government, of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was damaging the spirit of the Constitution.

At an event to mark the Congress's foundation day, he said the Congress would never allow the BJP to violate the Constitution's mandate. "Mr. Modi came to power promising the poor the moon; but he has forgotten



his promises, and is busy serving the interests of industrialists. The government is playing up such emotional issues as the Citizenship

(Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens to cover up its failures," he

Mr. Jakhar said the Congress had evolved amid long struggles, always associating itself with the people. It had always stood for the uplift of the poor. The successive Congress governments, he said, had implemented such welfare programmes as the Food Security Act, the MGNREGA, the right to education and the right to infor-

### Row over Meerut police officer's remark

He is said to have told those protesting against the CAA to 'go to Pakistan'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

A police officer in Meerut has triggered a controversy after he was caught on camera allegedly telling protesters to "go to Pakistan", during the violence that broke out in the western Uttar Pradesh city last week over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

A video of the incident, which the police said happened on December 20, was widely shared on social me-

1.43-minute clip shows Akhilesh Narayan Singh, posted as Additional SP, City, talking to a small

The choice of words could have been better. But officials showed restraint and didn't misbehave with the other people

standing there

ADG, Meerut Zone

group of people in a narrow lane as his colleagues march in. "Tell the protesters who have tied black and yellow bands to go to Pakistan. You will eat here but praise some other place," Mr. Singh said. He told them that he

would remember the lane and could even "reach their grandmothers".

'Slogans objectionable' Later, clarifying his remarks, Mr. Singh said he was reacting to some boys in the lane shouting 'Pakistan zindabad' slogans and fleeing,

amid stone-throwing in the

"I told them that if you make such comments, then you go where you like it better. I told them if you raise Pakistan zindabad slogans and hate India so much that you throw stones, then go to Pakistan," he said. Their sloganeering was objectionable in that atmosphere, he ad-

Additional Director-General, Meerut Zone, Prashant Kumar, supported his officer, saying that given the sensitive atmosphere and stonethrowing, Mr. Singh had displayed restraint. "The choice of words, during normal circumstances, could have been better. But officials showed restraint and didn't misbehave with peo-

ple," Mr. Kumar said. Playing this video after a week also appeared to be "part of a conspiracy", the senior officer added.

### Muslims give ₹6.27 lakh for damaged property

They requested police to withdraw cases filed against members of the community

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

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 (CAA) in Uttar Pradesh this

While handing over the demand draft to officials on Friday, they requested the police and the administration to withdraw cases filed against community members in the aftermath of the protests on December 20, when incidents of violence were reported from other parts of the State.

"It is a welcome initiative by the people here who have realised that the property which got damaged during the violence belonged to them and involved their own tax money. Loss to public



anti-CAA protests, outside the Uttar Pradesh Bhawan in New Delhi. ■ FILE PHOTO: R V MOORTHY

property means loss to citizen's property," Bulandshahr District Magistrate Ra-Kumar presspersons.

**Raised from donations** A sum of ₹6,27,507, the dam-

ages assessed by the administration, has been raised through donations within the community, Haji Akram, a local councillor, said.

A police vehicle, along

with a wireless communication set, and one more separate communication set were destroyed during the violence, Mr. Kumar said.

Three FIRs were registered and 12 people arrested, while several others "unknown" were booked for violence, he said.

"There was no need for us

to send the notices because

the community members

had approached us with the

proposal to compensate for the losses," he said.

#### 'No politics'

On their request for withdrawal of cases against Muslim protesters, Mr. Kumar said, 'There will be no involvement of politics or religion in the case. I have assured them that no innocent will face any problem. The rest is for the police to probe."

Nineteen persons have lost their lives and several others, including policemen, injured in Uttar Pradesh since protests broke out against the CAA and the proposed implementation of a pan-India National Register of Citizens (NRC). The CAA provides for grant of citizenship to persecuted minority Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Jain, Buddhists and Parsis of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, who have taken refuge in India before December 31, 2014.

**ELSEWHERE** 

Pompeo slams Iran for

U.S. Secretary of State Mike

Pompeo on Friday slammed

Iran for using "violence" and

memorials for those killed

during the suppression of

people have the right to

mourn 1,500 victims

Pompeo tweeted. AFP

recent protests. "The Iranian

slaughtered by @khamenei\_ir

**Human remains in boat** 

possibly from N. Korea

Japanese police found the

remains of at least five

people in a wooden boat

suspected to be from North

Korea on the coast of one of

Japan's outlying islands on

official said. Police made the

boat's stem around 9:30 a.m.

(0030 GMT) on Saturday on

Saturday, a Coast Guard

discovery in the wooden

Sado island. REUTERS

during #IranProtests," Mr.

censorship to prevent

'suppressing' events

### 15 held for Hong Kong mall protests

Sheung Shui mall is located near the China border and is popular with shoppers from the mainland

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Hong Kong riot police arrest ed at least 15 people in clashes on Saturday with dozens of pro-democracy protesters, who targeted a mall near the border with China to demonstrate against mainland tourists and shoppers.

The fresh unrest ended a brief calm after protesters had battled riot police in shopping malls and streets of commercial districts across the city for three days over the Christmas period.

On Saturday afternoon, masked plain-clothed officers wielding batons arrested 14 people, including a 14year-old girl, who were protesting inside the mall in Sheung Shui district, forcing shops to shut and harassing shoppers, a reporter at the scene said.

Riot police in building Riot police charged into the mall to reinforce the officers and used pepper spray to disperse a crowd of residents who gathered to protest

U.S. Democratic presidential

contender Joe Biden on Sa-

turday said there would be

"no legal basis" for Republi-

cans to subpoena his testi-

mony in President Donald

Trump's impeachment trial,

clarifying remarks from Fri-

"I want to clarify someth-

ing I said yesterday. In my 40

years in public life, I have al-

day that drew criticism.

WASHINGTON

Upping the ante: Anti-government demonstrators walk with their hands raised past shops during a protest at the Sheung Shui shopping mall in Hong Kong on Saturday. • REUTERS against the arrests.

After the police left, some protesters stayed on a footbridge linking the mall to a metro station and harassed passers-by they thought were mainland Chinese tourists. Another man was arrested by riot police in a later incident inside the mall, his

No legal basis for subpoena: Biden

Trump wants the former V-P to testify in impeachment trial

Former Vice-President

ed with legitimate congres-

sional oversight requests,"

Mr. Biden tweeted. "But I am

just not going to pretend that

head covered in blood.

Similar protests and clashes also took place in a mall in Kowloon Bay district, where a number of people were arrested Saturday evening.

Blood and a black mask were seen by a reporter on the floor where plainclothed police subdued prot-

peachment trial." The state-

ment came one day after Mr.

Biden said in an interview

with the Des Moines Register

that he would not comply

with a Senate subpoena be-

cause it would be a tactic by

Mr. Trump to distract from

the President's wrongdoing.

substantiated charges that

Mr. Biden improperly tried

to halt a Ukrainian probe of a

company with ties to his

son, and has said he wants

Mr. Biden to testify in the im-

peachment trial.

Mr. Trump has raised un-

esters in the mall.

In recent years, Sheung Shui has been swamped by a huge influx of mainlanders and parallel traders seeking to circumvent Chinese taxes, angering many residents who have seen their local shops transformed to cater

Hong Kong's many malls have become regular protest venues as protesters try to cause economic disruption in their push for greater democratic freedoms and police accountability. The last month had seen a drop in violence and protests after pro-democracy candidates won a landslide at local elections.

But with Beijing and city leaders refusing further concessions, rallies and clashes reignited over the Christmas

The protests were initially sparked by a now-abandoned attempt to allow extraditions to the authoritarian mainland.

They have since morphed into a popular revolt against Beijing's rule, with spiralling fears that the city is losing some of its unique liberties. Among the demands being made by protesters is an inquiry into the police, an amnesty for the more than 6,000 people arrested and the right to elect Hong Kong's leader.

### U.S. contractor in Iraq killed in rocket fire

Iraqi military base in Kirkuk targeted

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

A rocket attack in Iraq killed a U.S. civilian contractor, raising fears on Saturday that violence could escalate in the protest-hit country already engulfed in its worst political crisis in decades.

Washington recently promised "a decisive U.S. response" to a growing number of unclaimed attacks on its interests in Iraq, which it blames on pro-Iran factions.

Baghdad - which is close to both countries - risks being caught in the middle.

A barrage of 30 rockets was fired at the K1 Iraqi military base in Kirkuk, an oilrich region north of Baghdad on Friday, said a U.S. official. "One U.S. civilian contractor was killed and several U.S. service members and Iraqi personnel were wounded," said the U.S.-led coalition against the President signs decree for plebiscite on Constitution water cannon and tear gas. But after almost two hours Thousands of protesters

round of anti-government demonstrations that erupt ed more than two months

10 Afghan soldiers killed

in Taliban attack on base

Militants dug a tunnel and blew it up

The attack in Helmand

comes as local and interna-

tional forces brace for

another deadly winter amid

U.S.-Taliban talks to end the

On Tuesday, seven Af-

ghan soldiers were killed in

a Taliban attack on a base in

the northern province of

Winter once marked a slow-

down in the so-called "fight-

ing season", with Taliban

fighters returning to their

villages while snow and ice

made attacks more difficult

to pull off. But in recent

years, the distinction bet-

ween seasons has all but

Deadly violence conti-

nues to grip Afghanistan

even as the U.S. and the Tali-

ban negotiate on-off talks

aimed at reducing Ameri-

ca's military footprint in the

country in return for the in-

surgents ensuring an im-

proved security situation.

vanished.

