

लोकपाल लाओ
भ्रष्टाचार मिटाओ

Six years after Lokpal Act, no prosecution wing set up
page 12

Extend cut-off date for ending GST payment to States, says Baghel
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Hong Kong residents mark half-year protest anniversary with rally
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Simmons, Pooran help West Indies pull level in T20I series
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NEARBY



Rajasthan Minister demands ban on Panipat

JAIPUR
Rajasthan Tourism Minister Vishvendra Singh on Sunday demanded a ban on the screening of Ashutosh Gowariker's *Panipat* in north India to avoid a law and order situation, following protest against the film in Bharatpur. Mr. Singh alleged that the film portrays Bharatpur king Maharaja Surajmal in an unseemly manner.

NORTH PAGE 5

'Ensure prisoners are given only permissible items'

NEW DELHI
A Delhi High Court Bench has directed the city government and prison authorities to ensure that convicts and undertrials are provided only those items in jail which are permissible under the rules. The Bench gave the direction while disposing of a petition initiated by the court on the basis of an Additional Sessions Judge's report.

CITY PAGE 4

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EDUCATION PLUS PAGES 16 & 17

43 dead, 16 injured in major Delhi fire

Most of the workers in the illegal manufacturing unit were asleep at the time; building owner arrested

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

At least 43 people, including minors, died and over 16 were injured after a major fire broke out in a residential building being used as a manufacturing unit in the Anaj Mandi area on Rani Jhansi Road of Central Delhi on Sunday morning.

Most of the deceased are from Bihar.

The building did not have a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Fire Department, and no fire safety equipment was found to have been installed. The building was notified as residential and did not need an NOC, said Atul Garg, Director, Delhi Fire Services.

Monika Bhardwaj, DCP (North), said property owner Rehan and his manager Furkan had been arrested under IPC Section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and 285 (negligent conduct with respect to fire). The case has been transferred to the Crime Branch for further investigation.

A call about the fire was received at 5.22 a.m., following which more than 40 fire tenders were rushed to the spot. Over 53 people trapped in the building were shifted to hospital, where at least 43 succumbed to injuries during treatment. Doctors say the death toll might rise.

Mr. Garg said that it was a four-storey building. The fire appears to have started on



Disaster zone: A fire engine waiting near Anaj Mandi in a narrow alleyway amid a maze of tangled electrical wires in New Delhi on Sunday. • SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

the second floor and soon spread to all the other floors.

Four people succumbed to burn injuries. The others died due to asphyxiation. Workers on the first floor rushed out of the building after they got to know about the fire. They alerted locals and informed the Fire Department.

"Over 150 fire personnel were involved in the rescue operation. We removed all occupants from the building and rushed them to hospital. Two fire personnel suffered injuries," he said.

There was no ventilation in the building. There was only one window. There

FULL COVERAGE PAGE 9

were two exits, but one of the exit routes was blocked and used to store the factory's raw material.

In separate floors, workers used to prepare school bags, purses and hand-held plastic mirrors, said a fire fighter.

Narrow lane

"The whole building became a gas chamber. A team of fire fighters entered the building from the terrace after breaking a window. Most of the bodies were found in the hall located on the fourth floor,

'Bhaiya, I am going to die'

As smoke entered the fourth floor where he was sleeping, Musharraf Ali, 30, from Uttar Pradesh's Bijnor district, made one last phone call to his childhood friend and neighbour, Monu Agarwal, and pleaded with him to take care of his wife and four children. "Monu Bhaiya, I am going to die. There is no place to run, fire has broken out," he told his friend. "Please take care of my family. Bhaiya, I am unable to breathe." PAGE 9

Raw material adds to blaze

There were around 75 workers in the building in the Anaj Mandi area when the fire broke out on the second floor, presumably due to short circuit, said a police officer. The building was packed with combustible material such as cardboard, rexine, plastic and other packaging material that aggravated the fire and resulted in dense smoke, which suffocated the people trapped inside, a fireman said. PAGE 2

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Citizenship Bill to be tabled today

It is facing opposition in the Northeast



Activists protest against the Bill in Guwahati on Sunday. • PTI

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will introduce the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019 in the Lok Sabha on Monday.

The Bill seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955, by wanting to grant citizenship to illegal non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, who came to India on or before December 31, 2014.

The Lok Sabha Speaker has allowed the members to submit amendments to the Bill till 10 a.m. on Monday. A copy of the Bill was circulated to all parliamentarians last week, after the Union Cabinet gave a go-ahead on December 4.

If the Bill is passed, it will be the first time that citizenship will be provided on the basis of religion.

Several groups in Assam and other Northeast States

are protesting against the legislation as it will nullify the provisions of the Assam Accord, 1985, according to which all illegal immigrants, irrespective of religion, who entered India after March 24, 1971, were to be detected and deported.

The National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, published on August 31, was updated as per the accord. More than 19 lakh persons, out of the total 3.29 crore applicants, were excluded from the final NRC.

The Bill proposes that all such migrants will be eligible for citizenship if they came to India before December 31, 2014, and all pending legal cases pertaining to citizenship-related matters against them will stand abated.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12
CONGRESS TO OPPOSE BILL, AIADMK TO BACK IT PAGE 12

No relief in sight



A big draw: Workers segregating onions after fresh stock arrived at the APMC wholesale market in Ahmedabad on Sunday. The fresh crop arrived from the Saurashtra region. The stock was sold at a price of ₹80 to ₹100 to wholesalers and was available in the retail market at ₹150 a kg. • VIJAY SONEJI

Unnao victim laid to rest amid high drama

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT UNNAO

After hours of emotional outrage and protests, the mortal remains of the Unnao rape victim were buried in a field in her native village on Sunday, three days after she was set ablaze allegedly by five persons, including two men accused of raping her last December.

The body, which reached the village around 9.30 p.m. on Saturday, could be interred only at noon on Sunday.

The victim's family which was adamant that the body would be moved only if CM Yogi Adityanath visited them and promised instant capital punishment to the culprits, relented after hours of negotiations with Divisional Commissioner of Lucknow Mukesh Meshram.

LOVE, BETRAYAL AND CASTE OPPRESSION PAGE 13

Bill will mark victory of Jinnah's thinking, says Shashi Tharoor

'It will reduce India to a Hindutva version of Pakistan'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA NEW DELHI

The passage of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in Parliament will mark the definitive victory of Mohammed Ali Jinnah's thinking over that of Mahatma Gandhi's, senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said on Sunday, asserting that the exercise of granting citizenship on the basis of religion would reduce India to a "Hindutva version of Pakis-

tan". The former Union Minister also alleged that the BJP government wanted to single out "one community" and refused to grant its members asylum from oppression on the same conditions as other communities.

In an interview to PTI, Mr. Tharoor said that even if the Bill was passed by both Houses, he was confident that no Bench of the Supreme Court would allow such a "blatant violation" of

the fundamental tenets of the Constitution to go unchecked.

"It is a shameless performance by a government which as recently as last year refused to entertain any discussion on developing a National Asylum policy, which I had proposed in a Private Members Bill and shared personally with the then Home Minister, his MoSes and his Home Secretary," he said.

No arrests in Muzaffarnagar acid attack case

Police file FIR against four men who allegedly wanted the woman to withdraw rape case against them

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT GHAZIABAD

No arrest has been made in a case of acid attack on a woman by four men who had allegedly gang-raped her earlier in Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh.

In a video that emerged on Sunday, the complainant is heard saying the men barged into her house at Kaserva village in the Shahpur area in the early hours of December 4, and asked her to withdraw the rape case against them. When she refused, they poured acid on her, burning her face and hand.

She said the police responded to her distress call,



Against a scourge: Activists shouting slogans during a protest against sexual violence in Mumbai on Sunday. • AP

but did not take action against the accused then. Neither had the police taken

note of her earlier complaint of gang rape till she approached the court.

On Saturday, the police registered an FIR against Arif, Shahnawaz, Sharif and Abid of Kaserva and Budhana villages, after the complainant approached the Senior Superintendent of Police, Muzaffarnagar, Abhishek Yadav.

Police officers alleged that she had in the past lodged at least six complaints of molestation, rape, illegal confinement and causing hurt, accusing several persons of Kaserva.

"Two of the cases have been expunged and in the others, the final report is being prepared," a senior officer said on condition of anonymity. "This time, she approached the court direct-

ly. Though the alleged incident [gang rape] took place three months ago, the court is yet to take cognisance of her complaint."

Leaves hospital

Mr. Yadav said the police would not judge the alleged acid attack against her past record. "However, a thorough investigation is being done as *prima facie* the location of the accused does not match with the location of her house at the time of the incident. We hope to come out with the facts soon." He said the burns were not serious. "She was taken to Meerut, and was discharged within a few hours," he said.



A woman mourning the death of a family member outside the mortuary of LNJP Hospital on Sunday; Mustakeen at the gate of a mortuary after identifying the body of his brother. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

Narrow staircases, locked terrace restrict firemen

DFS says it took 20 minutes to cut window grills; building packed with combustible material, claims official

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

Narrow staircases, windows with grills and a locked terrace turned the building, which housed a manufacturing unit, into a "death chamber" where 43 people were killed and 16 others injured at Anaj Mandi on early Sunday.

The victims on the first two floors of the building managed to escape while those on the third and fourth floors were trapped as the fire broke out on the second floor blocking their only exit route.

A Delhi Fire Service (DFS) official said the team reached the location within five minutes but was unable to enter the building because of the intensity of the fire.

"We tried to enter the building from the terrace but it was locked. Then we tried to get inside through a window but it had grills on it. We cut the grills with a gas cutter and managed to get inside. This process took us around 20 minutes," said the firefighter.

He added that the people trapped in the building were screaming for help but the

Unfolding of the tragedy

• The fire broke out at 5 a.m.	• Call about the blaze received at 5.22 a.m.	• Over 40 fire tenders rushed to spot	• Fire doused at 10.05 a.m.	• 150 firefighters involved in operation
• Workers hail from U.P. and Bihar	Death toll 43	Total Injured 16	Total bodies identified 28	• Injured persons shifted to the LNJP, RML and Hindu Rao hospitals



A view of the Anaj Mandi where a fire broke out on Sunday, claiming the lives of 43 people.

■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

team was helpless as the officials, who were trying to get inside the building from the main entrance, were struggling because of congested lanes. The lane was so narrow that only one fire engine could enter it.

The building had a second staircase, which was stuffed with raw material used in the manufacturing unit. "The

workers who managed to come out of the building informed the locals and called the family members of their colleagues who were trapped inside. A local in-

formed the fire department about the incident," said Mohammad Rizwan, a resident.

The building, owned by a man named Rehan, rented a portion to a jacket manufacturer, said an official. Rehan manufactures school bags and plastic-hand mirrors in the unit. There were around 75 workers in the building when the fire broke out on the second floor allegedly due to a short circuit, said an officer. "Four workers on the third floor got trapped and later their bodies were recovered. Most of the casualties were on the fourth floor where the workers used to sleep. Marks of their struggle can be seen on the walls," the officer added.

Many die of asphyxiation

The workers on the fourth floor died due to asphyxiation as the ventilation window was closed. The workers might have closed it to stay warm in the winter. The building was packed with combustible materials like cardboard, rexine, plastic and other packaging stuff that aggravated the fire and resulted in dense smoke, said a fireman.

Government announces compensation, orders probe

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday ordered a Magisterial probe into the fire that killed 43 people and sought a detailed report within seven days.

He also announced an ex gratia of ₹10 lakh each for the families of those who died in the incident and a compensation of ₹1 lakh each for the injured persons along with free medical treatment.

Mr. Kejriwal visited the site of the fire at Anaj Mandi and said "strictest punishment" will be given to those who were responsible for the incident. He later visited LNJP Hospital and met the injured persons.

"It is a very tragic incident. The exact numbers of casualties are being ascertained. The exact cause of the fire will come to fore after the probe," Mr. Kejriwal added.

60-year-old man loses both his sons in the fire

Four families got calls from victims

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

"Abbu, aag laga hai yahan, bach na payenge [Father, the building has caught fire. I would not survive]." These were the last words of 34-year-old Imran to his 60-year-old father Zameel Ahmed who lost both his sons in the fire at Anaj Mandi. Mr. Ahmed was at his house in U.P.'s Moradabad on Sunday morning when he was wakened up by a phone call from Imran at 5 a.m.

He also lost his younger son Iqram, 32, in the blaze. Five of my grandchildren lost their fathers, he cried. "We have lost everything," Mr. Ahmed said.

Families of at least four people, who died in the building fire, told *The Hindu* that they had received phone calls from their loved ones minutes before they died.

'Act with courage'

Mr. Ahmed said Imran told him over the phone that the landlord was not receiving calls. "I told him to act with courage," Mr. Ahmed said, adding: "I kept calling him but no one picked up."

Bhura, 50, said he lost his cousin in the incident. "I got a call from him at 5 a.m. saying that the build-



Zameel Ahmed who lost his sons in the fire waits outside the mortuary of LNJP Hospital on Sunday.

■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

ing where he worked was on fire. I told him to jump. But he said the lanes were narrow and there were overhanging wires and so he would not be able to jump. After that the call got disconnected," Mr. Bhura said. Musharraf from U.P.'s Bijnor is survived by wife and three children.

"Subah mera bhai Bablu ne phone kiya aur bola bhaiyya aag laga hai [My brother Bablu called me in the morning saying that the building had caught fire]. I thought it must be a small fire but when I reached there, the situation was very bad. Everyone said my brother might have escaped. I had no idea that he had died," cried 32-year-old Mohammad Haider.

A never-ending search: distraught relatives visit hospitals in vain

Victims' kin run from pillar to post due to lack of information

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

On Sunday afternoon, Nurjahan kept running around crying, asking people to get her to her father and brother-in-law, both of whom were inside the building when the incident happened.

"They are dead...I know," she cried, as people around her tried to console her by saying that they were yet to find the hospital where her relatives had been taken to. She again went inside the hospital to search for her family members but in vain.

Hours after the incident, friends and family members of victims ran from one hospital to another, not knowing whether their loved ones were alive as there was a lack of information about them.

Around 11 a.m., Taj Ahmad, who came looking for his brother-in-law and father-in-law at LNJP Hospital

said he had been inside the premises for over an hour with no clarity.

"I requested the hospital authorities to at least show me the bodies so that I can identify my relative but they refused to do so. I do not know whether they are at this hospital or some other hospital or whether they are alive. At least give us a list of dead people," Mr. Ahmad said. A resident of Delhi, he said he had got a phone call from his village in Bihar on Sunday morning about the fire incident. His relatives, Jasimuddin, 56, and Faisal Khan, 27, have been working at the factory for 10 years now.

'Phones switched off'

"The owner had talked to our relatives in the morning and said things are fine but now his mobile phone is switched off. Both my relatives' mobile phones are also

switched off," he told *The Hindu*.

Mohammad Waseem, 18, said three of his friends, including 14-year-old Sonu, worked in the building. "Sonu's elder brother Bablu worked at the factory and Sonu came here yesterday [Saturday] evening," Mr. Waseem said. He also said he got to know that all three victims were at LNJP Hospital but "we are yet to see them".

Sonu was later traced to a different hospital in the city. Around 12 p.m., 21-year-old Sanauallah, who has been waiting outside the LNJP Hospital to get some details about his relative Mohammad Sajid, 18, for the past three hours, said authorities were not giving any information.

"The police are saying they can't give any information now. They should at least tell whether he is here," Sanauallah said.

Anaj Mandi has turned into a hub of illegal manufacturing units

Over 500 such units operate from residential buildings in the area

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI

Once a large grain market, Anaj Mandi, over the years has turned into a hub of illegal manufacturing units.

Anaj Mandi is located on Rani Jhansi Road in Delhi-6 where more than 500 illegal manufacturing units are operating from residential buildings.

Narrow lanes, tangled wires, encroachments, unauthorised parking, and the terrace being used to store raw material are some of the common sights in Anaj Mandi, said the locals. "The residents have illegally extended their balconies and hence the electricity wires run directly overhead. Most of the owners of these buildings have left the area and rented out it for commercial activities. The workers live in a very inhumane condition inside the buildings but don't have other options as it saves their

The residents have illegally extended their balconies. Most of the owners of these buildings have left the area and rented out it for commercial activities

MOHAMMAD IQBAL
Local

rent," said Mohammad Iqbal, a local. After the fire tragedy, when media persons went to the area, they were opposed by the locals while clicking pictures. "Even policemen do not dare to enter these buildings. The locals always stand united against any government agency that plan action in the area. People fear of getting exposed by media," said another local.

The area is packed with furniture stores, butcheries and tyre shops. Irfaan, a local, said illegal manufacturing units have mushroomed

in the area with the "help" of police and administration. He said fire incidents due to electrical short circuits are common in the area because most of the manufacturing units consume more than the sanctioned electricity load. The area attracts manufacturers from various locations as it is close to wholesale markets like Sadar Bazar, Chawri Bazar, Balimaran and its close proximity to railway station also help these manufacturers to transport their articles, said Irfaan.

