



Mumbai court declares Nirav Modi a fugitive economic offender

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Venkaiah pulls up MPs for absenteeism in standing committees

page 12



Sajith Premadasa named Leader of Opposition in Sri Lanka's Parliament

page 14

India starts favourite in the T20I series against West Indies

page 18



CCTVs, panic buttons, GPS in buses soon: CM

NEW DELHI
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday said three CCTVs, 10 panic buttons and an automatic vehicle location system will be installed in each of the existing 5,500 Delhi Transport Corporation and cluster buses.

CITY PAGE 3

Campaign ends for 2nd phase of Jharkhand polls

RANCHI
High-octane campaigning for the second of the five-phase Assembly elections in Jharkhand came to a close on Thursday, two days before 20 constituencies in the State go to polls. A total of 260 candidates, including Chief Minister Raghubar Das, will fight it out in this phase.

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FRIDAY REVIEW PAGE 8

(TABLOID)

PM Modi silent on economy, govt. clueless: Chidambaram

Ministers are allowed to engage in bluff and bluster, says Congress leader

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A day after his release from Tihar jail on bail, former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram on Thursday questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "silence" on the economic slowdown and accused the government of being "clueless even as its Ministers are engaged in bluff and bluster".

He also asserted that his "record as a Minister and his conscience was clear".

Mr. Chidambaram, who spent 106 days in judicial remand in money laundering and corruption cases, also hinted at the hardships he faced during his incarceration, stating that his "spine and head had become stronger by sleeping on a wooden cot without a pillow".



Raring to go: P. Chidambaram and other Congress MPs staging a protest over high onion prices in New Delhi. *SANDEEP SAXENA

"Even after seven months into the fiscal year, the BJP government believes that the problems faced by the economy are cyclical... It is wrong because it is clueless. It is unable to look for the obvious clues because it is stub-

born and mulish in defending its catastrophic mistakes such as demonetisation, flawed GST, tax terrorism, regulatory overkill, protectionism, and centralised control of decision-making in the PMO," he told repor-

ters at the Congress office, where he last addressed a press conference on the night of his arrest.

'Incompetent manager'

Mr. Chidambaram's blistering attack on the government over the economy came on a day the Reserve Bank of India revised the GDP growth estimates for the current year from 7.4% to 5%.

He said the Prime Minister remained "unusually silent but allows his Ministers to engage in bluff and bluster". "The net result, as *The Economist* put it, is that the government has turned out to be an 'incompetent manager' of the economy."

'COMPLETE FEAR' PAGE 12
BAIL BASICS EDITORIAL

In a surprise, RBI keeps interest rate unchanged

There is space for further policy action: Shaktikanta Das

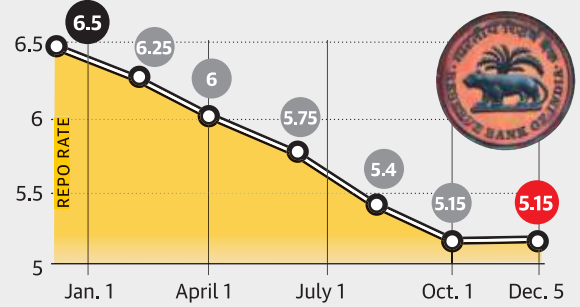
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) surprised the market by keeping the policy interest rate unchanged at 5.15% at the fifth bimonthly monetary policy review meeting, despite slowing economic growth, citing inflation concerns.

The market was expecting the central bank to cut interest rates for the sixth straight time. All six members of the monetary policy committee voted for keeping the rate unchanged. The accommodative stance of the monetary policy was retained. "...the MPC has committed to maintaining an accommodative stance as long as it is necessary to revive growth, while ensuring that inflation remains within the target," RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said at a briefing.

Status quo

The RBI has retained the repo rate (rate at which the central bank lends to commercial banks) at 5.15%. It had reduced the rate at five consecutive policy meetings till October



"This forward guidance in itself indicates that there is space for further monetary policy action. However, there is a need to optimise the impact of rate reductions. The key consideration has to be the timing of further actions, even as we monitor the impact of actions ta-

ken so far," Mr. Das said. He said the RBI paused to wait for further clarity on the inflation front and the steps that the government might take in the Budget to prop up growth.

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A STRATEGIC PAUSE EDITORIAL

Trouble on the tracks



Line block: Activists of the Indigenous Nationalist Party of Twipra blocking railway tracks to protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill at Khamtingbari on the outskirts of Agartala on Thursday. *REUTERS (NON-MUSLIMS STAND TO GAIN: PAGE 13)

Set ablaze, Unnao rape victim battles for life

All five accused taken into custody

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

A 23-year-old woman from Unnao district in Uttar Pradesh is battling for life after she was set ablaze on Thursday allegedly by five persons, including two she had accused of rape in March last year.

After treatment at a community health centre in Unnao and at a government hospital in Lucknow, she was air-lifted to Delhi. She was in a critical condition with 95% burns, doctors said. All the five accused were arrested, the Unnao police said.

Superintendent of Police,

Unnao, Vikrant Vir said the police received information through the Dial 112 emergency service that the accused had tried to burn the woman.