Attacks in winter

violence in Afghanistan.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Ten Afghan soldiers were

killed in a Taliban attack on

a military base in the south-

ern province of Helmand on

into the base in volatile San-

gin district and then blew it

up before their fighters

could attack the compound.

said Nawab Zadran a spo-

kesman for 215 Maiwand Ar-

my Corps in southern Af-

the base at the time of the at-

tack providing security for

the people of Sangin. Four

soldiers were wounded and

four repelled the Taliban at-

Omar Zawak confirmed the

attack and said the soldiers

were killed by the powerful

blast inside the base. Tali-

ban spokesman Zabihullah

Mujahid in a statement sent

to media claimed responsi-

bility for the attack.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

clashed with police on Fri-

day in Santiago in a fresh

spokesman

tack bravely," he said.

Provincial

"There were 18 soldiers in

ghanistan.

The Taliban dug a tunnel

Saturday, officials said.

ago in Chile. The rally took place in the Plaza Italia, which has since October 18 become the epicentre of massive citizen protests against President Sebastian Pinera's rightwing government.

Police entered the square in mid-afternoon and dispersed demonstrators with of confrontations, thousands of protesters finally occupied the plaza, according to reporters.

Social unrest

Chile sees fresh round of clashes

Authorities have been trying to restore calm in downtown Santiago, which has been roiled by a crisis that initially erupted over metro fare hikes but quickly escalated into the most severe outbreak of social unrest since the end of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet nearly

Chileans have taken to the streets to register their anger over inequality and particularly to vent at the elites that control much of the country's wealth.

Friday's demonstration occurred the same day Mr. Pinera signed a decree calling for a plebiscite on April 26 to decide whether to replace the current Constitution, which dates back to Pinochet's rule. Many in Chile see replacing the Constitution - which smacks of a dark, repressive chapter in the country's past – as a way to help end the crisis.

#### ways complied with a lawful there is any legal basis for order and in my eight years Republican subpoenas for as V-P, my office... cooperatmy testimony in the im-+ Algerian President

Abdelaziz Djerad is also an academic

names ex-diplomat as PM

REUTERS

Algeria's President Abdelmadjid Tebboune on Saturday named a university professor and former diplomat as Prime Minister as he builds a new government to handle political unrest and a looming economic challenge.

Abdelaziz Djerad, 65, served in the administration of a previous President in the 1990s, but was sidelined by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was ousted in April after two decades as head of state.

The massive street protest movement that prompted Mr. Bouteflika to step down regarded Mr. Tebboune's election this month



Abdelaziz Djerad, Algeria's new Prime Minister.

as illegitimate and it seems unlikely to accept any government he appoints.

The protesters rejected any election that took place while the military stayed involved in politics and Bouteflika-era figures retained powerful positions.

### Kazakh jet's black boxes sent to Moscow

Country in mourning a day after airliner slammed into a house

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Kazakhstan observed a national day of mourning on Saturday after 12 people died when an airliner crashed shortly after take-off and slammed into a house.

Witnesses spoke of the

terrified screams of passengers as the plane came down on the edge of the country's biggest city Almaty on Friday, but many on board managed to walk away without serious injury. The jet carrying nearly 100 passengers operated by budget carrier Bek Air was torn apart and its nose crushed on impact with a two-storey building just minutes after taking off en route to the capital Nur-Sultan.

Kazakh authorities have launched an investigation to



Little hearts: Tributes were paid in the form of candles and paper aeroplanes near the Almaty Airport to those killed in Friday's crash. • AP

determine the cause of the disaster, and the plane's black boxes have been sent to Moscow for examination, according to Deputy Industry Minister Berik Kamilyev, cited by Russian news

agencies. In Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan's largest flag was at halfmast for the day of mourning while officials made urgent appeals for blood donations to help the dozens of injured Neighbouring Russia and China were among the countries to join the Vatican and the Euro-

pean Union in expressing condolences to the former Soviet Central Asian republic. Officials say the Fokker 100 plane's tail hit the tarmac twice on Friday during take-off before it came down and crashed into the concrete building.

"Either this is a pilot error, or there were technical reasons," Deputy Prime Minister Roman Sklyar said at a press conference in Almaty on Friday. "The aircraft split into two parts. Most of the passengers who died were in the front part."

According to Kazakh emergency authorities, the 12 dead included the pilot. Another 47 passengers out of the 98 people on-board were still in hospital on Saturday. Nine of them were children,

### China bans 'labour camp' detention for sex workers

The system will cease from Dec. 29

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Chinese lawmakers on Saturday voted to abolish the 'custody and education' punishment system, which allowed police to hold sex workers and their clients without charge for up to two years, state media reported.

Critics say the nearly three-decade-old system has little to do with education.

"Sex workers are subjected to police violence... forced labour, compulsory testing for sexually transmitted disease... humiliation and physical violence at these centres," said Shen Tingting, director of advocacy and policy at Asia Catalyst, an NGO working with

people in the publishing in-

dustry wondered whether

the political content of Mr.

Woodward's book, rather

than the trade war, stymied

its release. The Communist

Party's Central Publicity De-

partment, which manages

the book approval process,

did not respond to faxed

region. Abolishing this system is a "significant positive step," she said. The arbitrary detention system will cease from December 29, and those held at "education centers" should be released immediately, state agency reported.

marginalised groups in the

There has been a public push to close the centres ever since China's top legislative committee abolished its system of "re-education through labour camps" in 2013.

Shutting the labour camps - introduced as a speedy way to handle petty offenders - ended a practice long criticised by human rights groups.

#### **SUDOKU**

	7	6					9	
								6
		2		5	1			6 4 8
			2			3		8
	2		1		5		6	
6		3			7			
6 5 3			3	2		1		
3								
	1					9	5	

#### Solution to vesterday's Sudoku

7	8	6	4	2	9	1	5	(
4	2	3	8	5	1	9	6	7
9	5		3					
3			1					
8	6	4	2	9	5	7	3	•
5	1	2	7	3	4	6	9	8
2	3	5	6	8	7	4	1	(
1	9	7	5	4	2	3	8	(
6	4	8	9	1	3	5	7	2

#### DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

-			٠,٠			, -			-
7	8	6	4	2	9	1	5	3	
4	2	3	8	5	1	9	6	7	
9	5	1	3			8	2	4	
3	7	9	-		8	2	4	5	
8	6	4	2			7	3	1	1007900
5	1	2	7	3	4	6	9	8	colpular.
2	1	5	6	8	7	4	1	9	OUT: MINN
	9	7	5	4	2	3	8	6	7 Distribut
6	4	8	9	1	3	5	7	2	No. 30457

### China targets another American product: books

There has been a near-freeze in regulatory approvals for books from the U.S., including bestsellers

LIN QIQING PAUL MOZUR

SHANGHAI

China has taken aim at major American businesses as it looks for ways to retaliate against President Donald Trump's mounting tariffs. It has targeted cars, beef and soya beans - and, apparently, Bob Woodward's latest tale of Washington dysfunction and intrigue.

Fear: Trump in the White House, which Mr. Woodward wrote in 2018, is one of hundreds of American books held up by Chinese publishing regulators since the trade war intensified this year. Publishers inside and outside China say the release of American books has come to a virtual standstill, cutting them off from a big market of voracious readers.

"American writers and scholars are very important in every sector," said Sophie Lin, an editor at a private publishing company in Beijing. "It has had a tremendous impact on us and on the industry." After new titles failed to gain approval, she said, her company stopped editing and translating about a dozen pending books to cut The Chinese book world is

cautiously optimistic that the partial trade truce reached this month between Beijing and Washington will break the logjam, according to book editors and others in the publishing industry who spoke to The New York Times. Already, they said, some have won approvals after China celebrated its National Day on October 1, a politically perilous event that had Chinese officials on edge. But they also worry that American books could be targeted in future crackdowns.

A review of lists of books that had been set to be published this year shows a wide variety of bestsellers and academic titles alike that have failed to appear as promised. Besides Mr. Woodward's book, they include a



**Hurting bibliophiles:** A bookstore located near Peking University in Beijing. • NYT

translation of the 1973 novel Child of God, by Cormac McCarthy; Asymmetry, the first novel by Lisa Halliday; Marriage: A History, Stephanie Coontz's nonfiction look at humanity's most intimate partnership; China and Japan, about the turbulent history between the Asian giants by influential Sinologist Ezra Vogel; and a new not clear. For example, some

Chinese version of Public people in China.

**Risky business** The reasons for the delayed publication of each title are

Philosophy: Essays on Morality in Politics, by Harvard professor Michael Sandel, whose online courses have been a hit with many young

questions. Still, publishing industry insiders describe a nearfreeze of regulatory approvals, one that could make the publishing industry reluctant to buy the rights to sell American books in China.

"Chinese publishers will definitely change their focus," said Andy Liu, an editor at a Beijing publishing company, adding that the U.S. was one of China's most frequent and profitable sources of books.

"Publishing American books is now a risky business," he said. "It's shaking the very premise of trying to introduce foreign books" as a business. NY TIMES

#### **UAE** denies spying using popular app

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Saturday denied reports that a popular mobile application developed in the country was used for government spying.

Apple and Google removed the ToTok app from their marketplaces last week following a report claiming it allowed the UAE government to track users' conversations and other details. But the country's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority said in a statement that UAE laws "prohibit any kind of data breach and unlawful interception".

ToTok became popular by offering free calling and messaging. But U.S. intelligence officials and a security researcher determined that the app was being used by the UAE government for surveillance, The New York Times reported on December 22.

13 of 19 government lenders back in black, GNPAs down 18%, says Sitharaman

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Out of 19 public sector banks (PSBs) that had posted losses in 2018-19, 13 have returned to profitability in the first half of 2019-20, while gross non-performing assets (NPAs) had fallen 18% since last March.

After a meeting with PSB heads on Saturday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said extensive government reforms had restored banks to health. Gross NPAs of PSBs had fallen from ₹8.96 lakh crore in March 2018 to ₹7.27 lakh crore in September 2019 with provision coverage ratio rising to more than 76%, the highest level in seven years, according to a Ministry statement.