An owner of a manufacturing unit said the labourers come from Bihar and U.P. and earn a salary of ₹8,000-12,000 per month. A labourer is assigned a task to get more workers from his village and he gets an incentive for the same. "We offer them accommodation in the factories and for this, their working hours also increase," said the owner.

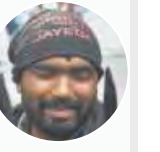
Fireman Rajesh Shukla is a real hero. He was the first one to enter the building and saved around 11 lives. He did his job till the end despite bone injuries. Salute to this brave hero

—SATYENDAR JAIN, Home Minister



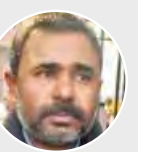
Only four months were left for his [brother's] marriage and he had told me that he will earn enough in these months to be able to paint the house before the event. *Kya pata tha, paint ke chakkar mei mera bhai duniya chodke chale jayega. Kaha dhundo mera bhai ko..* [How would I know that in the process of painting the house, my brother would leave the world. Where do I find him now?]

—MOHAMMAD HAIDER, brother of deceased



I requested the hospital authorities to at least show me the bodies so that I can identify my relative but they refused to do so. I don't know whether they are at this hospital or some other hospital or whether they are alive. At least give us a list of the dead

—TAJ AHMAD, brother-in-law of deceased



'10-year-old—the youngest admitted'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Ten-year-old Mohammad Mehtab from Bihar is admitted in LNJP Hospital with burn injuries. "He was having difficulty breathing. His clothes were burnt," an official said, adding: "He is the only victim below 18 years who is admitted at the hospital." His relatives were yet to reach the hospital at the time of going to press.

Party leaders engage in blame game over fire incident in city

Aam Aadmi Party holds civic bodies accountable for incident; BJP accuses govt. of 'administrative lapse'; Congress blames both parties

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Senior political leaders across party lines made a beeline to the spot of the fire, visited hospitals, expressed sympathy and announced compensation for the victims. However, they indulged in a political blame game.

AAP said it was the responsibility of the BJP-run civic bodies of Delhi to ensure that no illegal factories operate out of buildings and that it should be held accountable for the incident.

On the other hand, the BJP said the government cannot escape its responsibility by giving ₹10 lakh compensation each and ordering a magisterial probe. BJP MP Vijay Goel said: "This is an administrative lapse on the part of the Delhi government. Has it formulated any policy in the last five years to prevent fire-related accidents? There are many buildings in Old Delhi where such accidents can take place. Illegal constructions need to be banned too."

He also said the govern-

ment needs to take a lesson from this incident. Union Urban Development Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said the manufacturing units should have been given alternate places and alleged that the government had not shifted them.

Senior AAP leader Sanjay Singh said it was "shameful" that the BJP was indulging in "politics over dead bodies". "It is the BJP which is responsible for issuing licences for running manufacturing units in residential areas," he said.

The Congress accused both the BJP and AAP for the incident. Delhi Congress chief Subhash Chopra, after visiting the site, said he had spoken to the local residents who "held AAP and BJP responsible".

"The compensation announced by the government for the families of the victims is not sufficient. Dependents of those who perished in the fire should be given jobs," Mr. Chopra said.

A Union Urban Development Ministry statement added that the Redevelopment

plan of Special Area of Delhi was prepared by the North civic body and cleared by the Technical Committee of DDA and that the finalized plan was approved by the Corporation in March 2017.

"It was sent to the Urban Development Department of Delhi the government for notification in the official gazette in April 2017. But despite providing all clarification sought from time to time, it is pending for notification. What were these departments waiting for?" the Ministry said. It

also questioned as to why Delhi Fire Services had not taken action despite the building being of required height and occupancy to need safety and fire prevention measures.

"It is clear that precious lives would have been saved if these departments had been diligent," the Ministry said.

The Delhi government, reacting to the allegations, said the Ministry was trying to hide the corruption and inefficiency of the civic body and therefore, the Union Ministry has minted some false claims.

"Delhi Fire Services has made it clear that this factory had no fire clearance/NoC to operate and it was illegal. Why is the Union Ministry defending an illegal factory being run in violation of all rules and has claimed of no lives?" the Delhi government asked.

"It is beyond any reasonable understanding as to why the Ministry, in order to defend corruption and inefficiency of the civic body is stooping to this level," the Delhi government said.



SIDHARTH RAVI
JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

CITY MATTERS

The BJP leaders will give registry papers to 100 owners, at a huge event to be held at Ramlila Maidan, just for the photos I believe. But I want to ask, why should this preferential treatment be given to some people? The registry should be provided to the whole of Delhi. This is an election gimmick and they would end up betraying the people of Delhi just as the Congress did during the previous Assembly elections

—ARVIND KEJRIWAL,
Chief Minister



The previous governments had been only making announcements for regularisation but they never introduced the required law in Parliament but the Modi government made the decision to regularise these colonies within 100 days of his second tenure. Digital mapping of these colonies should have been completed in the last 11 years. The BJP government is going to complete the work by December 31, 2019

—MANOJ TIWARI,
Delhi BJP chief

The BJP and the Kejriwal government are hatching a conspiracy to uproot over 40 lakh people. Union Minister Hardeep Puri has admitted that according to Section 7A in the gazette notification, 9% colonies will go out of the purview of regularisation... the truth is that over 40% of these colonies will not be regularised if Section 7 is applied. The residents are very angry as they are being threatened in the name of giving them ownership rights. The BJP and the AAP governments are trying not to give ownership rights to them

—SUBHASH CHOPRA,
Delhi Congress chief

The issue of granting property rights to residents of unauthorised colonies may have taken centre-stage for political parties in the run-up to the Delhi Assembly elections, but it does not seem to have gripped the average voter's imagination — yet.

Similar promises made by the Congress in the past, according to one section of the residents of such colonies *The Hindu* spoke to, had made many lose faith in whether it was in the realm of possibility. While some credited the Bharatiya Janata Party-led (BJP) government at the Centre for pulling it out of obscurity and placing it onto the path of becoming reality through its enactment as a law, others argued that the Centre would not have taken the step had the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), at the helm of the Delhi government, not raised it in the first place.

In any case, with the process of granting ownership rights to an estimated 40 lakh residents of such colonies yet to begin and the registries of their respective properties still a promise made to them on paper, whether the passage of the National Capital Terri-

tory of Delhi (Recognition of Property Rights of Residents in Unauthorised Colonies) Act, 2019 by both Houses of Parliament will yield electoral dividends, if at all, continues to be a moot point.

Poll plank

After first surfacing in the 1970s, unauthorised colonies, as a poll plank, became ubiquitous in Delhi's politics over the decades. Granting ownership rights to an estimated 40 lakh residents of over 1,731 of these colonies is an issue older than the Delhi Legislative Assembly, which came into existence in the early 1990s. The first batch of such colonies, that is around 567, was regularised in 1977.

Crediting Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the "historic move" of bringing a law to grant ownership rights to the residents of these colonies within a hundred days of his second tenure, the BJP has accused both the Congress governments and the ruling AAP dispensation of dragging their feet on the issue for over four decades before Mr. Modi stepped in to "remove the blot of being unauthorised" from the foreheads of their residents.

AAP, on its part, has called the entire exercise an "eyewash" and a "photo opportunity" for the BJP with polls round the corner and

sought to caution voters not to be swayed by "laws and Bills" existing solely on paper. Soon after coming to power in 2015, AAP claims that a "detailed proposal" to regularise these colonies had been sent to the previous BJP-led government at the Centre which, it alleges, chose to sit on it since November that year.

The Congress, which had issued provisional ownership certificates to the residents of around 1,639 colonies before the Delhi Assembly elections in 2008, which, however, did not translate into anything tangible later, accused both the BJP and AAP governments of "hatching a conspiracy" to uproot the residents. The current law, the party

claims, will leave over 40% of such colonies out of the purview of actual benefit.

Ground reality

Suresh Kumar, a 60-year-old shopkeeper from Sangam Vihar, one of the largest unauthorised colonies in the city, said he didn't think the Bill would even go through. "There are so many authorities involved. The Supreme Court may intervene. Who knows? We have heard all this before," Kumar said.

Dinesh Kumar, another property owner here said there was still a lack of clarity on what exactly the policy of regularisation was and how it would be implemented. "I don't think it will have

any effect on the elections. The Sheila Dikshit government also made such promises but look what happened to that."

S.N. Jha, who runs a confectionery store in the area, said he was sceptical about its effect on the upcoming elections. "The Rajya Sabha has also passed it and the Delhi Development Authority has started setting up registration booths. Maybe some people will be affected by it. But it looks like [Chief Minister Arvind] Kejriwal will come back, even if he loses some seats," he said.

Credit wars

Vikram Singh Chandela, who operates a vehicle repair shop at the Indraprastha Colony in Burari, which hosts a sizeable number of unauthorised colonies, credited the BJP for ensuring the conversion of the promise to a law. "This promise has been made by every government before every election in the 25-odd years that I have lived in Burari. I was given a provisional certificate [in 2008] and promised that I will get ownership rights like lakhs of others but nothing happened. Credit should be given where it is due: the BJP has done what no other government could in this direction and will reap the benefits," he said.

According to Rohit Joshi — who resides in Amrit Vihar located across the road from Indraprastha Colony — irrespective of the Bill turning into a law, AAP would reap the electoral benefits of the developmental work done by it in such colonies. "There is still a lot of work that needs to be done in the area, but now we have roads, free power and water. The AAP government has worked regardless of such a law and has rightful claim on our votes," he said.

Manoj Singh, a resident of Amrit Vihar, argued that the Bill would not have seen light of day had "Mr. Kejriwal not pushed" the Modi government "to do something." "This issue would not have been reached where it has had it not been for Mr. Kejriwal pushing the Modi government in this direction," he argued.

Sheru Gupta, a taxi driver from Indraprastha Colony, agreed. "The BJP has helped pushed the Bill through, of course, but Mr. Kejriwal deserves to come back because he brought policies for free power, water and school education," he said.

Hemraj Singh, a resident of Amrit Vihar, said Mr. Kejriwal also deserved credit for "nudging" the BJP-led Centre along the "right path." "The AAP government started the process in November 2015 but the BJP did not act for years. This Bill is a result of the work done by Mr. Kejriwal," he said.

Over the 20 years of his residing in Sangam Vihar, according to Suresh Kumar, he had, for the first time, seen "at least some civic infrastructure" being built by the State government. "Water is free, alleyways have been improved, electricity is regular. There is still a long way to go but it is better than before," he said.

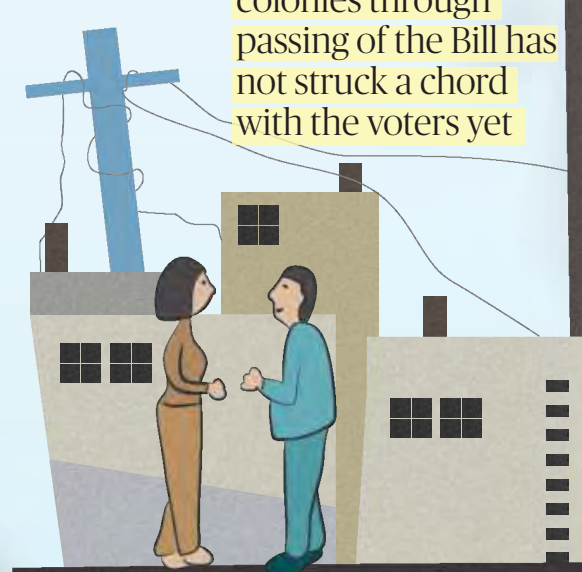
Bhagwan Kaur, a resident of the Khadda Colony in Swaroop Nagar, said the colony had come a long way since Mr. Kejriwal came to power. "We still have issues related to garbage collection but the development which we have seen since 2015 — whether the construction of roads in the by-lanes or the provision of free power — is nothing compared to the hellish conditions in this colony before the AAP government came to power," she argued.

'50:50'
According to Asha Devi, a resident of the J block in Swaroop Nagar, both the AAP and BJP governments "deserved equal praise" for the "gradually improving" conditions and status of her colony. "We are aware of the work that both governments have put in and people like me, who have four voters at home, will divide our support for both of them [the parties]," she said.

Simranjeet Kaur, her neighbour, said residents of unauthorised colonies like her were "keenly observing" television and newspaper reports related to the proposed implementation of the policy. "We watch and read all the news stories about our colonies which have always been a political issue but not of the stature that they have become this time; as far as we are concerned, both governments have done their bit and should get the credit for it," she said.

THE PROMISED LAND

BJP's assurance of granting ownership rights to those in unauthorised colonies through passing of the Bill has not struck a chord with the voters yet



STEP BY STEP

THE SCHEME

- Delhi Development Authority (DDA) authorised as nodal agency
- The exercise of delineation of boundaries is being carried out by DDA with the assistance of Survey of India and the Delhi government's Revenue Department
- More than 200 such colonies/clusters have been delineated
- The scheme is expected to benefit approximately 40 lakh residents
- It will cover 1,731 unauthorised colonies existing as on May 1, 2014, with a minimum of 50% built-up area as on January 1, 2015
- Apart from other excluded categories, 69 colonies inhabited by the affluent section of society will be considered in the next phase
- New colonies that may have come up after the cut-off dates will be dealt in the next phase
- The criteria for categorising colonies as 'affluent' is on the basis of plot sizes, location, level of development and other social, economic and physical infrastructure in the colonies

THE PROCESS

- DDA has requested Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) to develop an online portal for inviting claims/objections from RWAs/federation of RWAs on the delineated boundaries
- DDA will start receiving applications on its e-portal from December 16, 2019
- DDA has requested MeitY to develop an e-portal to apply for ownership rights
- The applicants have to attach the requisite documents such as General Power of Attorney, Agreement to Sell, payment and possession documents, site plan and GPS data etc
- Beneficiaries will have to apply only through a prescribed online system
- Verification -- both documents and physical -- will be done by DDA officials
- DDA will then issue the conveyance deed in case of government land and authorisation slip in case of private land

POST-PROCESS

- DDA will prepare Local Area Plan (LAP) for all unauthorised colonies/clusters of colonies and make necessary amendments in the MPD-2021 for intensifying and facilitating development/redevelopment of colonies and Urban Building Bye Laws for Delhi (UBBL) 2016 to pave the way for planned redevelopment of the existing units on the "as is where is" basis
- Construction may be allowed by the urban local bodies as per norms

SOURCE: DELHI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY | GRAPHIC: DURGA PRASAD

IN BRIEF

Air quality likely to remain 'very poor' today

The air quality in the Capital remained in the 'very poor' category on Sunday with the minimum temperature settling at 8.7 degrees Celsius and a thin layer of smog affecting visibility. The air quality index (AQI) is expected to remain in the higher-end of the 'very poor' category on Monday due to cold weather and calm winds allowing accumulation of pollutants. PTI

Air quality of Delhi-NCR

Delhi	391	Gurgaon	362
Ghaziabad	413	Faridabad	-
Noida	414	Greater Noida	395

Good 0-50 Satisfactory 51-100 Moderate 101-200 Poor 201-300 Very poor 301-400 Severe >401

AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M., YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) | SOURCE: CPCB

DELHI TODAY

Talk: "The Uren Story: Ascent of Human Society", an illustrated lecture by Dr. Goutami Bhattacharya, Deputy Superintending Archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India, Bhubaneswar at Conference Room - I, India International Centre (IIC), 6:30 p.m.

Talk: Panel discussion based on the book "Perspectives on Work, Home and Identity from artisans in Telangana: Conversations around Craft", authored by Chandan Bose at Seminar Rooms - II & III, India International Centre (IIC), 6:30 p.m.

Music: A musical tribute to Mirza Ghalib and Rabindranath Tagore. Performances by Rashmi Agrawal, ghazal singer; Veena Gupta, ghazal singer; Dr. Reba Som, Tagore scholar and singer; Sudavip Bhattacharjee, Tagore singer; Dr. Aalok, ghazal singer at The Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 7 p.m.

Exhibition: "Women passing", a solo exhibition of acrylic, collages and resin on canvas by Stephanie Arpels at Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. (Mail your listings for this column at cityed@delhi@thehindu.co.in)

'Ensure prison inmates are only given items permissible under rules'

High Court issues direction to Delhi government and prison authorities

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has directed the city government and the prison authorities here to ensure that convicts and undertrials are provided only those items in jail which are permissible under the rules.

A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice C. Hari Shankar gave the direction while disposing of a petition initiated by the court on the basis of an Additional Sessions Judge's (ASJ) report.

The ASJ's report had stated that a LED TV, coconut water, crates of mineral water, badminton rackets and household items were some of the prohibited items found in the prison cell of Unitech MD Sanjay Chandra



A report stated that some prohibited items were found in the prison cell of Unitech MD and his brother lodged in Tihar jail. FILE PHOTO

and his brother Ajay Chandra, lodged in Tihar jail for allegedly cheating home buyers.