While reports said the woman was going to attend a court hearing in Rae Bareilly in connection with the rape case when she was attacked, Lucknow IG S.K. Bhagat said she was going to meet her lawyer. The incident occurred around 4.15 a.m., he said.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has ordered tough action against the culprits.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12
MPS SEEK ACTION PAGE 12

2018 Sabarimala verdict is not the last word: CJ

Issue pending before larger Bench

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde on Thursday orally remarked that a September 2018 judgment of the Supreme Court allowing menstruating women to worship at the Sabarimala temple might, at the moment, not be the "last word" as the issue has been referred to a larger Bench of seven judges.

On November 14 last, a Constitution Bench of five judges, sitting in review of the September 2018 verdict, in a majority judgment, did not specifically decide the issue of entry of women



Justice S.A. Bobde

aged between 10 and 50 into the temple. The majority view was silent on the legality of women's entry into the temple. Instead, it framed larger questions and referred them to a seven-judge Bench.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

JNU students to boycott exams

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

JNU students, in a University General Body Meeting, adopted a resolution for complete academic suspension, including all evaluative requirements such as examinations and assignments, till a complete roll-back of the inter-hall administration manual is mandated. The students said they resorted to this step due to the attitude of the JNU administration, headed by V-C M. Jagadeesh Kumar, towards the crisis.

DETAILS ON PAGE 9

'DU ad hoc teachers will keep their jobs'

UGC will tweak the controversial August 28 circular issued by V-C, says DUTA

SIDHARTH RAVI
NEW DELHI

Office-bearers of the Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) on Thursday met officials from the Human Resource Development Ministry over the issue of absorption of ad hoc teachers, following prolonged protests at the Vice-Chancellor's office. Declaring the teachers' movement a success, DUTA president Rajib Ray said, "No ad hoc teacher would lose their job on the basis of the August 28 circular [issued by the V-C office]."

UGC officials have agreed



DU teachers protesting outside the V-C's office on Thursday. *SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

to amend the controversial circular, which had directed colleges to appoint guest teachers against vacancies arising in the current academic session, to include the terms "ad hoc/temporary/

contract" as well, a DUTA representative said. The decision of the Delhi University Principals' Association to not renew ad hoc appointments made after July 20, the start of the current academic session, on the basis of the circular had put at risk jobs of up to 400 such teachers, claimed Mr. Ray.

A DUTA representative said that their strike has not been called off and the union executive body would meet on Friday to take a call on it. Until then, the invigilation boycott of ongoing semester examinations will continue.

Through the day on Thursday, hundreds of teachers gathered on the lawns of the Viceregal Lodge to hold demonstrations. Sources said that government officials refused to take the dialogue further until the premises were vacated.

Sources in DUTA said the MHRD officials have agreed to increase the weightage of "experience points" by two to three times the current weightage. The UGC will issue an advisory to DU to call all serving ad hocs for interviews for permanent jobs, the sources said.

FM faces pungent barbs over spiralling onion prices

What does she eat, avocado, asks Chidambaram in response to Nirmala Sitharaman's comment

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The debate on unaffordable onions took on a sharp and pungent flavour on Thursday, with stinging volleys greeting Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's comment on the vegetable in the Lok Sabha the previous day.

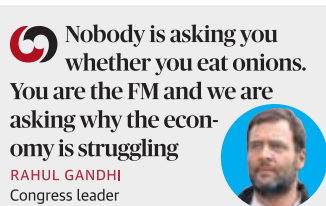
Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, who came to Parliament on Thursday, told the media: "I thought the Finance Minister said in Parliament yesterday that she didn't eat onions and she is not bothered. What does she eat, avocado? She doesn't eat onions."

On Wednesday, Ms. Sitharaman told an MP that her family didn't use onions much.



I don't eat much of onion and garlic. I come from such a family which doesn't have much to do with onion

NIRMALA SITHARAMAN
Union Finance Minister



Nobody is asking you whether you eat onions. You are the FM and we are asking why the economy is struggling

RAHUL GANDHI
Congress leader



The only thing more alarming than this government's inability to control prices of onions is the callousness of Modi and his Ministers

SITARAM YECHURY
CPI(M) leader

Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare Ashwini Kumar Choubey added to the debate with his assertion that he was not aware of spi-

ralling prices as he had never tasted onions.

CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury responded on Twitter: "The only thing more alarm-

ing than this govt's inability to control the price of onions is the callousness of Modi and his ministers. The PM is maun, and his ministers cannot stop revealing their contempt for Indians by talking about their own diets."

Congress MPs staged a protest in the Parliament complex against the "sky-rocketing prices". They displayed onions, held banners and placards, and shouted slogans demanding that the government "stop harassing the poor."

Mr. Chidambaram joined party leaders Adhir Chowdhury and Gaurav Gogoi in the protest.

At a press conference later, Mr. Chidambaram said his comments on the Fi-

nance Minister were not sarcastic.

"They should have planned in advance, what is the point of importing now, when will they arrive? But if the Finance Minister says I don't eat onions, that shows the mindset of this government," he added.

In Wayanad, party leader Rahul Gandhi criticised Ms. Sitharaman's comments, observing: "Nobody is asking you whether you eat onions. You are the FM and we are asking why the economy is struggling. Even if you ask the poorest person, you will get a sensible response."

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FM REJECTS CHARGE PAGE 12

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