Responding to concerns over "undue harassment" by enforcement agencies hampering banks from taking lending decisions, Ms. Sitharaman said the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) would not take suo motu action without referral from internal bank vigilance com-



Nirmala Sitharaman allayed fears of PSB chiefs over 'undue harassment' by enforcement agencies. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

mittees. "In the recent past, banks have gone through a slightly worrying period, wherein decision-making was getting stifled," said Ms. Sitharaman, adding a sense of fear of "what the banks would say is undue harassment, uncalled-for harassment" by the three Cs – the CBI, CVC and CAG - was preventing genuine, bona fide decisions from being taken.

"Bankers were assured that prudent commercial decision-making would be protected," said a Finance Ministry statement after the meeting, which was attended by the CBI Director also.

Meetings with ED, DRI The Minister said similar meetings would be held with the Enforcement Directorate, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and Customs Department to ensure that undue apprehensions did not hinder lending.

"No case, whatsoever, involving banks goes to the CBI

without banks themselves deciding to send it. There is no suo motu case that the CBI takes against the bank," said Ms. Sitharaman, explaining the process whereby the internal committees of banks would examine suspicions of fraudulent activities involving ₹3 crore or more before deciding to refer it to the CBI. This mechanism needs to

be made more robust, she

said, calling for speedy action for disposal of vigilance cases against PSB officials that have been pending for years. This comes a day after an RBI report said frauds reported by banks - both private and public - during the first half of 2019-20 had touched an all-time high of ₹1.13 lakh crore, mostly due to delay in detection by the lenders. To aid debt recovery, the Ministry has launched e-Bkraya, a common e-auction platform to sell 1.73 lakh properties, worth ₹2.3 lakh crore, that have been attached by PSBs over the last three years.

### **Reforms restored PSBs' health** FPI flows cross ₹1-lakh crore in 2019

2003

2004

2005

2006

2007

2008

2009

2010

2011

2012

2014

2015

2016

2017

2018

2019

Cumulative flows since September pegged at about ₹51,500 crore

Rich pickings Year

buyers at more than

calendar year only on

four occasions - 2019, 2013, 2012 and 2010 -

with the highest single-

vear flows registered in

2010 at ₹1.33 lakh crore

₹1 lakh crore in a

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR

The year 2019 saw foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) betting big on Indian equities with total inflows breaching the ₹1 lakh-crore mark only for the fourth time ever and the first since 2013.

According to data from the National Securities Depository Ltd. (NSDL), FPIs have been net buyers at a little over ₹1 lakh crore in the current calendar year, the highest since 2013 when they net bought Indian shares worth ₹1.13 lakh crore.

Incidentally, FPIs have been net buyers at more than ₹1 lakh crore in a calendar year only on four occasions - 2019, 2013, 2012 and 2010 - with the highest single-year flows registered in 2010 at ₹1.33 lakh crore.

#### **Highest monthly flow**

Further, the year also saw FPIs pumping in almost ₹34,000 crore in March, which was the highest-ever single-month flows registered ever. Since September, FPIs have been net buyers in every single month with the cumulative flows until December pegged at about ₹51,500 crore.

Not surprisingly, the year also saw the benchmark indices breaching record levels on various occasions with the 30-share Sensex touch-

ing a high of 41,810 on December 20. FPIs are often considered to be the prime drivers of any bull run in the Indian stock markets.

FPI flows (in ₹ Cr.)

30,459

38,965

47,181

36,540

71,487

-52.987

83,424

1,33,266

1,28,360

1,13,136

97,054

17,808

20,568

51,252

-33,014

1,00,086

-2,714

Debt

3,084

4.049

9,428

11,772

83,424

46,408

42,067

34,988

-50,849

1,59,156

45,857

-4,3647

1,48,808

-47,795

26,809

A recent note by Edelweiss Securities highlighted that FPI ownership in BFSI banking, financial services the oil and gas sector, saw a significant increase during the year even as sectors such as IT, FMCG, pharmaceuticals and automobiles saw a drop in foreign holdings.

#### **BFSI** exposure

"BFSI saw FPI ownership increasing by 186 basis points (bps) last month and by (approximately) 263 bps over last 12 months. Similarly FPI ownership in insurance was up by 9 bps over the previous month and 168 bps over the last 12 months," stated the report, adding oil and gas exposure of FPIs increased by 197 basis points over the last 12 months primarily due to buying in sector heavyweight Reliance Industries, along with the oil marketing firms.

On the other hand, the automobile sector saw a 147 bps fall in FPI ownership during the year that saw the overall exposure of overseas investors drop by \$4.6 billion. Even the IT sector saw a 135 bps fall in the FPI ownership in the last 12 months.

### ITI to come out with follow-on public offer in January

Public sector unit aims to raise about ₹1,600 core

MINI TEJASWI

Public sector ITI Ltd. is scheduled to float a follow-on public offer (FPO) to list an additional 18 crore equity shares in the third or fourth week of January.

Rakesh Mohan Agarwal, CMD, ITI, told The Hindu the public offer, to raise about ₹1,600-crore, will most likely open on January 20 and close on January 25 subject to board decision.

ITI has an order book worth ₹22,000 crore to be executed over three years. It has been a listed since the mid-90s. The Centre holds 89.7% stake in ITI with the Government of Karnataka

According to Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) regulations, a listed company should have a miof 25%. Post FPO, the go- years, the company, which gins," he explained.



Rakesh Mohan Agarwal

vernment holding will come down to below 75%. QIIs (qualified institutional investors) will hold 15% and high networth individuals (HNIs) and general public 10%.

Mr. Agarwal said the topmost priority of the company was to turn cash rich. It had turned profitable a few years ago. "We had hit the ground and now on, we can only fly high," he said.

was once the sole telecom equipment provider for the country, made a profit of ₹27 crore in 2017-18. A year later, it posted ₹1,870 crore turnover and a profit of ₹110

Mr. Agarwal said the ITI had changed its business model. Traditionally, the PSU was giving out telecom and defence projects it received to third party integrators and deployment partners and earned a certain margin. "We have realised this approach was hurting us financially and therefore we adopted a strategic shift in doing projects. As a result, currently, we are installing, implementing and maintaining all our projects by ourselves instead of giving it to third parties like L&T, Huawei and Ericsson and others. This is positively impacting

### Bank deposit cover set for increase

DICGC proposes raising cover from the current ₹1 lakh to ₹3 lakh-₹5 lakh

MANOJIT SAHA

Following the recent incidence of fraud at the Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative Bank (PMC Bank), which caused panic among some sections of the depositors, the government is vetting a proposal from the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) to increase the deposit insurance limit.

Sources in the know of the development said, the DICGC – a subsidiary of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) - had sent a proposal to the government for increasing the deposit insurance cover to between ₹3 lakh and ₹5 lakh. At present, deposits up to ₹1 lakh are insured by the DICGC. Sources said the decision was taken after consultation with the RBI. The final call on the extent of deposits that will be insured would be taken by the government.

For deposit insurance to been increased on four occa- among depositors and there ing regulator.



Safety net: The final call on the extent of deposits that will be insured would be taken by the government. • REUTERS

increase, the DICGC Act needs to be amended, for which Cabinet approval is required. Sources indicated that it would take some time before the Act was amended.

The last time the insurance cover was increased was in May 1993, when it was raised from ₹30,000 to the current ₹1 lakh. Since its inception in January 1968. when the cover was ₹5,000, the amount insured has ties. This caused panic

sions - first in April 1970, then in January 1976, subsequently in July 1980 and lastly, in May 1993.

The demand for increase in deposit insurance grew stronger after the RBI imposed various restrictions, including a cap on deposit withdrawal, for accounts held with the PMC Bank in the last week of September due to financial irregulariwere rumours about the safety of the banking system.

This prompted the RBI to issue statements twice in the last three months, assuring that the the Indian banking system was 'safe and stable.'

The RBI also increased the deposit withdrawal limit of PMC Bank in several phases to ₹50,000. With the withdrawal cap raised to ₹50,000, more than 78% of the depositors of PMC Bank would be able to withdraw their entire account balance, the RBI had said.

The DICGC insures all bank deposits, such as savings, fixed, current and recurring, but not deposits of foreign governments and of central/ State governments, deposits of State Land Development Banks with the State co-operative banks, inter-bank deposits, deposits received outside India and those specifically exempted by the Corporation with the prior approval of the bank-

#### Pronab Sen to head panel on statistics

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Statistics

and Programme Implementation has constituted a 28-member Standing Committee on Statistics (SCES) chaired by former Chief Statistician Pronab Sen to improve quality of data amid criticism of the government over political interference.

"The first meeting of the SCES is scheduled for January 6, 2020. The agenda would be very broadbased. We will come to know about that only in the first meeting next month," Mr. Sen said.

Earlier, in March this year, expressing concern over "political interference" in influencing statistical data in India, as many as 108 economists and social scientists had called for restoration of "institutional independence" and inteorganisations.

#### INTERVIEW | RAMKUMAR RAMAMOORTHY

### Problem-finding skills are now in demand

Technology is no longer just the enabler, technology is the business, says Cognizant India's CMD

Counting experience in the academia among the first jobs he held more than a couple of decades ago. Ramkumar Ramamoorthy earned his stripes with a long innings in Cognizant before taking over as CMD of the India arm. At the helm of the second-largest employer in India's private sector, attracting and growing talent is one of his key mandates. Edited excerpts from an interview:

Unemployable graduates have been a problem. Has this worsened?

■ As one of the largest recruiters of graduate talent in the country across engineering, science, management and liberal arts, I would argue that we have seen a decent increase in quantity and quality of graduate students in the past few years. But is it enough? Not really.