The prison authorities, represented by Delhi govern-

ment Standing Counsel (Criminal) Rahul Mehra, told the Bench that none of the items in the ASJ's report were provided specially to the Chandras as such things were available to all the inmates.

Mr. Mehra said there are 1,215 LED TVs in Tihar jail with one in almost every cell and these are provided in accordance with the Delhi Prison Rules.

He also said that items like coconut water and packaged mineral water are available for purchase at the jail canteen by using the smart cards given to inmates for this purpose.

He said that each inmate can purchase items worth up to ₹6,500 per month from the jail canteen.

Regarding the videoconfer-

encing and internet facilities provided to the Chandras, Mr. Mehra said it was done on the orders of the Supreme Court to help them interact with prospective buyers so that they can pay off their liabilities to investors and home buyers.

He said the facilities were later ordered to be taken away by the apex court and it was done.

Taking note of the submission made on behalf of the prison authorities, the Bench said, "Since the items mentioned in the report are prime facie found to be in accordance with the law, rules, regulations and government policy, we see no reason to further monitor the matter. The writ petition is disposed of."

HC tells Delhi government to keep providing free sanitary pads

'Continue awareness programmes on menstrual hygiene'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has asked the city government and civic bodies here to keep providing sanitary napkins to schoolgoing girls and those who dropped out for free and continue with their awareness programmes and schemes to promote menstrual hygiene.

A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice C. Hari Shankar said, "We expect the respondent to continue providing sanitary napkins for free, continue with the awareness programs and also schemes like UDAAN".

Pad-dispensing units

The Delhi government, represented by its Additional Standing Counsel Sanjoy Ghose, said it was providing

sanitary napkins for free to girls in schools run by it. Mr. Ghose also said that the toilets for girls in its schools have sanitary pad-dispensing units.

He also said that the Directorate of Education had issued a circular asking all counsellors in the schools to interact with girls and spread awareness on the issue of menstrual hygiene.

The Delhi government also claimed that it was providing sanitary napkins for free in packs of 10 under its UDAAN scheme.

The civic bodies said the schools run by them are providing the pads for free to the girls and also carrying out training and awareness programmes.

The Central government said that education was a

State subject and its role was only to provide finance for various schemes and programmes to the departments concerned to be used for the benefit of girls in schools.

Plea disposed of

After taking note of the steps being taken by the authorities, the High Court disposed of the petition by advocate Setu Niket, who had sought directions to establish a mechanism to provide education on menstruation and menstrual hygiene in all schools here.

The petition had sought a direction to the authorities to ensure that menstrual hygiene products were made available to adolescent girls in schools for free or at subsidised rates.

Govt. clears way for selling seized liquor

It will be sold after quality tests in labs within 7 days of seizures

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

In a first, people can now buy seized liquor at prices which are 25% cheaper than prevailing market rates with the Delhi government having issued an order.

The liquor can be identified through a label on the bottle that will read 'Authorised confiscated liquor'.

A government official said that foreign and Indian-

made foreign liquor (IMFL) seized during raids by the Excise Department and the police will be sold only after testing its quality in affiliated laboratories within seven days of seizures.

Until now, seized liquor was destroyed after completing legal formalities, in presence of government officials.

According to the standard operating procedure issued

by the Excise Department, each of four corporations (government agencies) will designate at least two vendors — one for foreign liquor and one for IMFL — through which the seized liquor can be sold.

The official said that Delhi would be first city where seized liquor would not be destroyed. In the first phase, eight vendors will be allowed to sell seized liquor.

Direct recruitment: 'consider experience of ex-professors'

Many contractual teachers are being declared ineligible, says TACUH secretary

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

The Teachers' Association of Haryana (TACUH) in Mahendragarh has demanded that teaching experience of candidates, who previously served as assistant professors on contract basis at CUH should be counted in shortlisting their applications for the call of interview towards Direct Recruitment and Career Advancement Scheme.

TACUH secretary Rakesh Meena, in a letter to V-C R.C. Kuhad, said many of the contractual teachers, even those who served at CUH, were being declared "ineligible" in the ongoing scrutiny of their application forms on the "erroneous judgment" that their "teaching experience is less than required as the incumbent was drawing salary less than the monthly gross salary

of regular appointed assistant professor".

It is self-evident that the CUH had utilised the services of the contract teachers without paying them salary or emoluments equal to the monthly gross salary of a regularly appointed assistant professor in violation of the constitutional mandate and the explicit UGC regulations. Now, the same university is adamant on depriving them

of the opportunity to appear in the interview by not counting the services rendered by them, said the letter.

Mr. Kuhad told *The Hindu* that he had received the letter on Sunday and the same had been forwarded to the legal advisor of the university and the registrar. He, however, maintained that the recruitment process was being carried in strict compliance to the UGC guidelines.

DELHI Timings

MONDAY, DEC. 09
RISE 07:02 SET 17:25
RISE 15:35 SET 04:00

TUESDAY, DEC. 10
RISE 07:03 SET 17:25
RISE 16:11 SET 04:56

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 11
RISE 07:03 SET 17:25
RISE 16:53 SET 05:54

Delhi Weather

	max	min
Delhi City	24	09
Safdarjang	24	09
Palam	23	10

Delhi Palam Today
25°C Moderate fog will prevail during morning hours. Day will be hazy and pleasant with a few clouds.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
25°C The pollution level will remain moderate during morning hours. Day will remain pleasant with a partly cloudy sky.

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IN BRIEF

1 killed in cracker factory blast in M.P.

HARDA
A 22-year-old labourer was killed on Sunday in a blast in a firecracker factory in Madhya Pradesh's Harda district, police said. PTI

'My priority is to bring Cong. back to power in Himachal'

Party is on a revival path now, says State unit chief Kuldeep Singh Rathore

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

Days after the Congress president Sonia Gandhi dissolved its unit in Himachal Pradesh, barring its chief Kuldeep Singh Rathore, the party is all set to revamp the organisation in a bid to revive the party's electoral prospects ahead of the next Assembly polls, due in 2022.

"The Congress is on revival path now. My priority is to bring back the Congress party in power. The process of reorganising the unit is a big exercise. I am deliberating with all leaders of the party on different aspects and soon a strong unit will be in place. After party's proposed rally on December 14 in New Delhi, we will speed up the process of restructuring the State unit," Mr. Rathore told *The Hindu* here.

The Congress had lost all four parliamentary seats including Mandi, Shimla, Kan-



Party president Sonia Gandhi had dissolved the State unit recently for its revamp.

gra and Hamirpur in the 2019 polls. Party insiders felt factionalism and infighting within the party was one of the key reasons behind party's poor show. In the 2017 Assembly polls as well, the Congress was reduced to 21 seats in the 68 member Vidhan Sabha.

Party's central leadership had appointed Mr. Rathore as the State party chief on January this year ahead of the

Lok Sabha elections by replacing Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, who had been at loggerheads with senior Congress leader and former Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh.

The decision was seen as an attempt to cull the factionalism and unite the party. Now, after the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) dissolved the State unit, the move is being seen as an indication to give the new president a free hand to reconstitute the organisation for better functioning.

"No infighting"

"Factionalism is a thing of the past as there's no infighting within the party now. The executive committees of the State, districts and blocks would be reconstituted on the old pattern, which was followed before my predecessor - Mr. Sukhu," said Mr. Rathore, who is believed

to enjoy backing of former Union Minister and senior party leader Anand Sharma, besides Virbhadra Singh.

"Party will start a membership campaign, which has not been undertaken in the past over seven years. The focus would be to induct honest and dedicated people," he said.

Mr. Rathore said people are already fed with the ruling Bharatiya Janta Party in the State and were supporting the Congress.

"We have been protesting against the anti-people policies of BJP governments in the State and at the Centre, and the positive response given to our recent protests by the public is indicative of their anger and disenchantment with the BJP regimes - be it on the issue of deteriorating law and order condition, price rise, rising drugs menace or economic slow-down," he added.

Mayawati holds review meet of BSP

Leaders told to remove shortcomings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW

The Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Sunday held a review meeting of the party's Uttar Pradesh unit here and issued instructions to the leaders to remove shortcomings in functioning pointed out in earlier such meetings, according to a statement.

"The stand taken by the party chief vis-a-vis the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill was praised, and that there is positive discussion among people regarding the stand taken by the party," the statement issued by the BSP said.

CAB review sought

On December 5, Ms. Mayawati had described the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill as "unconstitutional and divisive" and demanded that it be sent to a parliamentary committee for review.

"Citizenship in the name of religion and discrimina-



BSP chief Mayawati

tion in the name of religion of the citizens through it is totally against the basic structure of the humanitarian and secular Constitution of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar," she had said. "Instead of forcing this Bill, like demonetisation and GST, the central government should review it," she said.

"It should be sent to a parliamentary committee for better deliberations so that this Bill could come before people in a proper manner that is in consonance with the Constitution," the BSP chief had said.

Girl's body recovered from sack in Muzaffarpur

Leaders told to remove shortcomings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUZAFFARPUR (BIHAR)

The police has found the body of an eight-year-old girl stuffed in a sack from a litchi orchard in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district, police said.

The deceased's grandfather suspected that the girl, who was missing since Friday night, might have been killed after being raped.

"The police recovered an eight-year-old girl's body stuffed in a sack on Saturday morning. The deceased's legs and throat were tied with a rope," Station House Officer of Ahiyapur police station Vikas Rai said.

Post-mortem report

The exact cause of her death will be known after post-mortem examination, the SHO said.

The matter is being investigated from all possible angles, Mr. Rai said.

Rajasthan Tourism Minister demands ban on Panipat

'Maharaja Surajmal of Bharatpur shown in bad light'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAIPUR

Rajasthan Tourism Minister Vishvendra Singh on Sunday demanded a ban on the screening of Ashutosh Gowariker's *Panipat* in north India to avoid a law and order situation, following protest against the film in Bharatpur.

Mr. Singh alleged that the movie, featuring Arjun Kapoor and Kriti Sanon, portrays Bharatpur king Maharaja Surajmal in unseemly manner.

"It is unfortunate that the legendary Jat ruler, Maharajah Surajmal has been depicted in an unseemly light and historical facts have been distorted in the film *Panipat*. In light of the vociferous protest by the Jat community in Haryana, Rajasthan and other regions of

North India, I believe that the film should be banned to avoid a law and order situation," Mr. Singh posted on Twitter.

Opposition leader and former Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje also condemned the portrayal of Maharaja Surajmal in the film, which released on Friday.

'Portrayal condemnable'
"The mistaken portrayal of the self-respecting, loyal and large hearted emperor Maharaja Surajmal in the film *Panipat* by the filmmaker is condemnable," she tweeted.

The movie is based on the third battle of Panipat fought between the Maratha empire and Afghan king Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1761.

Arjun Kapoor plays the role of Sadashiv Rao Bha-

commander of the Maratha army and the movie allegedly shows Bharatpur king Maharaja Surajmal as a greedy emperor, who wanted to conquer the Red Fort of Agra and denied help to Maratha army during the battle of Panipat.

Nagaur MP Hanuman Beniwal wrote on the microblogging site, "I request CBFC, Prakash Javdekar, Prasoon Joshi to look into the matter of *Panipat* movie to avoid protest, law and order problem. No film or art can misreport history."

Director's effigy burnt
Jat leader Nem Singh Faujdaar on Saturday burnt an effigy of Mr. Gowariker at the Surajmal Square in Bharatpur amid presence of hundreds of people who raised slogans against the director.

Trader shot dead on busy Agra road

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AGRA (U.P.)

A middle-aged trader was allegedly shot dead from point blank range at the busy Waterworks Crossing in Agra city after an argument broke out between him and a man who had come there in a car, police said on Sunday.

The incident happened late on Saturday night after the trader, who sold sarees and clothing materials, closed his shop and was enroute home on his scooter, they said.

CCTV footage
Superintendent of Police (City) Rohan Botre Pramod said police are investigating the case. All aspects of the case are being checked. The assailant will be identified very soon.

CCTV footage of the area is also being checked, he added.

Freezing cold



Icicles hang from mountain sides along a road in Lahaul-Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh on Sunday. PTI

Himachal Assembly session in Dharamshala begins today

Lot of queries about roads, drinking water, schools and hospitals by members, says Speaker

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
DHARAMSHALA

Himachal Pradesh Assembly Speaker Rajeev Bindal said the winter session of the Assembly is all set to get under way from December 9 to 14 in Dharamshala.

Addressing a press conference on Sunday at Tapovan Assembly Secretariat, Dr. Bindal said the session will begin at 2 p.m. on Monday.

He said six meetings have been scheduled for the session with December 12 set to be a private members' working day.

Dr. Bindal said he will be requesting everybody, including the Opposition, to give their support in the conduct of the session.

The Speaker said the House is the best place to raise people's problems and solve them and called on the members to raise issues related to public interest.

434 questions

The Speaker informed newsmen that a total of 434 starred and unstarred questions have been received. Out of this, 270 starred questions

were received while information on 128 unstarred questions have also been received. In addition to this, a total of 36 questions that were postponed from earlier were also included.

Dr. Bindal said six questions were received under Rule 62, 13 questions under Rule 130, five questions under Rule 101 and three questions under Rule 324.

"Members have also highlighted the main issues related to their respective constituencies through questions. There are a lot of queries

about roads, drinking water, schools, hospitals and vacancies in offices. Great work is expected in the session, he said.

e-Vidhan Sabha praised
Further, he praised the importance of e-Vidhan Sabha that has helped in increasing the number of questions.

"The e-Vidhan Sabha has made the functioning of the Assembly faster. The agenda is immediately reaching the legislators. It is easy to prepare. The MLAs' speeches are also being made available to

the legislator on their mobiles on request," the Speaker said.

He added that there are also questions related to the recently held global investors' meet and land allotment in the State under Rule 118.

"We hope that the government will completely satisfy the legislators about their queries," the Speaker said.

He appealed to the MLAs to cooperate while working in the State's interest. Assembly Secretary Yashpal Sharma and other officials were present on the occasion.

Congress protests Chouhan's remark

Bid to divert attention from fertilizer shortage issue: BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh Congress on Sunday held a protest over the alleged use of intemperate language by senior BJP leader Shivraj Singh Chouhan against Chief Minister Kamal Nath.

Congress leader Vibha Patel claimed Mr. Chouhan, while delivering a speech at

a protest in Sagar over fertilizer shortage, said 'Kamal Nath kis khet ki mooli hai' (rustic way of brushing aside someone as insignificant and inconsequential).

Police stopped protesting Congress workers some 500 metres away from Mr. Chouhan's residence here.

"During a protest on Saturday at Sagar, Mr. Chou-

han used foul language saying 'Kamal Nath Kis Khet Ki Mooli Hai' (Who do you think you are Kamal Nath?) etc. This is a sign that he (Mr. Chouhan) has lost his mental balance," Mr. Patel said.

However, BJP spokesperson Rajneesh Agrawal said the Congress protest was a bid to divert attention from fertilizer shortage issue.

Jammu-Srinagar national highway closed for repair work

Convoys of security personnel allowed to ply from both sides, civilian traffic restricted

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAMMU

The 270-km-long Jammu-Srinagar national highway was closed for traffic on Sunday to facilitate "necessary repair work", while one-way traffic resumed on the 434-km Srinagar-Leh highway and the Mughal road after remaining closed for several weeks due to heavy snowfall, officials said.

Inspector General of Police, traffic, Alok Kumar said vehicular movement on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway, the only all-weather road linking Kashmir with the rest of the country, was suspended for the day to allow road maintenance agencies to carry out "necessary repair work".



Jammu-Srinagar national highway is the only all-weather road linking Kashmir with the rest of the country. FILE PHOTO

While convoys of security personnel were allowed to ply on the highway from both sides-- Srinagar and Jammu, civilian traffic was restricted.

The step was taken to ensure that the highway which was damaged by recent land-

slides in Ramban sector can be repaired and to facilitate the passage of security convoys.

Meanwhile, the 434-km Srinagar-Leh national highway was reopened for one-way traffic on Sunday morn-

ing after remaining closed since November 27 following heavy snowfall in Zojilla pass and adjoining areas, the officials said.

They said the traffic was allowed to move from Kargil towards Srinagar after the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), which maintains the highway, gave the green signal after clearing snow from the road.

Similarly, the officials said that the Mughal road which connects the border districts of Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu region to south Kashmir's Shopian district was also cleared of accumulated snow and thrown open for one-way traffic after remaining closed for more than a month.

Traffic was allowed from Shopian side but the drivers were cautioned to drive carefully due to slippery conditions at some places, the officials said.

Snowfall blocked road

The Mughal road was closed for traffic on November 6 after most parts of Kashmir valley including Pir Ki Gali experienced first major snowfall.

After several weeks of hectic efforts, the road was cleared on November 26 but a fresh spell of snowfall delayed its reopening, the officials said.

Both Srinagar-Leh national highway and the Mughal road remain closed for traffic during winter months due to heavy snowfall.