The expanded talent pool is driven by four factors: corporates, including prominent leaders such as Azim Premji and Shiv Nadar, have entered higher education in a meaningful way; dozens of private universities such as Ashoka, Flame, Lovely and KREA have significantly expanded the pool of talent; many institutions such as BITS-Pilani, VIT, Sastra and ISB have established satellite or extended campuses across the country and overseas; and fourth, with newer learning platforms and massive open online course providers such as Coursera, Udacity and Udemy, rich and curated learning content is made available and students are lapping it up. This has substantially improved access, quality and equity in learning. In fact, during recruiting, almost every graduate student presents nanodegrees and micro-credentials that they have obtained.

How is talent availability influencing growth?

■ The IT industry is not demand constrained; we are supply constrained. While there have been efforts to expand the talent pool, it is still not enough. I was with a bunch of CEOs last week in Delhi and one of them said, if only he had access to 50 skilled drone operators, he would hire them right away.

With digital, it's not about merely participating in market opportunities. We have the ability to shape them.

Are these skills readily

■ Today, skills aren't viewed just in terms of data science, automation or cybersecurity. Earlier, clients knew their business problems and brought in partners to solve them. Today, many clients do not know what the business problem is in all areas. Large banks like Citigroup

and Bank of America are today battling robo-advisory wealth management startups like Wealthfront and Betterment with about \$25 billion in assets under management. Large banks need help in ideating on how to win against new-age firms. What they need today is not just problem-solving capability but problem-finding skills. Critical thinking, creativity, cognitive flexibility, inter-disciplinary thinking and emotional intelligence are key.

How do you drive talent development?

■ As an industry, we do not have the skills needed at scale to capitalise on the massive opportunity unleashed by digital technologies; I work closely with educational bodies such as AICTE/UGC, Vice Chancellors and Deans of universities, and new-age learning and skilling partners to shape curriculum, drive faculty development programmes and bring

about greater industryacademia linkages, thereby being

day. Let me give you examples from our battle grounds

Where will Cognizant place bets in the digital context?

gelist of educational reforms

as well as newer models of

continuous learning and

'learnagility.'

Our strategy is two-fold: we will protect and optimise our heritage business that accounts for about 65% of our revenue; this includes driving efficiency, automation and tooling, delivery optimisation, and protecting renewal deals, strengthening our industry focus, as well as scaling our international footprint. Today, our international revenues are about 25% of global revenues; second, we will invest significantly in four key digital battlegrounds: data, digital engineering, cloud, and IoT.

Have digital technologies matured or are they still in pilot mode?

> ■ Digital is front and centre of everything our clients are doing to-

I cited. Data is the core of our clients' competitiveness.

Clients need to get better at storing, managing, reporting, analysing, and reusing their data. Clients need to leverage data to build Artificial Intelligence-based platforms that can transform customer experiences. We are helping clients shift from systems of record to systems of engagement. It is estimated that 50% of all workloads sit on public and private clouds today; this is set to increase to 80% in the next two years. An IDC forecast indicates that 42 billion devices are expected to be IoT-connected by 2025. Technology is no longer an enabler, technology is the business.

We see IT services firms buying consultancies. What value do they bring?

■ Niche consultancies bring capabilities, tools, methodologies and platforms that help us rapidly scale our nascent portfolios or quickly expand our existing portfolios.

Our recent pact to acquire Contino helps us to enable Global 2000 clients to speed their digital transformation programmes by leveraging enterprise DevOps methodologies and advanced data platforms. Contino's approach to cloud migration, core modernisation and cloud security is reshaping how enterprises build their

infrastructures.



### **Protecting minors**

In the context of protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, and the detention of minors in some instances, what does the law say about such detentions by the police? What role do commissions play?

JAYANT SRIRAM

**The story so far:** As protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 rocked the country over the last two weeks there have been several instances of police clashing with and detaining protesters. In several cases, those detained were minors under 18 years. Two notable instances have been reported. Last week, the Uttar Pradesh police detained at least five minors, between the ages of 13 and 17, at the Bijnor Police Cantonment and allegedly tortured them over a period of 48 hours before releasing them. In another instance, eight minors were among 40 detained after violence broke out near Delhi gate in Daryaganj, part of the old city (Delhi), during protests. Acting on the complaints of lawyers, these minors were released by a magistrate who noted that the detention of children in a police station in the first instance is a 'flagrant violation of the law'.

#### What does the Juvenile Justice Act say about detention of minors?

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 has specific procedures and rules in relation to children found to be in conflict with the law. Under

In no case, the Juvenile Justice Act states, should a child alleged to be in conflict with the law be placed in a police lock-up or lodged in a jail

Section 10, it says that as soon as a child alleged to be in conflict with law is apprehended by the police, the child shall be placed under the charge of the special juvenile police unit or the designated child welfare police officer. That officer in turn, should produce the child before the Juvenile Justice Board within a period of 24

hours excluding the time necessary for the journey from the place where the child was picked up. In no case, it clearly states, should a child alleged to be in conflict with the law be placed in a police lock-up or lodged in a jail.

#### What are the statutory bodies responsible for protecting the rights of children in India?

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) is a statutory body set up in 2007 under the Commission for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005. The objective of the commission is to protect, promote and defend child rights in India including the rights adopted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 – with an accession by India in 1992. The same convention defines a child as being a human being under 18. The NCPCR was established by an Act of Parliament, and is thus a statutory body. The commission works under the aegis of the Ministry of Women and Child Development. State Commissions for the protection of child's rights are also to be established under its supervision.

#### What are the powers of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)?

The powers given to the commission are extremely broad. It examines and reviews the safeguards provided under any law for the protection of child rights and recommends measures to the government. It can present a report annually, or as it deems fit, for implementation of these measures. The commission can also inquire into the violation of child rights and recommend initiation of proceedings in such cases. While inquiring into such matters, the NCPCR has the powers of a civil court. In addition it has a host of other powers in terms of commissioning research and framing policy for child protection and safety.

Has the NCPCR intervened in the matter of minors being detained during the anti-CAA protests? Not directly. When the protests first started, the NCPCR, on December 14, issued an advisory to the Directors General of Police of all States regarding the "use of children in unlawful activities like stone-pelting during the protests in various States against the amended Citizenship Act".

The NCPCR said it had come to its notice that certain groups of protesters were involving children in unlawful activities such as stone-pelting and other violent acts during the protests. The NCPCR said that that such use of children violates the rights of children under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

Guidelines of the NCPCR in respect to children's rights in areas of civil unrest, state that police and military authorities should avoid blanket characterisation of adolescent boys as security threats and that "they' (authorities) should take any arbitrary detention, mistreatment, or torture of children extremely seriously, investigate any reports of grave violations immediately, and take action against personnel involved.

### Is the economy in really bad shape?

Is this a result of a cyclical phenomenon or has it been driven by a structural malaise arising from deficiencies in the economic framework?

VIKAS DHOOT

The story so far: On November 30 this year, India's statistical machinery revealed that growth in the quarter from July to September had slipped to 4.5%. This was the lowest level recorded in six-and-a-half years, with the 6.1% nominal GDP growth (real growth plus inflation) coming in as the slowest in a decade. Compared to the previous quarter when growth clocked 5%, the 4.5% print was not a dramatic downswing, but capped off a slow and steady dip in growth over six quarters in a row following a robust 8.1% growth recorded between January and March of 2018. Growth in the first half of this financial year has been just 4.8%, compared to 7.5% in the same period of 2018-19. Fixed investment slumped to 1%, private consumption growth halved year on year, and manufacturing activity contracted by 1%.

#### What do the numbers mean?

The omens from high frequency economic indicators for the first two months of the third quarter do not augur well for the third quarter's performance to improve much, if at all. Industrial output shrank 3.8% in October, the second straight month of contraction following a 4.3% dip recorded in September and belying expectations that festive demand may revitalise production activity. Manufacturing activity dipped for the third month in a row in October.

But most telling was the 12.2% decline in electricity generation (the second month it had dipped) as it is a good barometer of demand generated by all economic activity, not just industrial production. Imports, merchandise exports, automobile sales, bank credit... metrics one would usually look at to assess economic activity and consumption, are glowing red in official statistics. For November, Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections crossed ₹1,03,000 crore, registering a 6% growth after two straight months of negative growth. It remains to be seen if this can be sustained, even as bank credit growth is expected to hit a 58-year low in 2019-

Amidst this gradual slowdown over the past year-anda-half, the saving grace for the economy and consumers was that inflation had been friendly and benign. That is no longer the case with retail inflation hitting a 40-month high of 5.54% in November, more than double the 2.3% recorded a year ago. Food inflation hit 10%, led by vegetables (think of onions) and pulses. This has led to worries about India entering a phase of stagflation, where growth and employment are low but inflation is high – a difficult morass for policy makers to swim out of. Any further spike in inflation, that takes it closer to or over the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) tolerance limit of 6%, will take the option of cutting interest rates for spurring growth out of the equation, for instance. The official third quarter growth numbers will be out on February 28, weeks after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents the second Union Budget. But an advance GDP estimate for the full year is expected early next month.

#### Why is former Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) Arvind Subramanian calling it India's great slowdown?

The economy's "seemingly sudden" illness is unusually severe, Mr. Subramanian has noted in a new working paper co-authored with Josh Felman for the Harvard

University's Center for International Development. "This is not an ordinary slowdown. It is India's Great Slowdown, where the economy seems headed for the intensive care unit," the paper stresses. Comparing indicators for the first seven months of this financial year with the past, the two have made the case that the current slowdown is closer in nature to what was faced as

While dissecting the slowdown, many have argued on whether this has been driven by a structural malaise caused by significant deficiencies in the economy's framework, such as archaic rules governing factor markets. Several others, including some in the government, suggest that this is a cyclical phenomenon and will pass like the circle of life... what goes up, must come down, et al. The World Bank has said this cyclical slowdown is severe. This camp's rationale for the slowdown focuses on demand collapsing due to reasons ranging from poor rural income growth, the ghosts of demonetisation and a hastily implemented Goods and

far back as 1991 – the year India liberalised.

Mr. Subramanian's paper with Mr. Felman reckons that India's current crisis is driven by both cyclical and structural factors – but problems in finance have exacerbated the slowdown.

Demonetisation and GST may have hurt growth, but cannot be the reason for the precipitous fall in recent

Revisions to India's outlook have come from almost every global institution, including the Asian Development Bank, the OECD and rating agencies

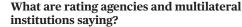
quarters. The preface to this crisis began in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. when slower growth threw out of whack bullish assumptions driving large infrastructure investments. That was the first stress point for banks, and investment and exports that had driven growth through the early 2000s

stumbled. That India's growth recovered without fixing these problems adequately, the paper ascribes to a series of fortuitous developments such as lower oil prices and a boom in credit from non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) which may be partly driven by demonetisation sending more cash into the formal financial system.

With the collapse of IL&FS in late 2018, that party has ended too. And now the twin balance sheet crisis (of stressed banks and corporates with infrastructure bets) that Mr. Subramanian flagged as a CEA, has become a Four Balance Sheet challenge (adding stressed NBFCs and

The paper, titled "India's Great Slowdown: What Happened? What's the Way Out?" (https:// bit.ly/2Ql2E3q), underlines: "All major engines of growth, this time also including consumption, have sputtered, causing growth to collapse... Something must be done to get India out of its current vicious cycle, in which low growth is further damaging balance sheets, and

deteriorating balance sheets are bringing down growth.'



The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had already pared India's growth estimate for this year to 6.1% in October from its earlier forecast of 7%, but is now expected to slash it further with the country in the "midst of a significant economic slowdown". The World Bank had said in October that it expects 6% growth but even achieving this range (6% to 6.1%) would require a significant uptick in the second half of this fiscal.

The most glaring downgrade for India came from global rating agency Moody's Investor Services which switched India's sovereign rating outlook from "Stable" to "Negative" in early November, citing enhanced growth risks. A week later, it also lowered growth expectations to 5.6% (from an earlier 6.2% hope) for 2019, saying the slowdown is lasting longer than it expected. In October, Fitch Ratings lowered its growth estimate for 2019-20 to 5.5% from 6.6%. Similar revisions have come from almost every other global institution, including the Asian Development Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and rating agency Standard & Poor's (S&P). These gloomy estimates still appear rosy compared to expectations from those closer to the ground. India-based, S&P-owned rating agency CRISIL has pegged down its growth hopes from 6.3% to just 5.1%, stressing that the slowdown has deepened.

#### What can the Union Budget do to help?

The government has rolled back several measures perceived to be deterrents for investors in the Budget for 2019-20 presented in July; in September, it even slashed corporate taxes significantly in a bid to attract fresh investments. The Finance Ministry has unveiled some packages for particularly embattled industry sectors such as NBFCs and real estate to salvage the situation even as it has hinted that the slowdown is not structural, but cyclical and driven by global growth pressures. On its part, the central bank has slashed its key interest rates by 1.35% or 135 basis points over the past year, in a bid to spur growth too. In an interview to this paper, the RBI Governor has mooted some "countercyclical steps" (read tax cuts and higher public spending) and continuation of structural reforms to revive the growth project.

But the room for tax cuts – after those announced in September set the exchequer back by ₹1.45 lakh crore – is very limited. GST collections this year have also been tepid and below target, leaving little room for the Centre to spend its way out of trouble. Stoking of inflationary pressures also need to be avoided. Given the constraints, the challenge for the Finance Minister is unenviable, but a focus on fixing the core crisis afflicting India's financial entities, creating a sense of certainty and predictability about India's policy direction, be it in taxation matters or reforms of labour, land and other restrictive laws, could provide some salve to the bleeding economy. We will know in 33 days from now.

### What is the directive on detention centres?

Those likely to be excluded from the NPR-NRC have a number of apprehensions. How have States responded?

VIJAITA SINGH

The story so far: On December 24, the Union Cabinet approved an outlay of over ₹3,941.35 crore for updating the National Population Register (NPR) across the country, barring Assam. A mandatory exercise, the NPR is to be conducted between April-September 2020. The NPR, first collated in 2010, already has a database of 119 crore residents. The fresh exercise will collect data on additional parameters such as "place of birth of father and mother, last place of residence" along with details like Aadhaar (optional), voter ID, mobile phone and driving licence numbers. As in the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003, and subsequent response furnished by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in Parliament from 2012 onwards, the NPR was the first step towards compiling the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) or National Register of Citizens (NRC). According to the Rules, a person's citizenship status will be decided by local officials. No new law or rules are needed to conduct this exercise across the country. The Assam NRC, conducted under the supervision of Supreme Court, excluded at least 19 lakh out of 3.29 crore residents. There are apprehensions that people will have to dig out old documents to prove their residency in India on the lines of the exercise done in Assam. After the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 was passed on December 11, there are fears that those excluded from NPR-NRC will be sent to detention centres. The government has denied that the NPR and the NRC are linked.

#### What are detention centres?

The Centre has the power to deport foreign nationals staying illegally in the country under Section 3(2)(c) of The Foreigners Act, 1946. State governments have also been entrusted under Article 258(1) of the Constitution to take similar steps. In 1998, the MHA under the then Atal Bihari Vajpayee government wrote a letter to all States and Union Territories asking them to restrict the movement of convicted foreign nationals who had completed their jail sentence. The letter said that they be confined to one of the detention centres/camps, pending confirmation of their nationality from the country concerned and to ensure their physical availability at all times for expeditious repatriation/deportation as soon as the travel documents are ready. The centres are also used to hold foreigners who have been caught overstaying

In 2009, the instructions were sent again to States, "conveying the detailed procedure to be adopted for deportation of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh". States were asked by the MHA to set up sufficient number of detention centres where the "suspected illegal immigrants would be detained pending their



deportation". Similar letters were sent in 2012, 2014 and 2018. On January 9, 2019, a detailed manual on "model detention centres" was circulated to make a distinction between "jails and detention centres".

The manual was prepared after a petition filed by activist Harsh Mander on September 20, 2018 in the Supreme Court of India to highlight the plight of families languishing in six detention centres in Assam where members of the families who were declared foreigners were put in camps separated from each other.

#### Which are the States that already have detention centres?

Delhi has one detention centre at Lampur on the outskirts. It is under the operational control of the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) and is maintained by the Delhi government. The ward holding Pakistanis is under the watch of the Special Branch of Delhi Police and other nationalities are under the FRRO. Both FRRO and the Delhi Police report to the MHA.

A detention centre was set up at Mapusa in Goa on February 7. Rajasthan has a detention centre located inside Central Jail in Alwar. As of now there is no separate detention centre in Punjab and foreigner detenues are kept in a segregated place at Central Jail in Amritsar. A separate detention centre is going to come up in a new jail being constructed in Goindwal Sahib in Tarn Taran district that is expected to be completed by May 2020. A detention centre on the outskirts of Karnataka's capital Bengaluru is all set to get operational from January 1, 2020 onwards. Maharashtra identified land to build a detention centre at Nerul in Navi Mumbai. But Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray assured a delegation that it was not connected to NRC. There is a report that the plan has been scrapped.

#### What about West Bengal and Kerala?

West Bengal had identified two locations, at New Town in Kolkata and Bongaon in North 24 Parganas district to

construct the detention centres. But on Friday Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said she will not allow any such centre in the State. Kerala, which was in the process of identifying a location to build a centre, has put it on

#### What is happening in Assam?

The final NRC to segregate Indian citizens living in Assam from those who had illegally entered the State from Bangladesh after March 25, 1971 was published on August 31, 2019. Nearly 19 lakh people were excluded from the final list. Those who have been excluded may move Foreigners Tribunals (FTs) and can also appeal to courts if the FTs give a verdict against them. This process has not started. The Assam government wants the NRC to be repeated.

From 1985 till October this year, the FTs declared 1.29.009 people as "foreigners." through ex parte (one sided) proceedings. A total of 4,68,905 matters were referred to the FTs during this period. Most declared foreigners ended up in the six detention camps. To

On January 9, 2019, a detailed manual on 'model detention centres' was circulated by the Ministry of Home Affairs to make a distinction between 'jails and detention centres'

handle the influx of applications following Assam's NRC, the MHA sanctioned 1,000 additional tribunals. Presently, there are 100 FTs in Assam of which 64 were established in 2014. According to a MHA reply in Rajya Sabha on November 27, as on November 22, 2019, 988 foreigners were lodged in six detention centres in Assam. From the year 2016 up to October 13, 28

detenues died either in the detention centres or in hospitals where they were referred to, the reply said.

Former Chief Minister of Assam Tarun Gogoi said in a tweet that detention centres were first built in Assam under High Court's orders in 2009 for detaining declared foreigners. "Subsequently, the BJP Government allotted funds of ₹46.41 crore in 2018 and supported the construction of a big centre in Goalpara (picture) for housing around 3,000 inmates," the tweet said.

On May 30, the MHA amended the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964 which empowers district magistrates in all States and Union Territories to set up tribunals. Earlier such powers to constitute tribunals vested with the Central government only. The MHA later issued a clarification on June 11 that "since the FTs have been established only in Assam, and in no other State of the country, this amendment is going to be relevant only to Assam at present".