Left bodies call for 12-hour Assam bandh on Tuesday against CAB

North East Students' Organisation is also protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWAHATI/ITANAGAR

As many as 16 Left-leaning organisations have called for a 12-hour Assam bandh on December 10 to protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill.

The North East Students' Organisation has already called for an 11-hour Northeast bandh from 5 a.m. on Tuesday on the same issue.

Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti and its sister organisations have extended their support to the bandh, called by these organisations and the Northeast students' body, KMSS adviser Akhil Gogoi said at a press conference on Sunday.

KMSS has also extended its support to the 12-hour Assam bandh on Monday, called by various tribal students' bodies such as Sootea, Moran and Koch-Raj-bongshi, he said.

'Scrap the Bill'

In a joint statement, the 16 left-leaning organisations, including SFI, DYFI, AIDWA, AISF, AISA and IPTA, demanded "scrapping of the Bill" and called for "the 12-hour Assam bandh" from 5 a.m.



All Assam Students' Union members take out a torchlight rally in Guwahati on Sunday in protest against the Citizen (Amendment) Bill. • PTI

on Tuesday. The Assam State Jamiat Ulama also supported the Northeast bandh, called by the NESO, on Tuesday.

Endorsing the NESO's decision to observe the bandh in the Northeastern States on December 10, the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union on Sunday appealed to the people of the State to support the agitation.

However, Nagaland has been exempted from the purview of the bandh in view of the on-going Hornbill Festival there.

The Centre is likely to introduce the Bill in Parliament on Monday despite stiff opposition by various organisations in the region.

"The AAPSU, a constituent of NESO, has directed all its federal units in the State to arrange requisite manpower for successful implementation of the bandh and we have appealed to the people to cooperate with us and support the bandh," AAPSU vice-president Mije Taku said at a press conference.

Terming the Bill as an attempt by the Centre to disintegrate the people of the region, Mr. Taku said that the stand of the AAPSU on the CAB is clear from day one. The CAB would not be applicable to Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram where inner line permit system exists and those tribal regions of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura which are governed under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Protest in Arunachal

On this, Mr. Taku said, the AAPSU being a constituent of the NESO would oppose it as the Bill would greatly affect other States of the region where Sixth Schedule is not in force.

"We are opposing the Bill since day one and despite several meetings, the central leadership did not pay heed to the concern of the people of the Northeast," Mr. Taku said.

The CAB will grant citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan after seven years of stay in the country even if they do not possess proper documents.

Winged visitors



Migratory birds perched on a tree at the Rabintra Sarobar Lake in Kolkata on Sunday. • PTI

Miscreants lock up Odisha MLA in room, torch his vehicle

Braja Kishore Pradhan's SUV, bike were similarly targeted in August

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

Some unidentified miscreants set a sports utility vehicle of an Odisha MLA on fire after locking him in his room from outside in Angul district late on Saturday night.

The incident took place when Talcher MLA Braja Kishore Pradhan had come to his camp office at Nandira village around 11.30 p.m. on Saturday.

Two hours later, when Mr. Pradhan and his driver had fallen asleep, some miscreants entered his garage and torched his SUV.

When the MLA got up and tried to come outside, he found himself locked in.

He made a call to the mobile phone of his driver who came to rescue him. They found two vehicles - his SUV and an ambulance - burning. They tried to douse the fire but in vain.

Probe is on

Although it has not yet been ascertained as to who were behind the incident, Vikrampur police along with forensic team and dog squad are investigating the case.

The incident has taken place barely four months after some unidentified miscreants set ablaze Mr. Pradhan's SUV and a bike at his official quarters in Bhubaneswar in August. The modus operandi was same.

Mr. Pradhan was then not present at his residence. His support staff had, however, felt suffocated as the entire house was filled with smoke and managed to escape through a window. In 2017, a woman, who claimed to be the MLA's wife, had ransacked his Bhubaneswar official quarters.

New chargesheet in murder case names BJP leader Mukul Roy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

A new chargesheet in a ten-year-old case has named BJP leader Mukul Roy as a provocateur in the murder of three persons. Mr. Roy has described this as "an act of political vendetta".

The main accused, Birbhum district's BJP leader Monirul Islam, is named in the chargesheet. Former Forward Bloc leader and Trinamool Congress ex-MLA Mr. Islam, a close aide of Mr. Roy, was recently inducted into the BJP. Mr. Roy was instrumental in inducting Mr. Islam, a decision severely

criticised by a powerful section within the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the BJP.

In June 2010, three brothers - Koton Sheikh, Dhanu Sheikh and Turuk Sheikh of Birbhum - were allegedly killed by Mr. Islam over a sand mining dispute. Mr. Islam is reported to have said at a public rally that he "squashed the brothers under his feet".

Issued threats

Mr. Islam is known for publicly threatening his political opponents and had also reportedly threatened to "behead" a local

Congress leader.

Despite his past, Mr. Islam was acquitted by a lower court in the case. A fresh appeal was filed by the brother of one of the deceased to reopen the case and in September 2019, the High Court instructed the police to re-investigate the case.

TMC secretary general Partha Chatterjee said that his party has "nothing much to add [as] administration is doing its job".

The family of the deceased, particularly the mother of the murdered men Zarina Biwi, welcomed the court's decision.

Ex-Minister passes away

Bhagabat Prasad Mohanty was a veteran Congress leader

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BHUBANESWAR

Veteran Congress leader and former Odisha Minister Bhagabat Prasad Mohanty passed away at his residence here, family sources said on Sunday.

Mr. Mohanty, 90, breathed his last following cardiac arrest on Saturday night, they said.

Three-time MLA

A three-time MLA from Kendrapara, Mr. Mohanty was elected to the As-

sembly in 1971 as a Praja Socialist Party (PSP) candidate and in 1985 and 1995 as a Congress nominee. He was the Higher Education and Revenue minister in the Congress government in the State.

A host of dignitaries, including Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, conduced the veteran leader's death.

Expressing his grief, Mr. Patnaik described him as an able administrator and a seasoned politician.

He also conveyed his deep sympathy to the bereaved family.

As the news about Mr. Mohanty's demise spread, a large number of his admirers, political leaders and people thronged his house to pay their last respect.

13 wagons of goods train derail

Services between lower and upper Assam affected

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWAHATI

Train services between lower and upper Assam were disrupted on Sunday morning after 13 wagons of a goods train derailed between Naharkatiya and Duliajan stations under Tinsukia division of NF Railway, officials said.

The train services between lower and upper Assam have been suspended for four days following the derailment, they said.

The tracks will be repaired during this period, an official said.

According to NF Railway officials, 13 goods-laden wagons derailed around 6.40 a.m. The cause of derailment will be ascertained after an enquiry, the officials said.

Accident relief trains with crane have reached the site from Tinsukia and another relief train from Lumding will also reach the site shortly to clear the tracks, NF Railway Chief Public Relations Officer Subhanan Chanda said.



Onlookers stand near the wagons of a goods train that derailed near Naharkatiya railway station at Dibrugarh in Assam on Sunday. • PTI

Senior railway officials from Tinsukia division are monitoring the work at the site, Mr. Chanda said.

The Tinsukia-Namrup-Simaluguri mainline (single line) section has been blocked due to the accident, the CPRO said.

A number of trains have been diverted via Simaluguri-Sibsagar Town-Dibrugarh section, while some trains have been cancelled, he said.

Now, Cong. comes up with Super 1000

Party to give tickets to 1,000 youth workers in the local body elections to strengthen organisation

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

The unexpected opportunity to be part of the Maharashtra government seems to have made the Congress realise the importance of focusing on its party organisation, especially the youth front in the State.

Following the Super 60 initiative in the Assembly polls, where the State Youth Congress handled the campaign of party candidates in 60 seats, it is coming up with the Super 1000 campaign. Under this, 1,000 Youth Congress workers will be given tickets for the local body elections.

"The youth is the backbone of a political party and we in the Youth Congress are determined to push ahead the party programme with our hard work. Similarly, we will be getting adequate representation to contest in the local body polls," said Maharashtra Youth Congress



Young blood: The Super 1000 programme follows the Super 60 initiative in the Assembly polls, where the Youth Congress handled the campaign of candidates in 60 seats. ■ FILE PHOTO

president Satyajee Tambe.

Of the 60 seats focused on by the Youth Congress in the State Assembly elections, 20 went to the allies and out of

the remaining 40, the party secured victory in 28. "The Youth Congress received 19 tickets out of which six candidates won. I am halfway in-

to my tenure as Youth Congress president and am aiming to make us No. 1 in the State," Mr. Tambe said. The Youth Congress re-

cently launched its Yuva Jodo programme, which aims to train young party workers to create the party's future generation. "These trained workers will be travelling to every district in the State to help and strengthen the party organisation in their respective areas. Out of these, 1,000 youth Congress workers will be given tickets in the local body polls," he said.

It has also been decided to nominate all candidates under the age of 40 for the zilla parishad elections.

Clarifying that the Youth Congress is committed to the issues related to youngsters, Mr. Tambe said despite being part of the government, the organisation will continue to hold protests when required. "At the same time, we expect that our ministers to contribute to strengthening the Congress organisation in the State and provide transparent governance," said Mr. Tambe.

In second incident in two days, leopard attacks woman

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AMRELI

A 45-year-old woman was injured in a leopard attack late on Saturday in Amreli district of Gujarat, in the second such incident of leopard-human conflict reported from the district in the last two days.

It is, however, not clear whether the same leopard was involved in both incidents. The woman, Dayaben Malavi, was attacked in Lunghiya village on Saturday night, two days after a leopard mauled to death a farmer who was sleeping at his farm at Mota Munjiyasar village, also in Amreli district, early on Thursday.

Following the latest incident, the forest department has launched a massive operation to trace and capture the big cat.

According to officials, several cases of human-leopard conflict have come to the light in the region. Most of the victims were farmers.

A senior forest official said a massive operation is under way to trap the leopard "which will be shot dead if it continues to remain evasive for long and keeps attacking humans."

The operation involves a team of 150 trained personnel, and 30 cages have been set up at different places, he said. "As many as six veterinary doctors are ready with tranquilliser guns to rescue the big cat," said conservator of forests, Rajkot, A.M. Parmar.

"We have also undertaken a preliminary survey of the area using a drone to get an idea of the movement of leopards. We are scanning the area, especially cotton and pulses farms, where leopards are likely to be found. If required, we are also setting up CCTV cameras and night vision cameras," Mr. Parmar said, adding that police teams have also been roped in with sharpshooters, who will be used if needed.

Keeping strict watch



Gearing up: Officials monitor arrivals and departures at Vidhan Bhavan in Nagpur on Sunday, with security stepped up ahead of the winter session of the Assembly set to begin on December 16. ■ S. SUDARSHAN

Goa govt. to revive farming culture: Michael Lobo

State Cabinet Minister says manure will be provided by solid waste management plant

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PANAJI

The Goa government will revive farming culture and encourage cultivation of onions in the State so that issues like rising price do not affect the common man, a State minister has said.

Talking to reporters on Saturday, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA and Goa's Waste Management Minister Michael Lobo said the Pramod Sawant-led government will also work towards reviving the "slowly dwindling" agricultural economy of the coastal State.

"Twenty-five years ago, Goa was totally self-sufficient. Our parents and grandparents used to grow vegetables, especially onions. Goan onions are famous across India," he said. "We want to encourage cultivation of onions, so that the rising prices of the crop will not affect Goans."

Mr. Lobo said manure or



Going local: The government wants to encourage cultivation of onions so that rising prices do not affect Goans. ■ FILE PHOTO

non-chemical fertiliser can be provided from the waste treatment plant in Goa for organic farming. "From next year, we should encourage cultivating more vegetables. Manure, necessary to grow vegetables in organic way, we can provide through the solid waste management plant," he said.

Mr. Lobo also said he would start cultivating vegetables all year round at his

own farm. "All kinds of vegetables would be planted there," he said.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant had recently blamed the *sushegad* (laid-back) attitude of Goans for the onion crisis. "The State government cannot be held responsible for high onion prices. We (people) are responsible for being *sushegad*...we are responsible because we do not plant onions," he said.

'Sawant irresponsible in blaming Goans for crisis'

Sena questions BJP leaders' silence

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PANAJI

The Goa unit of the Shiv Sena on Sunday termed Chief Minister Pramod Sawant's statement, blaming the "laid-back" attitude of Goans for the current onion crisis, as "irresponsible".

"Making statements such as people of Goa are *sushegad* due to which the onion prices are high, makes no sense," Shiv Sena's Goa unit vice president and spokesperson Rakhi Prabhudesai Naik said.

She also questioned the silence of women Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders in the State over the onion price hike, and sought to know if they were not affect-

Raut accuses BJP of double standards on women's safety

Sena MP says BJP had created uproar when in opposition

TANVI DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut on Sunday criticised the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for not doing anything in the aftermath of the Hyderabad rape case as against the uproar it had created over women's safety after the Nirbhaya case when it was in opposition.

He also called the encounter killings of the four accused "the victory of police raj over rule of law", in a column in Sena mouthpiece *Saamana* on Sunday.

Mr. Raut has kept up a continuous attack on the BJP since the Assembly election results and even after Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray became Chief Minister. Even though Mr. Thackeray is no longer the editor of *Saamana*, the daily is known to express the views of the party. Its fiery editorials have also helped set the tone of the politics in the State in recent



Sanjay Raut

months. Mr. Raut writes a weekly column for the paper titled 'Rokhthok.'

In Sunday's column, he said, "There is a difference between rule of law and police raj. In this case, police raj has trumped the rule of law. One should look at India to see how a crime like rape is politicised. At the time of the Nirbhaya rape and murder case, the BJP was in opposition at the Centre while Congress was in power. The op-

position capitalised on the case and said women were no longer safe in the country. Now that BJP is in power, it is not ready to take any responsibility... Nobody is saying the number of rapes increased under the BJP regime, but the reasons given by right-wingers for the rising crimes against women are laughable."

He was referring to people who have said women shouldn't wear short clothes and that rapes won't stop until India becomes a Hindu nation. "What has Hindutva got to do with rape?" the MP asked.

He said Indian society has failed to take necessary steps towards women's safety and needs to change, otherwise stringent laws will not work.

Terminating the encounter of the four accused in the Hyderabad case "suspicious," Mr. Raut said there is a need to fast-track rape cases.

2 held for gang rape of minor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AHMEDABAD

The Ahmedabad Crime Branch on Sunday arrested two people for the alleged gang rape of a 14-year-old girl in Vadodara.

The accused, Kishan Mathasuriya (28) and Jaso Solanki (21), were arrested from Tarsali locality of Vadodara where they lived, Special Commissioner of Police (Crime), Ahmedabad, Ajay Tomar, said. "The Ahmedabad Crime Branch worked in coordination with the Vadodara city police to crack the case," Mr. Tomar told reporters.

According to the police, the girl was raped on the night of November 28 in Navlakhi Compound on Rajmahal Road, where she had gone along with a friend.

The accused thrashed the boy accompanying her and then dragged her to an isolated place within the com-

pound and raped her, before fleeing.

The police had issued two different sketches of the accused and even announced a reward of ₹1 lakh for information about them.

"Mathasuriya is originally from Tarapur village in Anand, while Solanki is from Jasdian in Rajkot," Mr. Tomar said. "We have gathered enough evidence that supports their involvement in the crime. As per details gathered from them, they were also involved in past cases of burglary, theft, and fight. We suspect they were also involved in some other crimes," he said.

According to Mr. Tomar, the police used human intelligence, CCTV camera footage, technical intelligence, and other means to investigate the crime, which led to the arrest of the accused. The accused will be handed over to the Vadodara police.

Man says wife abetted rape of daughter

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BHAVNAGAR

Three people were arrested in Bhutiyavillage in Gujarat's Bhavnagar district for allegedly raping a 12-year-old girl over a year, while her mother, who abetted the crime, is absconding.

Her father filed a case on Saturday and said his wife had abetted the crime. "The victim told us her father used to be fed something due to which he would pass out, after which the accused would rape her," the police said.

Minor girl found dead in farm in Nagpur district

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NAGPUR

A five-year-old girl was found dead on a farm in Linga village in Nagpur district on Sunday. The girl had been missing since Friday.

"The body was found on the farm where she lived with her parents," a Kalmeshwar police station officer said, adding that prima facie someone had smashed her head with a stone.

He said police are awaiting the post-mortem report to ascertain the exact cause of the death and to know whether the girl had been sexually assaulted. A case of

murder has been registered under Section 302 of the Indian Penal Code.

A police official said the girl's parents live on one side of the farm while her grandmother on the side, with a small path connecting both houses. Her parents work as farm labourers. "The girl went missing on Friday evening. Initially, her parents assumed she might have gone to her grandmother's house. However, they lodged a missing person complaint on Saturday afternoon after realising that she was not traceable," the official said.