#### Mosquito resistance

New research shows that proteins in the legs of malaria carrying mosquitoes help them develop resistance to insecticides, an advance that may lead to new strategies against the disease which kills nearly 4,00,000 people each year. The study was published in the journal Nature



#### **Brain simulation**

Researchers have developed a brain-like network composed of ultrasmall metallic wire. This may lead to new ways for understanding the brain's processes. They used the metallic nanowire network to simulate the human brain's electrical activity unique to processes like memorising, learning and forgetting



#### Towards clean energy

Stanford scientists have outlined new steps that 143 countries around the world can take to attain 100% clean renewable energy by 2050. The roadmap, published in the journal One Earth, uses the latest energy data available in each country to offer more precise guidance on how to reach those commitments



#### Chewing gum trail

Archaeologists have found a 5,700 year old 'chewing gum' made from birch pitch and managed to extract ancient human genome from the same. In the Nature Communications article, they write that the person who chewed it was a woman closely related to the hunter gatherers of Europe. She was dark with blue eyes.

# Biomarkers for glioma brain tumour found in peripheral blood

These can be used for prognosis and early diagnosis of the most aggressive glioblastoma

R. PRASAD

Researchers have found potential gene biomarkers that can be used for prognosis and early diagnosis of the most aggressive form of primary brain tumour called glioblastoma. The biomarkers can help in knowing if the tumour is at an initial stage (low-grade) or advanced stage (high-grade).

The multi-institutional research work carried out by a team led by Javed N. Agrewala from Institute of Microbial Technology (CSIR-IM-TECH), Chandigarh, now at IIT Ropar, looked at immune cells called macrophages in the tumour microenvironment to understand their role in suppressing or boosting the immune system to keep the tumour under check. The role of certain macrophages in suppressing the immune system leading to progression of cancers such as breast, prostate, bladder and cervical cancers is already known.

Two macrophages Based on patient tissue samples the researchers identified two macrophages - M1 and M2 - that were associated with the tumour. These were identified using hallmark gene markers (CCL3 gene for M1 macrophage and CD163 for M2 macrophage). The M1 macrophage is protective for glioma while the M2 macrophage is not.



Multipurpose: Besides indicating whether the tumour is low- or high-grade, the macrophages can also indicate the chances of survival of patients with glioma, says Aurobind Vidyarthi

mune response and intimately interacts with the tumour and supports tumour progression.

"We observed that as the glioma progresses from low-grade to highgrade, the amount of M1 macrophages reduced and the amount of M2 macrophages increased," says Prof. Agrewala. "Thus the ratio of M2 macrophage marker CD163 versus M1 macrophage marker CCL3 can ascertain the glioma progression."

#### Making a prognosis

In the low-grade glioma, the ratio of M2/M1 macrophages (or CD163/ The M2 macrophage control the im- CCL3) is less while it is high in the

case of high-grade glioma tumour.

"Besides indicating whether the tumour is low- or high-grade, the macrophages can also indicate the chances of survival of patients with glioma," says Aurobind Vidyarthi from CSIR-IMTECH, the first author of a paper published in Cancer Immunology, Immunotherapy. He is currently a post-doc at Yale University, New Haven, U.S. "In low-grade glioma patients we see both M1 and M2 macrophages. But if there are more M2 macrophages (as indicated by the gene marker expression) than M1 macrophages, the survival is less. Likewise if there are more M1 macrophages then the patient has better chances of survival."

Most studies have looked at only the local immune response in the tumour region. But these researchers went a step ahead and looked for macrophage phenotypes and different T cells in peripheral blood samples collected from glioma patients.

#### Markers in blood

"Interestingly, compared healthy individuals, there was elevated level of M2 macrophages in peripheral blood too. This indicates that the influence of glioma is so prominent that M2 macrophages can be found in the blood," says Dr. Vidyarthi. Besides M2 macrophages, the researchers also found in the blood PD-1 expressing CD4 T cells. During chronic infection and tumour, the T cells become exhausted. "So instead of promoting, the exhausted CD4 T cells end up suppressing the immune system at the systemic level. Consequently, both CD4 T cells and M2 macrophages suppress the immune system at the systemic level," says Prof. Agrewala. "Thus the gene biomarkers in blood samples can be used for early diagnosis and prognosis of the gliomas. We need to carry out studies on more samples before being certain."

Researchers from Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh were also a part

eclipse. "The only way to

verify these models is to eith-

er have photographs taken

during the eclipse which

captures the Sun's corona or

use space- or ground-based

instruments which use an ar-

tificial disc to occult the

Sun's surface to make the

faint corona visible," Dr Nan-

Prime indicator: Underweight is highly correlated with child morbidity and reflects the nutritional status. • BLOOMBERG

### Need a different approach to address child malnutrition

Though it is declining in India, the rate of decrease is very slow

ASWATHI PACHA

Globally over 200 million children below five years of age are chronically malnourished causing persistent problem in middle- and low-income countries. Though India's National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) show that there has been a decline in child malnutrition numbers in the country, various studies show that the rate of decline is very slow, and India is still fighting a tough battle.

#### **District level trends**

Now, a team from Harvard and Cambridge University has assessed district-level trends in the prevalence of malnutrition and how wealth disparity plays a role in five important malnutrition indicators such as stunting, underweight, wasting, low birth weight, and anaemia. The researchers analysed the NFHS-4 data of 2015-16 and noted that among the four indicators, anaemia was highly prevalent at 54.6%, across the poorest of the poor in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana.

The team also placed each district under four categories - disparity, pitfall, intensity or prosperity based on the overall burden

and wealth disparity. Wealth disparities in underweight children were seen across all districts with Gujarat, Jharkhand and Bihar having the worst disparities and Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur having the least. "Underweight is highly correlated with child morbidity and is reflective of the current environmental and nutritional status of the child. Hence, underweight is arguably a more relevant and straightforward indicator to monitor

for progress in child malnutrition," explains Dr. Rockli Kim from the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, U.S. in an email to The Hindu. She is the corresponding author of the paper recently published in SSM- Population

The paper adds that for stunting and underweight, the north and central region of India which includes Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Iharkhand were composed primarily of "pitfall" and "intensity" districts.

The team explains that though the Government of India's new initiative National Nutrition Mission (NNM) has led to a progressive decline in child malnutrition, the decline has been slow and the improvements have not been equally distributed across the population. "Our work provides estimates to inform policies and interventions to target areas with the highest overall burden and the worst wealth disparity in child nutritional status. Even within well-performing districts, there can be gross inegalitarian malnutrition outcomes," explains S.V. Subramanian from the Department of Population Health and Geography at Harvard University in an email to The Hindu. He is one of the authors of the paper.

#### **Different strategies**

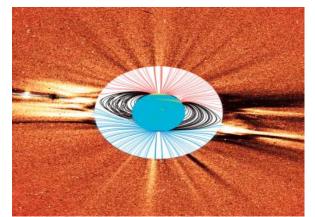
"Districts where the prevalence of malnutrition is uniformly high likely require a different intervention strategy compared with districts where prevalence is high but disproportionately shouldered amongst poorer households within the district. It is important to make sure progress on child nutrition is made both effectively and equitably," he adds.

## Shape of Sun's corona accurately predicted

The advance prediction gives a large window of preparedness for space weather variations

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

Solar physicists from Centre for Excellence in Space Sciences (CESSI), IISER Kolkata, have succeeded in predicting the shape of Sun's corona at the time of the annular eclipse on December 25. The corona is the outermost part of the Sun's atmosphere. This is the second successful prediction, counting the last solar eclipse that was viewed from South America on July 2 this year. While the earlier prediction differed slightly from the actual image, this time, it has been pretty close to the real thing. This was imaged by NASA and European Space Agency's space-based Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) using the LASCO instrument. "For the South American Eclipse of 2 July, our predicted streamer tilts were slightly larger than observed at large distances



Good match: The LASCO instrument's observation overlaid on the large scale coronal magnetic field lines predicted by the

far better. We are still trying to figure out why this worked so well this time," says Dibvendu Nandi, who is a professor and Principal Investi-

**Predicting in advance** The Predictive Solar Surface

from the Sun. This time, it is Flux Transport model developed by the CESSI team can predict the shape of the corona well in advance. Prantika Bhowmik, now at Durham University, UK, developed this model with Dr Nandi. "Our previous research indicates that we can predict the large-scale structure of the

Sun's corona up to two months in advance. This is great, because this gives advance knowledge and a large window of preparedness for space weather driven by coronal magnetic fields," says Dr. Nandi. Space weather consists of the varying conditions such as solar wind and is different from weather on

#### Space weather

'The dynamic events on the Sun can affect Earth's outer atmosphere and our technologies, leading to disruption in communication and navigation networks (GPS). These are more frequent during solar maxima and pose a threat to space reliant technology and astronauts," says Soumyaranjan Dash, PhD student at IISER Kolkata who works on this model.

This time, they had used inputs and made the prediction 43 days ahead of the

di adds in an email to The Hindu. This time, since this was an annular eclipse with a ring of bright solar surface visible, the corona was not directly observable. The only option was to use a coronagraph with an occulting disc. "The only functional one in the world is in Hawaii in Mount Mauna Loa which has been having bad weather. Also it was night in Hawaii when the eclipse happened," he adds. So the researchers

used the images generated

by the space based corona-

graph instrument LASCO on

board the SOHO satellite.

# Question Corner

Safety of buildings

on stilts

Are buildings with stilt parking (without a wall joining the stilts) at greater risk of collapsing due to earthquake?