Cattle rescued from truck in Nagpur after dramatic chase

Driver, illegally transporting 47 animals, broke through police barricades and toll plaza barrier

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NAGPUR

Cattle being illegally transported in a truck was rescued by the police after a dramatic chase of around 40 km, which ended with its driver abandoning the vehicle and fleeing from the spot, the police said on Sunday.

The incident occurred in the early hours of Saturday, when the driver of the truck, carrying 47 animals, broke through police barricades at two points and a barrier at a toll plaza on the outskirts be-

fore entering Nagpur city, the official said.

Nakabandi on highway
"The police received a tip-off early on Saturday that a truck carrying some cattle would be passing via NH-47. Accordingly, a nakabandi was put in place at Kelwad. The truck arrived there around 4 a.m. The police signalled the driver to stop the vehicle, but he sped away instead," inspector Suresh Mattami from the Kelwad police station said.

"So we started chasing the truck. On the way, the truck also hit a car near Pipala village. We then alerted the operators at Patansaongi toll plaza and asked them to stop the vehicle. However, the speeding truck even broke through the boom barrier at the toll plaza and continued its run," he said.

Meanwhile, the Kelwad police officials alerted their Nagpur city counterparts about the truck.

"The city police team blocked the road with barri-

acades at Naka no. 2 area on Koradi Road. However, the driver did not stop the vehicle and broke through the barricades even there," Mr. Mattami said.

Vehicle abandoned
He then took the truck to Mominpura Chowk area of the city, where he abandoned the vehicle and fled from the spot.

"The police team then rescued 47 animals, including some cows and bullocks, from the truck. These ani-

mals were being illegally transported in a pathetic condition. We chased the truck for around 40 km from Kelwad," the official said.

An offence has been registered under Sections 279 (rash driving or riding on a public way) and 427 (mischief causing damage to the amount of fifty rupees) of the Indian Penal Code, and sections of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the Motor Vehicles Act.

A hunt has been launched to nab the driver.

IN BRIEF



Minor fire breaks out in Tirumala kitchen

TIRUPATI
A minor fire accident took place in the kitchen of the Sri Venkateswara temple in Tirumala on Sunday. A tin containing ghee slipped and fell on the stove, which started the fire. Fire tenders rushed to the spot and put out the flames within 30 minutes.

10,130 government offices mapped in Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
As many as 10,130 government offices have already been mapped as part of the ₹4.24-crore-Mapathon Kerala project, a crowdsourcing mapping initiative, which aims at creating micro-level maps of entire Kerala for identifying its natural and physical assets. The project is part of the Rebuild Kerala Initiative.

'Disha's killers contradicted one another'

During inquiry, Arif put the blame on the other three, while they claimed he goaded them: police

ABHINAV DESHPANDE
HYDERABAD

The four accused in the gang-rape and murder of the 27-year-old veterinarian are learnt to have given contradictory confessions to the investigating officers about the offence they committed on November 27.

The source said all the four accused – Mohammed Arif, 26, Jollu Shiva, Jollu Naveen and Ch. Chennakeshavaulu, all aged about 20 – gave different versions of the events that unfolded on that fateful night.

They were taken into custody by the police on December 4 for interrogation and were gunned down in the wee hours of December 6.

Kept apart

A senior police officer associated with the investigation said all the accused were held separately at an 'undisclosed' location in Cyberabad. "All of them were scared and narrated different versions of how they planned the offence, sexual-



Shootout site: Police personnel at the field where the accused in Disha murder case were shot dead in an exchange of fire on Friday. **APTI**

ly assaulted the vet and subsequently killed her. The confessions did not match," said the officer.

The other three maintained that it was Arif who asked them to consume alcohol and hatched the conspiracy to rape the vet when they first saw her parking her two-wheeler near the Tonduppally toll gate on the Outer Ring Road on the evening of

November 27. "While Arif shifted the blame on the other three, they claimed it was Arif who goaded them to commit the offence," said a police official, requesting anonymity.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, another officer said that when the accused were taken to the Chattanpalli underpass in the early hours of Friday for reconstruction of

the crime scene, they all said different things. "One said they carried the victim in their hands after parking their lorry on the highway, while another said they took the lorry and went under the bridge," said a police officer. When the police asked them where they buried the victim's mobile, power bank and her watch, they pointed to different directions.

Family alleges inaction by the police

STAFF REPORTER
HYDERABAD

Family members of Disha reportedly informed the seven-member National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) team, headed by Senior Superintendent of Police Manzil Saini, of the alleged inaction of the Cyberabad police when they went to lodge a missing person complaint on the fateful night of November 27.

Disha's father and sister met the team of the NHRC at RBVRR Telangana State Police Academy on Sunday.

Sources said that Disha's family told the team that the victim's life could have been saved had the Cyberabad police acted on time without citing jurisdiction limits.

Two held in A.P. for raping minor

Incident took place on November 25

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI

Within a couple of days of the shooting down of the accused in the Disha rape and murder case in Telangana, another incident, this time involving a minor, came to light from the Tiruchanur police station limits of Andhra Pradesh on Sunday.

The girl, 16, hailing from the vicinity, was walking down the road on the night of November 25, when Chittoor Venkatesh, 28, offered her a lift on his two-wheeler.

She boarded the vehicle, but after going some distance the man stopped near Mundlapudi pretending to have run out of fuel. He called his friend Bukke Rajmohan Naik, 28, requesting him to bring petrol.

Gagged and raped

The latter arrived at the spot a few minutes later. The duo then gagged the girl and dragged her into the nearby

bushes and allegedly raped her. The two then took off on the two-wheeler.

The shocked girl called her parents, who lodged a complaint with the Tiruchanur police. Based on the description given by the girl and with the help of CCTV footage, the police arrested the duo near the Tiruchanur flyover on Saturday afternoon.

Accused in murder case

Rajmohan Naik is an accused in a murder case registered at the Tirupati West police station last year. The case has since been transferred to Tiruchanur after he changed his location.

Deputy Superintendent of Police (Tirupati East division) T. Muralikrishna said that a case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act of 2012 had been registered and the accused sent to judicial custody.

Delay in NREGS wages hits BPL families

Centre yet to pay ₹1,000 crore for job scheme and material cost arrears to Kerala

N.J. NAIR
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The alleged delay by the Centre in releasing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) wage and material cost arrears of ₹1,000 crore due to Kerala has left about 15 lakh below poverty line (BPL) families in the lurch.

The arrears comprises wages of ₹860 crore and material cost and administrative expenses of ₹140 crore. Payment of wages has been indefinitely held up at a time when the State is trying to

overcome the pangs of rural poverty, price hike of essentials, job loss due to economic slow down and such other major ills.

95% women

About 95% of the 12.98 lakh workers registered under the scheme are women and the lapse in releasing the wages would push them to the verge of poverty yet again. Kerala is one State that had set a model worth emulating for others in taking up projects for creating durable assets and providing maximum employment to

the indigent and marginalised sections. The scheme had come as a blessing to a legion of families that are striving hard to eke out a living. Local Self-Government Department sources told

The Hindu that the audit reports have been submitted and replies to queries too have also been furnished within the time set by the Centre.

All other procedures, including inspections, have been completed and a decision to recover ₹25 lakh in connection with some of the works completed under the

scheme have been approved. Still, the payment is being delayed without attributing any valid reason.

The Local Self-Government Department Principal Secretary had apprised the Centre of the issue on December 3 and was learnt to have wrested an assurance for releasing the funds soon, but the Union government had not heeded to such moves so far, sources said.

The delay would have a serious impact on the execution of projects, mainly watershed development, sources said.

ASI rescues girl who jumped into Krishna river

The 58-year-old brought her ashore with help from local fishermen

STAFF REPORTER
MACHILIPATNAM

An assistant sub-inspector (ASI) rescued a girl who jumped into the river Krishna at the Puligadda-Penumudi bridge near Avanigadda in Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh on Sunday.

Koppula Manikyala Rao, Avanigadda station ASI, was on duty at the weekly 'No-Accident Drive' campaign when he saw the girl jumping.

He promptly jumped into the river, found her, and brought her safely to the shore.



Good job: Avanigadda ASI Manikyala Rao, second from left, being felicitated on Sunday. **SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT**

What is commendable is that the 58-year-old ASI managed to swim nearly 500 m in search of the girl. And, he

managed to bring her out safely with help from local fishermen. According to an official re-

lease, the girl has been admitted to the government hospital in Avanigadda, where she is responding to medical treatment.

The girl is an under graduate student from the nearby Diviseema region. She reportedly attempted to end her life due to some personal reasons.

Krishna district Superintendent of Police M. Ravindranath Babu and other officials lauded ASI Manikyala Rao's effort.

Those suffering with suicidal thoughts can dial 100 for help.

'Kerala is in for major dengue epidemic'

C. MAYA
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala could be bracing for yet another major dengue epidemic in 2020 going by the current and early disease surveillance trends, public health experts said.

With serological evaluations showing that there might be a shift in the type of dengue virus hitherto circulating in the community, the possibility of the next outbreak being more virulent, with significant mortality, cannot be discounted, the experts have warned.

Not just dengue, Chikungunya also seems to be rearing its head again, with a significant spike in the number of cases being reported from Thiruvananthapuram. Dengue epidemics occur in a cyclical pattern and the last major epidemic in 2017 resulted in 165 deaths.

Patient wait



Huge demand: People waiting to purchase onion at a subsidised rate of ₹25 at the Rythu Bazar in Tirupati. The price of onion shot up to ₹250 a kg in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh on Sunday. **K.V. POORNACHANDRA KUMAR**

Wild elephants create panic among farmers in Chittoor

A 30-member herd is moving close to fields in Kuppam

STAFF REPORTER
CHITTOOR

The presence of a 30-member herd of wild elephants moving close to the fields in the villages of Rallabuduguru panchayat of Shantipuram mandal of Kuppam Assembly constituency in Andhra Pradesh is causing tension among farmers.

According to available information, the wild elephants raided standing crops of paddy, ragi and vegetables at Bellakogila village of the mandal in the early hours, and started moving towards Rallabuduguru along the forest fringes.

Though the movement of wild herds is regular in Kuppam, Gudupalle and Ramakuppam mandals, the villages of Shantipuram mandal are considered safe from the jumbo raids, usually seeing such incidents only occa-



Migratory path: Elephants from Karnataka forests moving close to fields near Rallabuduguru near Kuppam in A.P.

sionally. Forest officials said the presence of various standing crops had lured the herds.

Agriculture activity

It has been observed that wild elephants along the Hosur, Krishnagiri, Kuppam and Karnataka are active along the migratory path in the months from November

to mid-January due to the agriculture activity.

Meanwhile, forest officials have deployed trackers at the trouble spot, and initiated measures to drive the pachyderms back into forests. By Sunday evening, the herd had split into two and were moving beside the fringe villages along the Kuppam-Karnataka border.

BJP will win at least 13 seats: Yediyurappa

Ahead of the counting today, Karnataka CM is confident of sweeping byelections

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
DHARMASTHALA/SHIVAMOGGA

Hours before the counting of votes for the byelection to 15 Karnataka Assembly seats is due to begin on Monday, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa exuded confidence that the BJP will win at least 13 of them.

Speaking to presspersons during his visit to Dharmasthala here on Sunday, Mr. Yediyurappa said one seat each might go to the Congress and the Janata Dal (Secular).

"I don't think our prediction will go wrong," he said and added that this will help in giving a stable government to the State.

The Chief Minister said he had come to the temple to seek the strength to rule the State effectively in the remaining three-and-half



Prayer time: Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa at Sri Manjunatha temple in Dharmasthala. **SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT**

years. "I'm also praying to the deity to resolve problems of people of the State and give them prosperity," he said.

Mr. Yediyurappa said he had released funds for con-

structing a retaining wall to the vented dam built across the Netravathi river in Dharmasthala. The work will start shortly, he said.

Mr. Yediyurappa, Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai,

and Minister for Public Works Govind Karjol who arrived from Mankalale village in Sagar taluk of Shivamogga district, after attending the wedding of Speaker Vishveshwara Hegde Kageri's daughter in Sagar, visited the temple along with D. Veerendra Heggade, Pattadhikari of Dharmasthala. Minister for Muzarai, Ports, Fisheries and Inland Water Transport Kota Srinivas Poojary also joined them.

Earlier, he told reporters in Shivamogga that most of the disqualified MLAs who contested the byelection would be accommodated in his Cabinet. The Cabinet expansion would be done immediately after the announcement of results as per direction of the BJP central leadership, he said.

Telangana town to host 'Bird Walk' festival

The two-day event around Kumram Bheem will showcase avian wealth

S. HARPAL SINGH
ADILABAD

The Forest Department in Kumram Bheem (KB) Asifabad district of Telangana is all set to earn the distinction of being the first in the State to organise a Bird Walk Festival on December 14 and 15, promoting awareness of that part of nature which it protects. There are umpteen places and spots that will enthral bird watchers in the district and from outside who will get to see some of the pristine patches of forest.

Wading birds' spots

"We will have the bird walks on both days at sites in Bejjur and Penchikalpet forest in Kagaznagar Division and in Tiryani forest, especially the Gundala range in Asifabad



Treat for bird watchers: A Purple Heron seen at Kumram Bheem in Asifabad district of Telangana. **S. HARPALSINGH**

Division," revealed KB Asifabad District Forest Officer Ranjeet L. Naik. The walks will also be conducted at the picturesque Kumram Bheem Project Reservoir and the tank at Sirpur (T), as they attract a lot of water birds of varying species," he added.

The Bird Walk tour includes a visit to the scenic habitat of the Long-billed vultures in Penchikalpet range, the scavenger bird being the flagship species. The habitat is located in a beautiful setting at a bend in the Peddavagu stream close to

where it joins the Pranahita river on the Inter-State border with Maharashtra near Motlaguda village.

Giving participation details of the festival, the DFO said interested persons can register themselves by calling the department on 737752600 and 9550005343. "Registrations will be limited to 100 and they will be divided into groups of 10," Mr. Naik said.

Video clip

As a teaser, to reveal what's in store, the department has produced a three-minute video clip including some of the 270 species of birds recorded in the district. Early registrations will help the Department in organising the stay and transportation of the birders, the DFO said.

IN BRIEF



'Lapses were allowed to continue with impunity'

NEW DELHI
Union Housing and Urban Development Minister Hardeep Singh Puri hit out at the AAP government over the death of 43 people in the fire in Anaj Mandi, alleging that the incident pointed to lapses that were allowed to continue with "impunity". ■ PTI

Fireman saves 11 people trapped in building

NEW DELHI
One of the first firemen to enter the building in Anaj Mandi area, Delhi Fire Service personnel Rajesh Shukla saved 11 persons from the inferno on Sunday. Mr. Shukla injured his legs during the rescue operation and is currently recuperating at LNJP Hospital.

Bihar CM announces ₹2 lakh ex-gratia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday expressed grief over the death of 43 people in a massive fire in Delhi, and announced an ex-gratia of ₹2 lakh each to the next of kin of the victims, who hailed from the State.

Proper treatment

The Chief Minister asked the State's Resident Commissioner in Delhi, Joint Labour Commissioner and senior officials to take stock of the situation at the incident site and ensure that the injured belonging to the State get proper treatment, an official release said.
Mr. Kumar said, a financial assistance of ₹1 lakh would be paid by the Labour Department while ₹1 lakh would be paid from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

'The fire has come inside the building. I can't breathe'

Knowing that he would not make it alive, Musharraf Ali called his childhood friend, pleading that he take care of his wife and four children



Major operation: NDRF personnel carrying out rescue operations at the factory in Rani Jhansi Road in New Delhi on Sunday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

SOIBAM ROCKY SINGH
NEW DELHI

Musharraf Ali, who was among the 43 people who died in the devastating fire in Delhi early on Saturday, made a last distress call to his friend Monu Agarwal, as smoke entered the fourth floor hall where he was sleeping.
Knowing that he would not make it out alive, he called his childhood friend and neighbour from Uttar Pradesh's Bijnor district, pleading that he take care of his wife and his four children after he was gone.

Here is a transcript of the conversation that was shared by Mr. Agarwal, who arrived at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan Hospital to receive Mr. Ali's body.
The caller was Mr. Musharraf Ali and the receiver was

Mr. Monu Agarwal:

Caller: Hello Monu Bhaiya, I am going to die. Please come to Karol Bagh. There is no place to run, fire has broken out.

Receiver: Delhi?

Caller: There is no place to run. I am going to die. Please take care of my family. Bhaiya, I am unable to breathe. What should I do?

Receiver: Can't you escape? What about fire brigade? Call them, they will bring water.

Caller: Nothing is happening here.

Receiver: How did the fire break out?
Caller: Bhaiya, please take care of my kids and my family. Please don't tell everything at once. Come tomorrow to take me.
Receiver: Don't worry, nothing will happen.

Caller: Hai Allah! Now, I can't even breathe.

Receiver: Haan... People must have fire brigade's number.

Caller: Downstairs people must have the number and they must have called them. I can't breathe.