A PROF. DEVDAS MENON, IIT Madras

In general, yes – unless the buildings have been designed structurally to mitigate the risk. Typically, in multi-storey, reinforced concrete framed buildings on stilts, masonry infill walls (between columns) are present in all upper storeys, except in the ground storey. This introduces a sudden reduction in lateral stiffness in the building in the open ground storey, relative to the upper storeys, under the action of lateral loads during earthquake. The lateral inter-storey movement ('drift') in the ground storey is likely to

with the upper storeys, inducing local high stresses in the ground storey columns. In an extreme seismic event, the vertical steel reinforcement can yield at the top and bottom locations of the ground storey columns, making the building vulnerable to a 'soft storey mechanism' collapse: the building can simply 'cave in', with the upper storeys coming down. (flattening the cars parked in the ground storey - as witnessed during the 2001 Gujarat earthquake). Such sudden failure can be avoided by proper structural design such as providing reinforced concrete shear walls at appropriate locations, or at the very least, adequately stiffening and strengthening the ground floor columns. Existing open ground storey buildings most at risk can be retrofitted to make them safe.

#### This week's question

Why do two parallel lines appear to be meeting at an infinite distance?

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

### Musth does not necessarily give younger, male Asian elephants an edge

Going into must is a roving strategy primarily advantageous to old males not to young males

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN

A seven-year study of Asian elephants from Nagarahole-Bandipur, a population centred around the Kabini region, yields interesting patterns of male elephant behaviour when in musth. Hormonal levels give musth males high energy and aggression levels and this state is often correlated with a propensity to mate. In two papers published in Journal of Mammology and Gajah, the team from Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research (JNCASR), Bengaluru, probes how this works in the Kabini population.

#### **Elephants in musth**

When an elephant is in a musth state, its urine shows increased testosterone levels. Also, temporin, a thick secretion, flows from the temporal ducts situated midway between their eyes and ears. Sometimes, the elephant dribbles urine as well. They hardly feed during musth and are more focussed on finding fertile females. They move from female to female, checking if she is fertile or not. Males enter into musth (show signs of musth) when there are in good body condition, and lost body condition over the time they are in musth because they are hardly feeding. Moreover, males can also mate when they are



**Roving male:** Ghatotgaja, a male aged above 45 years, sighted in musth. Temporal gland secretion is visible as a dark stain behind and slightly above the eye. ■T. REVATHE

not in musth (they do not have to enter musth in order to mate). Therefore, people have been interested in finding out how exactly musth helps as a reproductive strategy since it is a very expensive

One way in which musth might give an advantage is that it might help to break a "queue" so to say of which male elephant is allowed to mate. It is also possible that musth allows for males to have greater energy and to rove (roam) over

larger areas, which then gives males the opportunity to sample more females than nonmusth Data were collected by a seven-

member team. The team members drove along pre-selected routes for nearly 12 hours starting early morning and took photos and videos whenever they sighted elephants on these paths. "We aged all the elephants based on relative height, and ratio of head size to body size, and identified all the individuals based on ear, back and tail characteristics since we have a database based on long-term monitoring," says P. Keerthipriya, a reassociate at the Evolutionary and Integrative Biology Unit, JNCASR. Which individual male whether in musth or not was associated with which female was

#### No apparent advantage

The key findings of the group are that young (15-30 years old) males in musth did not have an advantage over older (over 30 years) nonmusth males in terms of access to females. Old musth males had an advantage over old non-musth males, and also showed a roving strategy which allows for searching for multiple females. Therefore, musth seems to be a roving strategy that is primarily advantageous to old males and not to young

They also found that Kabini has a lower proportion of musth sightings compared to earlier studies from Kaziranga and Mudumalai. "Kabini has fewer males in the over-45 age class than Kaziranga and Mudumalai.... Hence the number of males of the 45 plus age-class seems to influence the occurrence of musth," says Dr. Keerthipriya.

Female elephants have a fourmonth oestrous cycle in which they are ovulating for three or four days only. Thus, for a male to find an ovulating female and mate with her is, even normally, a rare occurrence. Further, if the female should get pregnant, she is out of circulation for about five years, because the pregnancy lasts two years and then she is lactating for over twoand-half years. Therefore, females are a rare resource for males seeking to produce offspring. Therefore, male mating strategies become very important in such a species.

#### **Competing males**

In this context, the obvious feature is the high degree of competition that exists among males to select and mate with the few available females. This study analyses how musth might affect this competition.

The young males probably have to wait it out and invest in growth rather than reproduction while the competition is mostly among the old males," says T.N.C. Vidya of the Evolutionary and Integrative Biology Unit, JNCASR, under whose leadership the work was done. "The low occurrence of musth in Kabini brings up interesting questions about how paternity will be distributed among males in Kabini, which is now being studied," says Dr Vidya.

be very high, compared

### All the President's sons

Allegations of corruption and militia links against his sons are turning allies away from Bolsonaro

**SAO PAULO** 



Since the night of March 14, 2018, when two shooters trailed the car car-Marielle

Franco, a black, gay and leftist politician in Rio de Janeiro, and sprayed the vehicle with bullets, killing Franco and her driver, a question has haunted Brazil: who was behind the murder? After two former policemen,

linked with a militia, were arrested for Franco's assassination, a photograph appeared on social media showing President Jair Bolsonaro embracing one of the alleged killers. Then came another revelation: Mr. Bolsonaro's eldest son, Flavio, a federal Senator known as "01", had em-

ployed the wife and mother of a

former policeman who ran the militia and has been absconding since the murder.

For a long time, there have been rumours about the Bolsonaro clan's links with the illegal militia. The President and his three sons - all elected officials – from his first wife have denied the allegations of connection with criminals in their inimitable style: dismissing it as "fake news". But last week, the rumours were back in circulation as Rio's police searched the addresses of Fabricio Queiroz, a former adviser to Mr. Flavio (in photo) and a friend of the President for decades. As per local media, warrants based on suspicions of money laundering and embezzlement also targeted a swanky shop owned by Mr. Flavio and relatives of Ana Valle, the President's second wife (He is in third marriage now).

For a politician who ran his elec-

tion campaign as an "outsider" who would "bust corruption", Mr. Bolsonaro is now in trouble as a probe into money-laundering zeroes in on his immediate family. But the Bolsonaros remain defiant. After his shop was visited by the police, Mr. Flavio claimed the investigation was a "conspiracy" to "destabilise" Brazil and force his father out of power. The same day, as a reporter asked the President about the probe, Mr. Bolsonaro responded by launching a homophobic attack on the journalist. "You look terribly like a homosexual," barked Mr. Bolsonaro.

#### **Under pressure**

A master of diversionary tactics, Mr. Bolsonaro generally succeeds in obfuscating issues and firing up his farright base with outrageous comments. But now, with Mr. Flavio under the scanner, even some allies are breaking ranks with him. Janaina Paschoal, a lawyer who led the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff and played a crucial role



in propelling Mr. Bolsonaro into presidency, said Mr. Flavio has to be punished. "Unfortunately, it seems that Flavio committed embezzlement and used officials to divert public money...," said Ms. Paschoal, a Sao Paulo State representative.

In a year, Mr. Bolsonaro has managed to alienate his allies by giving important roles to his sons. While his second son, Carlos, known as "02", has been in-charge of the President's social media, the youngest one, Eduardo, known as "03", almost got appointed as the Ambassador to the U.S. But with Mr. Carlos attacking top officials on social media and Mr. Eduardo acting like the de facto Foreign Minister, there has been a backlash from the leaders Mr. Bolsonaro's Social Liberal Party (PSL). The differences exploded in pu-

blic recently when at a parliamentary hearing on "fake news", a number of PSL leaders accused the President's sons of abusing them on social media with fake news. Mr. Eduardo responded by making fun of the weight of PSL parliamentary leader Joice Hasselman, who, in turn, called him "useless, stupid and [of] bad character".

President Bolsonaro and his sons sunk Brazilian politics to a new low in 2019, but at the end of the year,

Eduardo, who was anointed by farright ideologue Steve Bannon to head The Movement in South America, had to withdraw his ambassadorial nomination; Mr. Carlos, who is accused of running a fake news racket on social media, deleted all his accounts as Parliament investigated the phenomenon; Mr. Flavio, who has been under suspicion for months, is now a person of interest in a corruption scandal that may expose the politician-militia nexus in Rio. And Mr. Bolsonaro's ratings have dropped to 29%, the lowest for a President in the first year.

the clan was under pressure too: Mr.

Cornered he is, but Mr. Bolsonaro, who will be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations in January, hasn't lost his ability for shocking remarks. After spending a night in hospital following a fall in the bathroom on Christmas Eve, Mr. Bolsonaro, 64, said he had a "partial memory loss".

With a corruption probe knocking on his door, this could be his line of

### Putin's double bet — train to Crimea and gas to Ukraine

Russia has inked a gas deal with Ukraine, while deepening its influence in the annexed Crimea

**MOSCOW** 



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Russian President Vladimir Putin began last week with a train ride on a new rail bridge ov-

er the Kerch Strait that separates the Crimean peninsula from Russia's mainland, marking yet another milestone in Moscow's ongoing conflict with its closest neighbour Ukraine.

The beginning of a regular road service in May and the rail service now are important achievements for Mr. Putin, whose approval ratings have been on a steady decline.

Travelling to Crimea, a popular resort destination for many Russians since the Soviet times, was quite painful since Russia seized the peninsula from Ukraine, or "reunited" with it as Moscow prefers to call, in

2014. Crimea is connected only to the mainland Ukraine, and getting there meant either flying or travelling by road or rail via Ukrainian territories. This all had stopped in 2014 and Russians had to use ferries to get to the peninsula.

Having rail and road bridges over the Kerch Strait will allow thousands of Russians to travel to Crimea for vacation by car or by train, like in the "old times"

The company operating the trains to Crimea said more than 57,000 tickets were sold during the first one month of sales. By June, when the summer vacation starts, the tickets are expected to be in deficit.

The 19-km bridge was built by a company owned by Mr. Putin's close ally Arkady Rotenberg in just two years at a cost of \$3.7 billion, with the entire funding coming from the fed-



Russia's annexation of Crimea had triggered widespread condemnations, especially from Ukraine and the Western countries who called the move illegal.