Receiver: Hello... Hello... Hello... Have the water vehicles come???

Caller: The fire has come inside the building. I can't breathe. Whatever is God's will. Hai Allah.

Receiver: Try to escape...
Caller: No bhaiya, I can't... Please take care of my family. Today I am going to die.

Receiver: Come outside. Try to come outside.

Caller: Bhaiya, even if I die, I will come to you. Hai Allah...
Another call was made by

28-year-old Bihar native Shakhir Hussain, a father of three.

Mr. Hussain, who worked in a cap manufacturing unit on the fourth floor, told his pregnant wife: "I am trapped. Won't come out alive."

Yet another call was made by Imran, 35, elder son of Nafees, who had come to Delhi from Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh six years ago.

Mr. Nafees said with a lump in his throat, "I got a call from Imran who said 'Abbu, a massive fire has erupted in the building. I won't be able to come out alive. Please save me'."

"I asked him to call the fire brigade and the call ended soon after. He didn't pick up my calls again," said Mr. Nafees, 58, who lost his two sons in the tragedy.
(With PTI inputs)

Building was surveyed last week

Upper floors were found locked and could not be inspected, say official sources

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The civic authorities had last week "surveyed" the four-storey building housing illegal manufacturing units, where 43 lives were lost in a massive fire on Sunday, but the upper floors were found to be locked due to which the entire structure could not be inspected, according to official sources.

Officials were to visit the building again to survey the upper floors and accordingly issue a show-cause notice, a source said.

A preliminary probe by authorities suggested that a short-circuit triggered the fire which started on the building's second floor.

"The building was surveyed last week by civic authorities, but upper floors were found locked so the entire building could not be surveyed," an official source claimed.

The building is under Del-



Police and rescue personnel inspect the gutted unit at Rani Jhansi Road in New Delhi on Sunday. ■ PTI

hi Laws (Special Provisions) Act, 2006 which protects unauthorised construction from being sealed.

"The unit would have been closed by authorities if not found to be permissible as a household unit under provisions of the Master Plan of Delhi," the source said.

The building, spanning an area of 600 square yards, had just one door. Fire department personnel had to cut

window grills and metal meshes to enter to rescue trapped people, the Delhi Fire Services officials said.

Only one fire tender could be sent at a time through the narrow congested lanes, he said.

It took over 150 fire fighters nearly five hours to douse the blaze. As many as 63 people were pulled out from the building. While 43, including one minor, died,

16 were injured. Two fire department personnel were hurt while carrying out the rescue work, officials said.

The massive fire ripped through the building housing illegal manufacturing units in north Delhi's cramped Anaj Mandi area on Sunday morning, in the deadliest blaze in the national capital since the Uphaar tragedy in 1997 in which 59 people were killed and over 100 injured.

Almost all the deceased in the Anaj Mandi fire were migrant labourers hailing from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Police and fire department officials said many of the fatalities occurred due to suffocation as people were sleeping when the fire started at around 5 am on the second floor of the building that did not have fire safety clearance and was packed with combustible material like cardboard, plastic sheets and rexine.

Heart-rending scenes at morgue

Wedding of one victim was just four months away

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

Outside the mortuary of the LNJP Hospital on Sunday evening, sporting a black sweater, Mohammad Haider, 32, was among the many inconsolable family members of victims killed in the Anaj Mandi factory fire.

"Bhai chala gaya... Baap re..." Mr. Haider kept repeating as he cried out about his brother Mohammad Babu, 20.

"His marriage was only four months away and he said he will earn something in four months and paint the house, so that it will look good," Mr. Haider said between sobs.

"Kya pata tha, paint ke chakkar mei mera bhai duniya chodke chala jayega. Rang dalte, dalte, mujhe be-rang karke chala jayega.. Mera bhai.. Kaha dhundo mera bhai ko.. [How was I to know, in the process of painting the house, my brother would leave my



Inconsolable: Relatives outside the LNJP mortuary waiting to claim the bodies of the victims. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

world colourless and go away]," said the inconsolable elder brother sitting on a footpath outside the mortuary, as relatives tried to console him.

From a 20-year-old who was to get married in four months, to a man whose 25-year-old wife is eight months pregnant and a brother who was to go home with a 'le-henga' for his 15-year-old sister, the deaths have shattered families and left

families inconsolable.
Mr. Haider said they had taken a loan of ₹1.5 lakh to build the house and his brother had said they will finish the work fast.

"He said we will plaster the walls and do the painting and then he will get married. Na to plaster huva, na paint huva, bhai mera chodke chala gaya [Neither plastering nor painting happened and my brother left me]," he said.

WEATHER WATCH
RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Monday: Dense fog very likely in isolated pockets over Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...	29.3	17.5	Kozhikode	...	35.5	25.0
Ahmedabad	...	28.2	14.3	Kurnool	...	31.0	21.4
Aizawl	...	21.6	9.8	Lucknow	...	25.8	12.1
Allahabad	...	27.5	13.5	Madurai	0.4	29.8	22.8
Bangalore	0.6	24.9	17.8	Mangaluru	...	35.1	21.8
Bhopal	...	25.8	12.4	Mumbai	...	33.3	22.2
Bhubaneswar	...	30.0	18.4	Mysuru	...	28.2	16.4
Chandigarh	...	25.0	8.4	New Delhi	...	23.8	8.7
Chennai	2.7	30.6	23.1	Patna	...	27.2	14.0
Coimbatore	1.7	27.9	21.5	Port Blair	...	29.9	25.4
Dehradun	...	25.2	7.5	Puducherry	0.9	31.4	21.4
Gangtok	...	15.6	7.4	Pune	...	29.4	16.4
Goa	...	33.5	22.8	Raipur	...	28.4	15.6
Guwahati	...	27.0	11.4	Ranchi	...	25.2	12.0
Hubballi	...	27.0	19.0	Shillong	...	17.3	7.4
Hyderabad	...	27.5	18.0	Shimla	...	15.7	5.1
Imphal	...	23.5	7.6	Srinagar	...	4.7	-4.0
Jaipur	...	24.0	9.8	Thiruvananthapuram	...	2.3	33.5
Kochi	...	32.8	25.4	Tiruchi	...	13.3	29.7
Kohima	...	20.7	6.8	Vijayawada	...	31.0	21.7
Kolkata	...	30.6	...	Visakhapatnam	...	29.0	23.4

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air we are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	38	90	32	211	129	■
Bangalore	04	52	72	43	52	■
Chennai	04	30	16	67	...	■
Delhi	469	443	■
Hyderabad	16	56	51	195	...	■
Kolkata	34	99	16	229	225	■
Lucknow	62	36	45	403	...	■
Mumbai	24	56	28	214	139	■
Pune	96	14	49	202	132	■
Visakhapatnam	11	31	41	36	53	■

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

Panel pulls up 19 States for tyre disposal

Inadequate management of pyrolysis technique by-products poses health risks

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has pulled up 270 tyre pyrolysis units in 19 States for employing technology that is polluting and harmful to the health of the workers employed.

Tyre pyrolysis refers to a technique of breaking down used tyres in the absence of oxygen. Shredded tyres, at temperatures between 250° C and 500° C, produce liquid oil and gases.

While this is considered a safer technique than burning tyres, pyrolysis leaves fine carbon matter, pyro-gas and oil as residue and the inadequate management of these by-products poses health risks.

The CPCB letter of December 4 says States should be closing down all pyrolysis units that are not compliant



More than 40% of tyre pyrolysis units are not complying with rules, the NGT observed in April. ■ E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

and that the import of hazardous substances – these include used tyres – ought to be strictly regulated.

Used tyres

India is also a recipient of used tyres from Australia and the U.K., which are sent for recycling and disposal.

As of 2016-17, official estimates indicate 127.34 million tyres were produced in In-

dia, which was seen to be a 12% increase from the previous year. A 37% increase in the tyre production has been observed in the two-wheeler segment, a 23% increase in the tractor segment and 16% in the passenger car/jeep segment. India discards about 100 million tyres everyday and only a fraction of it is recycled. India is also responsible for 6% of the global tyre

waste, according to a 2017 report by environmentalist group Chintan.

The National Green Tribunal in 2014 prohibited used tyres from being burnt in the open or being used as fuel in brick kilns, because of the toxic emissions. The authority asked the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board to look at ways to dispose used tyres safely. Subsequently, the board issued a set of guidelines, in which pyrolysis was recommended as an acceptable mode.

More than 40% of tyre pyrolysis units were not complying with rules, the NGT observed in April 2019, after it sought a report from the CPCB. The CPCB reported that there were 637 units in 19 States of which 251 units were compliant, 270 non-compliant and 116 were closed.

'In 5 years, 27 students across 10 IITs took their own lives'

IIT Madras sees highest number during this period: RTI report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
INDORE

Twenty-seven students across 10 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) in the country have committed suicide in the last five years, a reply to a Right to Information (RTI) query has revealed.

As per the data from the Department of Higher Education, under the Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD), IIT Madras tops the list, with seven students committing suicide during this period.

In the reply to a query asked by RTI activist Chandrashekhar Gaur on December 2, the MHRD said between 2014 and 2019, seven students from IIT Madras, five from IIT Kharagpur and three each from IIT Delhi and IIT Hyderabad committed suicide.

Two students each from IIT Bombay, IIT Guwahati and IIT Roorkee also ended their lives during this period, it said.
During this period, one student each from Varanasi's IIT (BHU), IIT (Indian

School of Mines) Dhanbad and IIT Kanpur took the extreme step.

Measures taken

No reply was given to the query which sought to know the reasons behind the IIT students' suicides. When asked about the measures taken to prevent student suicides, the reply said, "Systems are in place to take action with regard to complaints received from students, which include Student Grievance Cells, Counselling Centres, etc."

Reward for info on child marriages

STAFF REPORTER
BERHAMPUR

Odisha's Ganjam district administration will offer a reward of ₹5,000 to anyone who provides information on child marriages, Collector Vijay Amruta Kulange said on Saturday during a meeting of the task force of the 'Nirbhay kadi' (bold bud) programme in Chhatrapur.
The administration has also decided to develop a mechanism where community leaders and local anganwadi workers will check the ages of all grooms and brides in the surrounding areas.

CVC summons EPFO top brass after fire

Files pertaining to inquiries feared lost

VIKAS DHOOT
MUMBAI

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) has summoned the top brass of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), after a fire on Friday night destroyed its vigilance wing office in the capital.

Several fire tenders were deployed to douse the flames at the NBCC Tower in the Bhikaji Cama Place around 10 p.m. The fire was brought under control a little after midnight.

FIR filed

Central Provident Fund Commissioner (CPFC) Sunil Barthwal confirmed the incident to *The Hindu* and said an FIR had been filed in the matter.

"Forensic and police investigations are now in progress to determine the cause," Mr. Barthwal said in a text message.

A stone's throw from the EPFO's headquarters, the NBCC building houses several offices, including the Bank of Maharashtra's zonal office.

However, the fire affected only the sixth floor where the vigilance wing's office is



The fire affected the sixth floor where the vigilance wing is located.

located. All files and documents pertaining to vigilance inquiries are feared lost.

The CVC is learnt to have raised concerns about the impact of the fire on the wing's functioning and the fate of investigations it is carrying out. The wing usually probes cases against employers evading PF remittances and complaints against its own staffers, who administer the savings of crores of formal sector workers.

The CPFC did not respond to queries from *The Hindu* about the CVC's intervention and whether there was a backup of the destroyed files.



Trampling on grassroots

It is a travesty of law that local body polls have been delayed by three years in Tamil Nadu

Three years after they fell due in 2016, rural local bodies in Tamil Nadu will witness elections in the last week of this month. And, barring any further judicial intervention, urban local bodies are also likely to have elected representatives early next year. It is a travesty of the law that these elections have been delayed. Cities, towns and villages have been under the rule of unelected officials for too long. Under a Supreme Court order, polls for all local bodies will have to be held, except in those districts that have been divided recently to create new ones. It is the first time since local self-government became the third tier of governance under the Constitution that polls have not been held on time in T.N. – timely elections were held every five years since 1996. Administrative lapses and political litigation over ward delimitation in various local bodies in accordance with the latest population figures in the 2011 Census resulted in the unprecedented delay. Originally announced on time in 2016, the notification was cancelled by the Madras High Court, citing irregularities in it. Since then, the issue of delimitation, the announcement of new districts and occasional litigation have contributed to the delay in setting in motion elections to the vital tiers of grassroots democracy.

There have been frequent changes in the mode of electing mayors of city corporations and chairpersons of municipalities. Originally, direct elections were held, but it was changed to indirect mode in 2006. The present regime has changed its mind twice. In 2016, the Jayalalithaa regime opted for indirect elections, that is, only ward councillors would be elected by the people and these representatives, in turn, would elect mayors and municipal chairpersons. The current Edappadi K. Palaniswami government reversed the decision and chose the direct election mode. Recently, it once again changed its mind and restored the system of indirect election, citing “better accountability and collective responsibility”. It claimed that there was scope for conflict between a directly elected head and the councillors, and that this would be eliminated if councillors themselves elected the mayor or chairperson. Beyond all the legal and technical reasons, and political squabbles over the timing of elections, the attitude of the two main parties towards the importance of local bodies has been quite lukewarm. While the posts of the heads of various local bodies are seen as prestigious, there is much politicisation when it comes to devolving funds and letting the various tiers work independently. District panchayats, in particular, are seen as being frequently undermined, as most parties consider them as a redundant third tier among panchayati raj institutions. While the polls are fought bitterly, the State is still some distance away from including local self-government bodies as partners in its development.

Shooting in Pensacola

Saudi Arabia is not doing enough to counter Islamist tendencies at home and abroad

The deadly shooting at Florida's Pensacola Naval Air Station by a Saudi aviation student that killed three and injured eight others is a fresh challenge to the Saudi authorities who are trying to remake the kingdom's image after a series of recent setbacks. U.S. federal investigators say they are yet to establish the gunman's motive, but some lawmakers have already claimed it was an act of terror. The suspect, Mohammed Alshamrani, 21, who had been training in the U.S. for two years, had watched mass shooting videos a week before Friday's assault, say investigators. A Twitter handle that is believed to have belonged to him called the U.S. a “nation of evil” and blamed it for “crimes not only against Muslims but also humanity”. This is not the first time a Saudi national is attacking Americans inside the U.S. Fifteen of the 19 al-Qaeda-linked terrorists behind the September 11, 2001 attacks, were Saudi citizens. But U.S.-Saudi relations have deepened over the years despite the 9/11 attacks. U.S. President Donald Trump, in his quest to contain Iran, Saudi Arabia's main regional rival, has doubled down on America's ties with the Kingdom. But his push for stronger ties with the Saudis has faced severe resistance from U.S. lawmakers. The murder of Saudi dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, suppression of dissent at home by the Saudi authorities, and the ongoing Saudi-led war on Yemen have all brought renewed global focus on the character of the Saudi leadership.

Riyadh was quick in condemning the “barbaric” Pensacola shooting, saying the shooter did not represent the Saudi people. The incident is unlikely to upset the U.S.-Saudi military ties immediately as both countries need each other in the larger geopolitical setting; 2,000 more American troops could be sent to the Kingdom to take on Iran. But the incident could strengthen the perception, especially among U.S. lawmakers, that the conservative Kingdom is not doing enough to flush out extremism given that the attacker was a second lieutenant in the Royal Saudi Air Force. It also raises questions about the vetting standards of both countries. More important, it is America's lax gun rules that allowed the shooter to buy the Glock 45 9-mm handgun which he used for the attack. Initial reports suggested that he used a loophole in the gun laws to buy the weapon legally. Despite repeated incidents of gun violence – most by Americans against Americans – the U.S. federal government could do little in addressing the problem. Worse, Mr. Trump and his Republican Party are opposed to stringent gun control rules. The U.S. has to first review its lax gun rules and then address issues such as vetting standards, foreign military ties and radicalism in general if it wants to prevent such incidents.

Constitutional justice is non-negotiable

The ends of justice are not served by wanton killing and retributive blood lust; India must follow constitutional morality



B. SUDARSHAN REDDY & KALPANA KANNABIRAN

Last Friday, the country was rudely awakened to the news of the deaths, in an encounter early in the morning, of the four accused in the rape and murder of the young veterinarian in Hyderabad – an incident, which happened on Wednesday, triggering an angry response across the country with demands for speedy justice. Some politicians demanded the public lynching of rapists. Members of the public were justifiably anguished that a gruesome crime such as this was even possible in the heart of a vibrant metropolis. It brought back memories of a similar and gruesome sexual assault on a young woman in Delhi in December 2012. Just before the veterinarian's murder, in Asifabad close to Hyderabad, another woman of about the same age was sexually assaulted and murdered by three men; she belonged to an extremely vulnerable nomadic community that eked out a living from wage labour and petty vending. These cases are just two in a long list where women across India have been killed and maimed in the most brutal fashion while we have had a stringent, amended rape law in place and also fast track judicial processes.