European countries and the U.S.

ter the Ukraine conflict broke out.

As Mr. Putin rode in the cabin of the first passenger train from Crimea to Russia's mainland last week, the West got yet another chance to condemn his policies towards Ukraine. But this time, the condemning voice was a bit quieter. And not without a

#### Gas transit deal

A few days before Mr. Putin's train ride, Moscow and Kiev reached one of the most awaited deals of the year – on the transit of Russian gas to Europe via Ukraine. As the current gas transit agreement is set to expire at the end of the year, a new deal was Russia's only chance to continue supplying gas to its European buyers and for Europe to keep getting Russian gas. The deal was reached after 15 hours of tough negotiations. Both sides have made compromises.

That Russia's energy giant Gazprom agreed to pay the \$3 billion arbitration bill to Ukraine's Naftogaz as one of the conditions of the deal confirms that Russia had run out of options. The U.S. sanctions on Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline project that will allow it to transit natural gas to Europe via the Baltic Sea and Germany, signed into law by President Donald Trump at the same time when Russian and Ukraine officials were holding talks, has probably become the last straw.

According to S&P Global Platts analysis, the U.S. sanctions will lead to delays in finishing the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that Russia was aiming to complete by the end of 2019. It's now expected to be finished in the fourth quarter of 2020. Once fully operational, the pipelines will allow Russia to bypass Ukraine as a transit country.

Naftogaz executive Yuriy Vitrenko said in a Facebook post that the deal was a "difficult compromise" as Russia was looking for a short-term agreement and Ukraine for a 10-yearlong one. Finally, they met halfway: the deal was signed for five years. Same on the transit volumes: 65 billion cubic metres in the first year, and 40 billion the next year.

Experts believe the gas deal could have a positive impact on the fiveyear-long conflict, which claimed more than 13,000 lives. The meeting of Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky earlier this month in Paris was another sign of a modest progress the two countries are making, even though it did not result in any significant outcome.

So Mr. Putin has shown readiness to compromise on the gas deal, while at the same time deepening Russia's influence in Crimea through the road and rail links. The trains arriving in Crimea from Russia regularly via the new bridge will now put the progress achieved to test. Earlier this month, Ukraine launched a criminal probe after the first train from St. Petersburg arrived in Crimea, arguing that the passengers had illegaly crossed the Ukrainian border.

The question is how Mr. Putin is going to balance engagement and ex-

### Ensuring memories don't die

The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art offers a glimpse into Sri Lanka's troubled past

**COLOMBO** 



How do you translate the word 'juxtaposition' to Tamil and Sinhala? When a team of art curators set up

Sri Lanka's recently-launched Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), they had many decisions to make, including on questions like this, pertaining to lan-

The museum does not limit itself to a particular type of art work or exhibit. There are sketches and paintings. There are photographs in black and white, and in faded colour. There are archival digital prints from decades ago that serve as a stark reminder of the many phases of state repression and violence - against minority Tamils, or against rebel Sin-

halese youth. For instance, one print is of a masked supporter of the Janata Vimukti Peramuna from 1987. when the leftist party launched its second armed insurrection. Or, another visual of a check point in Pallai in Jaffna peninsula, taken in 2007, two years before the civil war fought by the Sri Lankan armed forces and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended.

Maps, cartoons - including by renowned satirical artist Aubrey Collette – and book collections are part of the exhibits that offer snippets of a leisure that a few could afford, of the lives that many lost. Some tell tales of the country's resilient women, powerful men, and those on the margins. The exhibition is suitably named 'One hundred thousand small tales', after Tamil poet Cheran's lines.

It was first held in Bangladesh and

commissioned by the Dhaka Art Summit in 2018. Some of the works, like Jaffna-based artist Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan's 'Cabinet of Resistance', have been featured at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. In a shade of light brown, that tints golden-brown under yellow lights, the cabinet holds about 30 drawers. In each of them are cards, with little stories or messages telling us something someone felt during the country's three decade-long war.

The art displayed offers a glimpse of some of the troubling chapters of Sri Lanka's past and the newer battles. "It has been an invaluable learning curve," says Ruhanie Perera, a curator in-charge of education and public engagement. "One of our main objectives is to explore the museum's potential as an educational tool... to see how students and young adults can relate to the art here." And for that, her team not only went through existing high school curriculum while putting together tours and talks tailored for students, but also began building a team of editors who will make the space trilingual (English, Sinhala and Tamil). 'We are seeing how we can bridge the gap between translation and discourse creation," Ms. Perera said.

#### A suitable home

Walking around the 17th-floor space in the heart of Colombo that features art and exhibits from or about different parts of the country, it seemed that the questions – of possibly losing something in translation or silencing another without it – were as much a part of the exhibition as the works displayed.

There were other challenges too, according to the exhibition's chief curator Sharmini Pereira. "Finding a suitable first home from which to launch our initiative and mount the first exhibition was our first challenge, along with securing funds. Trying to persuade people that modern and contemporary art needs to be preserved and collected is also a challenge because most people do



not see heritage as being about the last 100 years," she says.

Currently in a temporary space. the MMCA-SL is free and open to all. The initiative is being funded by priv-

ate individuals and the John Keells

Foundation that supports various ef-

forts in arts and literature, while the Colombo Innovation Tower and the Academy of Design have offered the space temporarily.

For now, the museum will be open for three months, until early March. But the curators are working on making this a long-term feature. "We want to establish a permanent museum because modern and contemporary art needs to be preserved before it perishes, disappears into private collections or leaves the country," Ms. Pereira notes.

In her view, establishing a permanent museum might encourage young people to think about professional careers in the museum sector.

"Today museum spaces need to be more than galleries showcasing art but spaces in which discussions about justice and equality take place. This is after all what most artists have been trying to tell us for decades. A permanent museum will need to recognise the art histories across the country for it to be rele-

### The road to uncertainty

Three months after Afghan poll, early results were announced, but still no consensus on the winner

**KABUL** 



After a long delay and political disagreements, the Independent Elec-

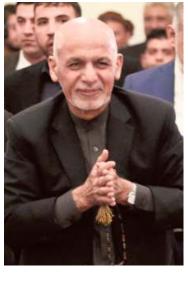
(IEC) Afghanistan finally announced last week the preliminary results of the Presidential election, held in September. But the results are unlikely to resolve the political crisis the wartorn country is undergoing.

The election that saw a record low turnout – only a quarter of the 9.66 million registered voters turned up to vote amid widespread violence by the insurgents – itself was controversial. The preliminary results have put the incumbent President Ashraf Ghani in the lead over his rivals, mainly Abdulla Abdulla, the Chief Executive in the current administra-

tion. With 923,868 votes, President Ghani secured 50.64% of the total votes cast. Mr. Abdullah won 39.52% votes, according to the IEC. Predictably, the winning side welcomed the results, while Mr. Abdullah's team has cast shadows over it.

"This result is a product of thousands of sacrifices that we have given," Basir Mohammadi, a close aide of Amrullah Saleh, the former intelligence chief and Mr. Ghani's running mate, told The Hindu.

"Our office was attacked by the Taliban on the first day of our campaign, and we lost more than 30 of our friends and colleagues," Mr. Mohammadi said, recalling an attack on Mr. Saleh in August. "But we are looking at the broader picture...this victory has come after thousands of sacrifices, and we are looking forward to the final results to have the platform for the opportunity to



serve the people of Afghanistan," he

Both leading candidates are waiting for the final announcement of the result. Already, other candidates, particularly Mr. Abdullah's team, have disputed the preliminary

results. Mr. Abdullah has alleged widespread fraud in the election. Haji Khalil Daresufi, a close aide of Mohammad Mohaqiq, Mr. Abdullah's vice presidential candidate, told The Hindu that their team refused to accept the preliminary results.

'Transparent election'

"Our teams were always clear about the election and a transparent election was our main demand," he said. "Our red line was clear – we won't accept non-biometric votes. We protagainst mixing fraudulent votes with clean ones." He added Mr. Abdullah's team would be registering complaints with the Independent Election Complaints Commission (IECC). Election observers from Dr. Abdullah's team have claimed that as many as 3,00,000 votes are fraudulent and have demanded that they be declared invalid.

The IECC has registered the complaints and will be investigating and evaluating the cases before it announces the final results. While the

Election Commission did not give a specific date for such an announcement, a spokesperson told The Hindu that based on Afghan law, "the IECC will have 37-39 days to evaluate all the complaints and to send the final result back to the IEC".

Mr. Abdullah's campaign team has accused the IEC of favouring one candidate over the others. "The IEC showed to the people of Afghanistan that they lack independence. We will take action through transparent means and will fight for every vote that was cast in our favour. We will not let anyone play with the true mandate of the people, or damage it with their unclean votes," Mr. Daresufi said.

However, Mr. Mohammadi of the Saleh campaign emphasized that the election commissioners were independent. "It must be noted that the commissioners, whether with the IEC or the IECC, were elected by all the 18 candidates, not just one," he said. "If it is a shame, it is a collective shame for all of us. And if it is a victo-

The situation threatens to escalate like the crisis that unfolded after the 2014 presidential election when a deadlock between Mr. Ghani and Mr. Abdullah led to two rounds of voting and political instability. Eventually, the then U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, brokered a power sharing deal between the two to create a national unity government.

ry, it should be a victory for all of us."

Representatives of both parties, however, claimed that the situation now is different and showed no interest in sharing power again. "It's not the same as 2014. It is clear to everyone that the preliminary result the IEC announced is based on fraud numbers. Afghans are tired of these repeated frauds. We won't allow this to happen again," Mr. Daresufi said.

two sides, Mr. Mohammadi said: "The ground reality is not like that of 2014, and none of us will be interested in a power sharing deal.

In a rare agreement between the

Meanwhile, everyone is waiting for the final results.



is a journalist