Sexual assault is pervasive, these incidents tell us, and the response must be systemic, not episodic.

In moments such as this, families react with deep anger and grief. Most times this is exhibited through a demand for instantaneous retribution. For several affect-

ed families, death is the only answer to rape. It is also a fact that this is not a universal view. Grief at loss and pathways to healing speak through different tongues, and we need to be mindful of this fact.

Public responses that equate judicial outcomes and “justice” to immediate and quick retribution are not universal, nor just. When men accused of causing grievous hurt and loss of life to women through acid attacks are simply killed in police encounters, we may hear popular applause and appreciation of the heroism of the police; or we may, as we do now, be mere spectators to the showering of rose petals on police personnel involved in the encounter. Where does this drawing of blood stop? Is retributive justice the way to go in a democratic country that prides itself in its unprecedented historical legacy of resisting violence in fundamentally non-retributive ways?

The larger picture in mind

In thinking through the course of justice, it is extremely important for us to rise above the heat of the moment and provide moral reassurance and comfort to families, while keeping sight of the rule of law and constitutional tenets. The ends of justice are not served by wanton killing and retributive blood lust. The course of justice cannot be determined by the grief and grieving of victims' families. Justice lies in supporting them in their moment of grief and pain and insisting on due process that brings suspects and accused to trial through a robust, stringent and competent criminal investigation.

This is the challenge before governments and the criminal justice administration, especially the police.

After the December 2012 incident, in response to the wide-



NAGARA GOPAL

spread demand for a more stringent law and fast track courts, the law on rape was amended substantially based on the recommendations and deliberations of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013, or Nirbhaya Act, 2013, as it is christened, is testimony to the possibility of translating public angst into just law. That is a victory for the movement against rape that Nirbhaya's family must celebrate as their own.

A note for the Indian police

There is a procedure prescribed by the law for criminal investigation. This is a procedure embedded in constitutional principles and honed over decades of thinking on keeping constitutionalism alive and throbbing through the most testing times. Article 21 of the Constitution of India – “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law” – is fundamental and non-derogable. The police, as officers of government, are bound by the Constitution – there are no exceptions.

The case at hand: four suspects are apprehended and shot in custody within a week, without the criminal investigation having commenced in any substantive way. They were shot purportedly when they tried to escape during an exercise of reconstruction of crime at the scene of offence – so even that very preliminary step in criminal investigation had not been completed. The police personnel

– unnamed, except for a Commissioner of Police – have caused the investigation of the crime of rape and murder to abate by killing the suspects.

Before we examine the problems in this action, let us refresh our memory of a core constitutional precept as set out in the Salwa Judum case in 2011: “Modern constitutionalism posits that no wielder of power should be allowed to claim the right to perpetrate state's violence against anyone, much less its own citizens, unchecked by law, and notions of innate human dignity of every individual.” This is the touchstone of the constitutionally prescribed rule of law, which police officers are schooled in as part of their foundational training.

The Supreme Court of India, by resurrecting Justice H.R. Khanna's dissent in *Puttaswamy* in 2017, has prescribed the interpretation of Article 21: It is non-negotiable, non-derogable, and is not suspended even during conditions of Emergency. We are not living under a declaration of Emergency so the duty of care is more onerous on the police. Any argument on the actions being carried out in “purported discharge of official duties” especially involving the death of unarmed persons in custody cannot stand the narrowest test of Article 21.

There is no law in force in India that authorises the police to kill. The plea of self-defence cannot be used to rationalise a targeted, premeditated killing of suspects in custody. This plea is bound to the apprehension of death at the hands of the suspects at the time that the suspects are shot. There is nothing to suggest that the four suspects posed a threat to the lives of the police personnel since they were admittedly in custody and, therefore, presumably unarmed. The police have confessions of the

suspects while in custody, the evidentiary value of which must be evaluated by the court; but we have on the other hand an open declaration by the police of shooting and causing death. As was argued in the Encounters case before the Andhra Pradesh High Court, the discussion on the law “was never whether there should be indictment and trial when homicide is committed in self-defence”. The debate was on “whether a plea of self-defence where excessive force is used, should be tried for manslaughter or murder”. We have deliberated on this at length in the High Court of Andhra Pradesh and the full bench decision on encounters can scarcely be forgotten especially because these are unarmed commoners in custody.

A part of democracy

Where does that leave us? The case of the rape and murder of the veterinarian abates with the killing of all four suspects. This without giving a chance for the law to operate. However, we now have a fresh case of the murder of four unarmed suspects in custody that must be investigated with police personnel required to stand trial. The pathways of justice are not linear nor without obstacles. But we have, as a people, chosen the route of democracy and the Constitution, so we really have no option but to school ourselves in constitutional morality. For as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar cautioned in anticipation, constitutional morality must replace public morality. It is not easy, because it is not a natural sentiment. But it is non-negotiable.

Justice B. Sudarshan Reddy is a former Judge, Supreme Court of India. Kalpana Kannabiran is Professor and Director, Council for Social Development, Hyderabad

An Asian engine driven by India and China

The region's rise is linked to peace and stability; cooperation rests on a compact between the two countries



SUJAN R. CHINOY

The world today is undergoing a fundamental transformation and there are several facets to the emerging uncertainty. Traditional and non-traditional security threats (economic and military competition, climate change, piracy, radical ideology, cyber threats, drug and human trafficking, and energy and food security) have grown in magnitude. Power, whether economic, political or military, is fractured. Trade and technology are at the heart of a new round of competition and contestation. Nationalism and regionalism are on the rise. There is less multilateralism but greater multi-polarity. Hedging and multi-alignment are the order of the day.

Obstacles ahead

All known paradigms are experiencing stress, which calls for readjustments. At the broadest level, the inadequacies of the post-World War II international institutions are showing up because of the complexities and uncertainties characterising global politics and the economy today. The old consensus is fraying and a new consensus is yet to emerge.

The liberal trading order has encountered protectionism in the form of tariff and non-tariff barriers, which explains why India's service exports which touch \$29.6 billion in the U.S. market, and pharma products, especially generic drugs, which account for

20% of global generic medicines, have barely been able to scratch the surface in the Chinese market. Cheaper imports from China, which practices “state capitalism”, threaten domestic manufacturing in India. Movement of talent and the services sector, important for India, have not received satisfactory attention. Many of these concerns are central to India's position on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

There is a looming danger for developing countries on account of “zero-sum” mercantilism and rising protectionism in western economies. There is no doubt that the U.S.-China trade war has been disruptive.

Geopolitical considerations are increasingly driving trade and investment decisions; on the other hand, geo-economic forces unleashed by China's economic rise are redefining the geo-strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific region.

Worryingly, the global economy is likely to grow at its slowest pace in a decade, at 3% in 2019.

Today, the momentum in manufacturing activity has weakened to levels unseen since the global financial crises. Investor and business confidence even in emerging markets is at a low ebb. Low productivity growth and ageing demographics in advanced economies have further compounded the problem. Most countries appear to be financially vulnerable. Key anchors in the global economy, including China, are experiencing a slowdown. Elsewhere, Europe is in the throes of a major readjustment in the context of Brexit. Yet, amidst the downturn, Asia is witnessing the simultane-



GETTY IMAGES

ous rise of several powers. Global engines of economic growth over the past three decades have shifted to Asia, first to the Asia-Pacific and now, more broadly, to the Indo-Pacific region that includes South Asia. The continent, home to over half the global population, has emerged as the new fulcrum for geo-economic and geo-strategic realignments. High economic growth rates across the region are accompanied by some of the highest military expenditures in the world.

The External Affairs Minister of India presciently said recently that if the world is different, we need to think, talk and engage accordingly. The wheels of change appear to have been set in motion. In the face of automation, countries are undertaking structural reforms and emphasising skills-training to raise productivity. Development and adoption of green technology is also a priority. Even Saudi Arabia, the quintessentially hydrocarbon-dependent economy, has endeavoured to diversify its economy through the Saudi Vision 2030 master-plan.

Shaping trade, economy

Both India and China are expected to contribute to global economic growth in the future. India is also transforming into a knowledge-based, skill-supported and technology-driven society. A liberal

FDI regime combined with a youthful demographic profile makes India an attractive destination. India attaches great importance to its relations with China, a large trade partner in goods. Since 2015, there has been a spurt in Chinese FDI in India (at around \$8 billion). There is great scope for China to participate in flagship initiatives such as the ‘Smart Cities Mission’ and ‘Skill India’ programmes. As the world's second-largest economy, China can and must play a constructive role globally and within Asia to help the world return to higher growth rates. Bilateral trade today is approximately \$95 billion. India faces a huge and rising trade imbalance. The decision at the Mamallapuram Summit, in October, to set up a new mechanism to discuss the trade imbalance, is aimed at addressing this issue.

As members of several multilateral institutions, India and China are in a unique position to give shape to their economic destinies. There are suggestions that the era of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)-anchored, Most Favoured Nation (MFN)-based regime is drawing to a close and that the future lies in a web of free trade agreements. However, there is still scope for India and China to work together to strengthen the WTO.

The RCEP should have a wider ambit, including trade in services. Many countries (especially Japan which still boasts the world's second-largest developed economy) have openly favoured a more accommodating position that addresses India's concerns and facilitates its joining the RCEP. China too should pro-actively work to ensure India's membership. Beyond jointly training Afghan

diplomats under the “India-China Plus One” framework, China and India could explore the potential to work together on Asian infrastructure and connectivity development on the basis of equality and an open and transparent model under the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

As China's presence in South Asia grows, greater transparency in its actions and closer consultations with India are also necessary to help allay concerns. China should also be mindful of its forays into the Exclusive Economic Zone of others.

Today, the global energy market is more favourable to consumers in the face of a supply side glut. OPEC and non-OPEC oil and gas producers have come together to prevent a fall in energy prices. This should be a common concern for China and India. As two of the world's biggest importers of oil and gas, the two nations should have a joint consultative mechanism to protect the interests of consumers.

It must be remembered that Asia's rise is predicated on peace and stability. It is a sad fact that a stable regional security architecture has yet to emerge organically in Asia. It is worth recalling what Prime Minister Narendra Modi had stated at the Raisina Dialogue in 2017: that there is enough room for all Asian countries to prosper together, and that the Asia of rivalry will hold us all back. It is the Asia of cooperation that will shape this century.

Sujan R. Chino, a China-specialist and former Ambassador to Japan, is Director General, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Waiting for justice

The photograph on the first page (December 8) conveyed the helplessness of the women residents of Unnao village. The indifference of police, an unending delay in delivering and implementing judgments and incidents like the burning of the Unnao victim are the factors behind the common man losing faith in the judiciary. That said, the celebrations in the country following the Hyderabad shooting are troubling. Even if the end is justified, there can not be

any disagreement that the means should follow all the established legal procedures. On the other hand, while justice cannot be instant, it should also not take infinite time.

K. VIJAYARAGHAVAN, Hyderabad

■ One would agree with Chief Justice S.A. Bobde that justice cannot be instant (Front page, Dec. 8). But, he should know better that justice cannot take 5-7 years to be delivered and implemented (as in the Nirbhaya case). People have by and large lost trust in the

judiciary, with cases dragging on indefinitely. It should not take more than three months to give justice to the victims of heinous crimes like rape and murder. Every reasonable citizen understands that justice can never be instant but the government and the judiciary should also understand that importance of time limit.

JAYANTHY S. MANI, Mumbai

■ It is sad that the Unnao gang-rape victim, who had the courage to pursue the case all by herself, died of

extensive burn injuries. Though the police would now alter the case to “murder”, it won't make any material difference to the accused, because they may again get bail. Given their money power, the culprits could even intimidate members of the victim's family. All this amounts to a mockery of the justice system. The common man's faith in the judiciary has already gone for a toss. If corrective steps are not taken, we shall soon reach a point of no return.

P.G. MENON, Chennai

Exploitation of workers

As someone who has worked in the steel industry for nearly four decades, I can say with confidence that contract labourers invariably get the wrong end of the stick. I remember that in 1994, Rourkela steel plant regularised the services of nearly 4,000 contract labourers, pursuant to a Supreme Court order. At that time, I thought this verdict would be a trendsetter. Nothing of the sort has happened. The Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act expressly

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prohibits the engagement of contract labour in certain kinds of jobs. Yet, this is being done with impunity by corporates, who find it easy to neutralise the state, and earn more profits and share a part of the profits with the state itself! That 90% of India's labour force is in the informal sector is a sad commentary on the state of affairs in the country (Op-Ed page, “The neglected foot soldiers of a liberalised economy,” Dec. 5). A.R. RAMANARAYANAN, Chennai

Demonising the legal system won't help

Some of the existing laws are already too harsh and some other provisions are not being implemented



RUKMINI S.

The killing of the four men accused of the rape and murder of the Hyderabad veterinarian will need to be properly investigated, though the Telangana police's conduct thus far does not inspire confidence. Ever since the police first turned away the victim's family when they went to lodge a complaint, they demonstrated no commitment to the rule of law. Finally, they claimed that the accused, who were under heavy police protection, tried to escape and had to be killed.

The atmosphere of lawlessness that was built up prior to the shooting certainly did not help. From protesters on the ground, to the commentary on social media, to MPs in Parliament, the demand for the instant killing of the accused from all corners created the public opinion for the abandonment of the rule of law that appears to have led to the incident.

The argument made by people is that the rule of law is not giving women justice, and that at the very least, laws need to be amended to create a stronger deterrent and provide quicker closure to victims of crimes of sexual violence.

Flawed arguments

Both arguments are flawed and need to be challenged or, once again, hard cases will lead to bad law. The chargesheeting rates in cases of rape as well as rape and murder are higher than that for all other violent crimes, and the conviction rates are higher too, while the pendency rates are roughly the same as the average for all violent crimes.

The court pendency rate for crimes against Scheduled Castes (SCs), on the other hand, is far higher, but you will not see mass public support for killing those accused of atrocities, including caste-motivated rape against Dalits.

Even among those rare few who have professed some belief in the rule of law in the last week, the argument has been that "laws need to get

Cases and convictions

In 2017, while the chargesheeting and conviction rates in cases of 'rape' and 'murder with rape' were well above the overall rate on violent crimes, the pendency rates were similar. The pendency rates, in courts, in the case of crimes against Dalits were much higher

All figures in %	Rape	Murder with rape	All crimes against women	Crimes against Dalits	All violent crimes
Chargesheeting rate	86.6	95	78.3	82.6	82.6
Pendency rate (police station)*	29.3	32.9	32.9	27.8	28.2
Conviction rate	32.2	57.9	23.9	35.3	30.9
Pendency rate (court)**	87.5	90.1	89.6	91.7	87.8

*Number of cases in the police station pending investigation at the end of the year relative to the total number of cases for investigation

**Number of cases pending trial at the end of the year relative to the total number of cases for trial

SOURCE: NCRB 2017

tougher". The hard truth, after an examination of legal reform recommendations and available judicial data, is this – there is no new law needed; in fact, some of the existing legal provisions are too harsh in ways that harm both men and women, and other important legal provisions are not being implemented.

The most comprehensive review of the gaps in laws around sexual harassment and sexual violence came in the aftermath of the 2012 Delhi rape incident in the form of the Justice Verma Committee Report and its recommendations. (It is worth noting that the report's recommendations began by acknowledging that existing laws were adequate, but some improvements could be made.) The report's key recommendations were centred at improving the status of women in non-legal ways as well, but its legal recommendations included a much-needed broadening of the definition of rape. The report also recommended raising the minimum sentence for rape to 10 years.

Strengthening the law

The 2013 Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, which sought to operationalise some of these suggestions, went well beyond what was recommended by the Verma Committee Report. It introduced the death penalty for some circumstances around rape, including repeat offences, despite the Verma Committee expressly

arguing against this. Subsequent laws have raised mandatory minimum sentences and simultaneously raised the age of consent.

These changes have had a few worrisome results. One, there has been further criminalisation (with longer sentences) of consenting underage couples, which my investigation for *The Hindu* in 2014 in Delhi found was very common. Two, laws have removed any discretion in minimum sentencing from the hands of judges. There is evidence from other fields of law that removing such discretion actually lowers the rate of conviction.

Two of the largest categories of rape cases I found pertained to consenting couples criminalised by the woman's family (over 40% of the cases in Delhi) and 'breach of promise to marry' (over 25%). Further, conviction in cases other than those involving these two categories was over 75%. What we have now is a situation where there are not any remaining loopholes in laws concerning sexual violence against women; on the other hand, there is no legal protection for adult men from rape, and under the new Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, the sexual abuse of a transgender person carries a maximum sentence of two years only.

Official statistics on the speed of trials by nature of crime are not maintained; however, there is anecdotal

evidence among practising lawyers that the average rape trial in a big city at the trial court stage is now completed within two years, but the appellate process takes longer. In the 2012 Delhi case, the trial was conducted within a year, the High Court appeal by March 2014, and the Supreme Court appeal by May 2017. Subsequently, the appeals of the convicts against their sentence – the death penalty – were heard and rejected.

When the accused is powerful

There remain instances, particularly when the accused is a powerful person, where the process of exhausting the individual's pre-trial options, including attempts to quash charges or shift the trial to a friendlier city, makes a mockery of a fast-track case; the trial of former *Tehelka* editor Tarun Tejpal, accused of sexually assaulting an employee, only resumed in October 2019 as Tejpal went up to the Supreme Court seeking quashing of the charges filed in 2013.

The argument here is not that the accused should not receive the full range of pre-trial legal options guaranteed by law, but that they be heard at a pace that maintains the spirit of providing speedy justice to the complainants.

Other improvements in existing laws remain essential – the police are still able to ask worried parents to return home without filing an FIR (already a punishable act for the police); victims still face cross-examination about their past sexual histories; and there is still little by way of rehabilitation or even therapy offered to victims.

Legal arguments are easy to make from a distance – when one is not suffering the agony of a family that has had to imagine the final, helpless hours of a loved one. There is no doubt that the anguish or the "outrage" of people in the aftermath of such horrific crimes is justified and, for the most part, well-intentioned. However, hard cases have already made bad law in India, and we continue to flail in helplessness for more laws. The tragedy is there is no band-aid left. Instead, by abandoning principles of justice to calm the rage, we are making the country more savage and less safe for women.

Rukmini S is a Chennai-based data journalist

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

The elements of engaged journalism

Readers should know the editorial processes that guide a newspaper



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

At a time of digital disruption and institutionalised misinformation campaigns, an idea that has caught the imagination of journalists is 'engaged journalism'. The meaning of engaged journalism is described in journalist Michael R. Fancher's excellent essay, "The Ethics of Engaged Journalism". He forcefully argues that "journalism has little purpose if it is not trusted by the public it is meant to serve, so public engagement and public trust are inseparable in the networked world of digital journalism." He writes: "Engaged Journalism's mission is to make journalism more open, accessible, collaborative, and participatory while maintaining the highest standards of accuracy, fairness, clarity, and impartiality. Engaged Journalism is consistent with and supports the historical mission of professional journalism – public good, self-governance, and a better life for all."

Engaging with readers

At *The Hindu* we constantly explore the idea of engaged journalism. The opening of our editorial meetings to readers is a part of this exercise. Last Tuesday, 15 readers attended the noon editorial meeting and the evening news meeting. Kidambi Narayanan, a reader of this paper for nearly four decades, said he sees a decline in flair for sports writing. He felt that the editorial, "Charging Chidambaram" (October 21), on the INX Media case was partisan and could have been avoided. Mr. Narayanan was also unhappy with the reportage on the Ayodhya verdict, particularly the explainer by K. Venkataraman that pointed out that the unimpeded right in the outer courtyard of the site in effect won the whole site for Hindus. The court held that Muslims had failed to prove an exclusive right even in the inner courtyard, where the mosque was located, the report said.

Sports Editor K.C. Vijaya Kumar explained the impact of live broadcasting on sports reporting. He also pointed out that since the number of pages in the newspaper has been reduced, more reports are now squeezed into fewer pages. In this process of compression, sometimes flourishes in writing are re-

moved and only bare bones information about events are presented, he said. Editor Suresh Nambath explained the rationale behind the editorial on Mr. Chidambaram. He spoke of how individual freedom is central to democracy and added that it is not right to view the editorial from the prism of partisan politics. Mr. Venkataraman explained that his report on Ayodhya was the essence of the Supreme Court judgment. Not reporting it would be failing the readers, he said.

After the meeting, Mr. Narayanan wrote a letter thanking the newspaper for providing an opportunity to discuss his viewpoints without any reservations. His views were endorsed by Srravya. C, a young researcher of news and technology affiliated with the International Institute of Information Technology, Bangalore. She wrote: "Thank you for providing the opportunity to attend and understand the editorial work at *The Hindu*, spending quality time with us and answering a lot of our questions. The interaction not only helped me better appreciate the news-making processes but also understand the historical background and contemporary political economy of news."

Antidotes to misinformation

Participating readers wanted to know why *The Hindu* decided to open its editorial meeting to its readers. The main reason was that we realised that vested interests are not only undermining journalism but also vitiating the information public sphere with vitriol and rhetoric. Whitney Phillips, in a powerful article in *Columbia Journalism Review* ("The Toxins We Carry"), argues: "We reach for facts as our antidote to misinformation, false and misleading stories that are inadvertently spread; or disinformation, false and misleading stories that are deliberately spread; or malinformation, true stories that are spread in order to slander and harm. But the problem plaguing digital media is larger than any of these individually; it's that the categories overlap, obscuring who shares false information knowingly and who shares it thinking it's true."

In this context, we felt that readers should know the editorial processes that guide a newspaper and how it is different from the opinions that populate the social media space. We recognise that journalism and democracy are intertwined and credible information makes our democracy vibrant.

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No more remixes, please

Music composers should take risks instead of reworking old songs

P.K. AJITH KUMAR

In October, music composer Vishal Dadlani warned that he would sue anyone remixing any more songs composed by him and Shekhar Ravjiani. The duo, known as Vishal-Shekhar, boast of some of the most enduring hit songs in Hindi cinema in the last two decades, a period that saw a clear decline in melody.

Vishal's sharp words (he called those remixing songs as "vultures") have again put into focus the trend of repackaging a popular song from the past for a new film, often for a steamy dance sequence. It is the easy way out for producers and directors to market their film. Composers will tell you how difficult it is to create an original, catchy tune.

While remixes may be here to stay, Vishal's demand for enough credit and remuneration is absolutely fair. "This is not about one song, one person, one company or one remix," he said in an interview to *Scrol-Link*. "This is about a screwed-up system that allows the exploitation of what should be a composer's legacy without any regard for the original composers themselves." When asked about his own reworkings of popular songs, Vishal said those were tributes and that he had spoken to the original composers before putting them out.

More popular than originals

Remixes don't require the kind of talent that composers like A.R. Rahman possess, yet they are hugely popular. In fact, Vishal's anger is understandable as remixes, if we go by YouTube viewership statistics, are often more popular than the original compositions. *Saaki Saaki* composed originally by Vishal-Shekhar for *Musafir* has garnered more than 80 million views in eight years, while its remix for the film *Batla House*, has registered more than 70 million views in just four months. Similarly, Laxmikant-Pyarelal's *Ek Do Teen*, composed for the 1988 film *Tezaab* and famous for Madhuri Dixit's iconic dance sequence, has been watched 83 million times since it was posted

on YouTube nearly six years ago, while the new version, for *Baaghi 2*, has had 113 million views in about year and a half despite its failure to reproduce the magic of the original. Thus there is little doubt that remixes attract more attention, especially when marketed as refreshed versions of a cult original. And this is not surprising. Viewers from the younger generation, who consume videos on computers and mobile phones more than those from the earlier generations, prefer these modernised versions, especially when these songs also serve as promo for a film.

It is never easy to come up with a tune as captivating and original as *Ek Do Teen*, but it isn't impossible for a gifted composer even in times like

these. However, the fact is that there aren't many composers around today who are capable of this, or even directors who can extract such quality music from them. This is a pity given that Indian cinema – be it Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Malayalam, Telugu or Kannada – has a proud, rich tradition of music.

And yet, despite this rich tradition of music, several composers have been accused of plagiarism. Many have climbed the charts of popularity standing on the shoulders of tunes obviously lifted from other composers producing music in other languages, including Arabic, Afrikaans, English and Turkish. In fact, such is the trust our music lovers have in Indian composers that when they come across an Indian song and a foreign one with an identical tune, they assume that the former is the rip-off!

Given India's rich tradition of music, music composers should take risks and produce original compositions instead of popularising what was already popular decades ago. Old songs bring with them certain memories. Recreating them may be easy, but remixes can never produce the magic of the original. And if composers are intent on reworking original numbers, it is important, as Vishal says, that the original composers be given their due.

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DATA POINT

Air India's Mayday call

Air India's market share has dropped significantly over the years. From being the top domestic airline at the start of the millennium, it has become just another player trying to stay on the runway. The airline performs poorly relative to its competitors on timeliness, attention to passenger grievances, and fare affordability. These factors have had a big impact on the airline's finances. By Naresh Singaravelu and Sumant Sen

1. Plummeting numbers

In FY01, Air India & Indian Airlines carried half the domestic passengers. However, in 2019, as of October, the national carrier has flown only over a tenth of them. The chart shows domestic passenger share of major airlines in two different years

Airline	2016	2017	2018	2019
Air India	71.8	77.2	74.7	54.3
IndiGo	81.2	83.9	85.9	79.4
SpiceJet	86.1	83.3	86.5	66.5
Jet Airways	78.3	64.0	85.9	-

2. Not a crowd puller

A major factor behind Air India's fall in market share is dissatisfaction of customers who chose less expensive and better serviced players. The national carrier's on-time performance (% of flights operating on time) fared the worst among airlines. It has also failed to address a relatively high percentage of passenger complaints in the last four years unlike others

Airline	2016	2017	2018	2019
Air India	34	33	22	35
IndiGo	0	0	0	0
SpiceJet	0	0	0	0
Jet Airways	4	1	2	0

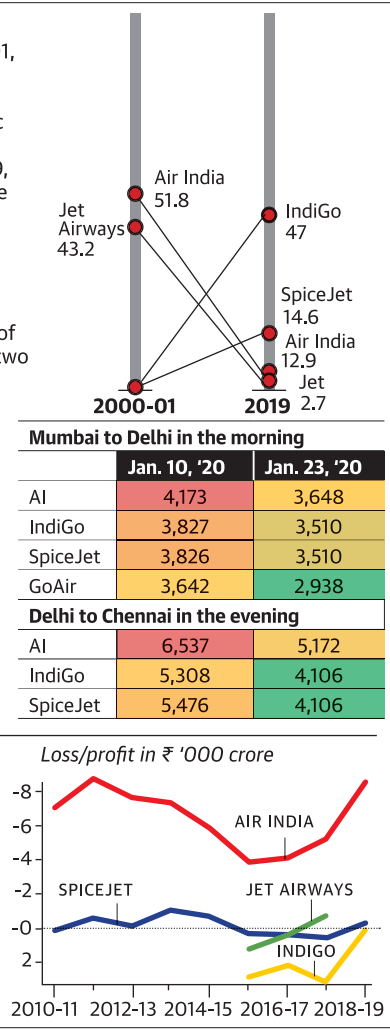
Source: DGCA, Public Enterprises Survey, BSE filings

3. Higher fares

While Air India's services have been the poorest, its ticket prices are among the most expensive. The table compares the lowest fares of major Indian airlines in two routes. For instance, on the Mumbai-Delhi route, Air India's fares were at least 3% higher than the next costliest

4. Mounting losses

As passenger revenue fell, Air India's losses ballooned. For the past 9 years, Air India has never turned a profit. In 2018-19, the company's loss before tax was ₹8,475 cr., its highest in 7 years. Graph shows loss/profit before tax



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO DECEMBER 9, 1969

Missing Defence Designs

Excitement ran high in the Lok Sabha today [December 9] following the Education Minister, Dr. V.K.R.V Rao's admission of the disappearance of certain defence designs from the Central Scientific Instruments organisation (CSIO), Chandigarh, although he assured the House that they were "neither secret nor of a confidential nature". Opposition members, particularly those belonging to the Jana Sangh, repeatedly interrupted Dr. Rao while he was making his statement in response to a call attention motion on the subject and challenged his contention that the missing documents were not secret. When Mr. M.L. Sondhi (JS) charged the Minister with misleading the House and hiding the facts, Dr. Rao protested and offered to resign if a Parliamentary body were to prove the charge. The motion had been tabled by Mr. S. Supakar (Cong.-O) and others. Dr. Rao said that in June 1966, the Department of Defence Supplies had sent drawings relating to an instrument needed by it to a number of public and private sector firms and to the CSIO to ascertain their capacity to fabricate and supply it. This was an angle measuring instrument used by the British and Army Commonwealth Forces during World War II.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO DECEMBER 9, 1919

A Research Student in Tamil.

Mr. P.V. Manickam Naickar, B.C., M.C.I. (Lond.) is already known to many of us as a gentleman of originality. His vast research in Tamil, and in "Universal Phonetics" has forced him to public admiration. The Arni Teachers' Association, very recently, appealed to our University to open their eyes to his astonishing discoveries. I wish in this small article to draw the attention of all lovers of pure literature to his researches in phonetics. The learned scholar has found it possible to transliterate all the languages in Tamil characters, taking as basis for the phonetic rules, Tholkappyar's ancient work. At a lecture delivered by him under the presidency of a member of the International Phonetic Association – the distinguished Rev. Fr. Quin S.J. he (the lecturer) clearly expounded the basisless attempt of the above Association to symbolise individually all human voices. With a little humour, he added that if the earth were turned into a parchment, and if all the symbols discovered and to be discovered were spread on it, there will not be space for all of them.

FROM PAGE ONE

43 dead, 16 injured
in major Delhi fire

Decrepit and dangerous: Locals gathering near the factory in New Delhi, where a fire broke out. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

The injured were shifted to the LNJP hospital, the RML Hospital and the Hindu Rao Hospital.

People trapped in the building were screaming and shouting for help, but the firefighters trying to get inside from the main entrance were unable to move in because of the congested lane.

Among the dead were a 20-year-old who was to get married in four months, a man whose 25-year-old wife is eight months pregnant and a brother who was to go

home with a 'lehenga' for his 15-year-old sister.

A police officer said the identity of 28 deceased was established, and they were making efforts to identify the others.

"Their family members will arrive on Monday. Locals, guardians or friends have reached the hospital to identify the deceased. The bodies will be handed over to relatives after post-mortem and other legal formalities. A help desk is functioning at the hospitals," said a police officer.

Citizenship Bill to be
tabled in Lok Sabha today

The Bill says the amendments will not apply to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura as included in the sixth schedule of the Constitution and Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland that are protected by the Inner Line Permit (ILP).

The statement of objects and reasons of the Bill says, "The constitutions of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh provide for a specific State religion. As a result, many persons belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities have faced persecution on grounds of religion in those countries. Some of them also have fears about such persecution in their day-to-day life where right to practise, profess and propagate their religion has been obstructed

and restricted. Many such persons have fled to India to seek shelter and continued to stay in India even if their travel documents have expired or they have incomplete or no documents."

The Bill says the six non-Muslim communities "shall not be treated as illegal migrant" for violating provisions of the Passport Act, 1920, or the Foreigners Act, 1946.

The Bill reduces the mandatory requirement of continuous stay in India from 12 years to five years for "many persons of Indian origin including persons belonging to the minority community from the neighbouring countries" who are unable to produce proof of their Indian origin and are forced to apply for citizenship by naturalisation under Section 6 of the Citizenship Act, 1955.

6 years on, Lokpal is yet to get prosecution wing

Complaint formats, rules for disclosure of assets and liabilities and investigation regulations are yet to be notified

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

Almost six years after the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, was signed into law, several key provisions needed for the anti-corruption ombudsman to function have still not been operationalised. The process of constituting the Lokpal's inquiry and prosecution wings has not yet begun, and regulations for how to conduct preliminary investigations have not been made, the Lokpal has said in response to RTI queries.

The movement to ensure accountability through an anti-corruption ombudsman has been long. The term Lokpal was coined in 1963 but it was not until January 2014

that the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act came into force. It was more than five years later, in March 2019, that the first chairperson and members of the Lokpal were appointed.

More than eight months later, the institution is functioning out of a government-owned hotel in Delhi. While it approved a logo and motto for itself last month, the Lokpal has not yet notified a format for filing complaints. Despite that obstacle, 1,065 complaints were sent to the Lokpal office. "After scrutiny, complaints that did not fall within the mandate of the Lokpal were disposed of and complainants have been informed accordingly," says a note on the Lokpal web-

Lacking teeth

Six years after the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, was signed into law, key provisions for the ombudsman to function have not been operationalised

- First chairperson and members were appointed in **March 2019**

- **1,065 complaints** were sent to the Lokpal. After scrutiny, complaints that did not fall within the Lokpal mandate were disposed of

- **1,000 complaints** have been disposed of until September 30

- **Section 60** of the Act empowers the Lokpal to make regulations on "the manner and procedure of conducting preliminary inquiry"

- Till now, no such **regulations** have been made

- The process of constitution of the Inquiry Wing is yet to be initiated, the Lokpal's office said on **November 25**

site, adding that 1,000 such complaints have been disposed of until September 30.

The Lokpal would find it difficult to investigate complaints that do fall within its

mandate as it has no inquiry wing or regulations for inquiries. "The process of constitution of Inquiry Wing of Lokpal is yet to be initiated in consultation with the go-

vernment of India," the Lokpal's office wrote on November 25, in response to RTI queries by activist Anjali Bhardwaj.

Section 60 of the Act gives the Lokpal the power to make regulations on "the manner and procedure of conducting preliminary inquiry or investigation". It also deals with making regulations on the website display of the status of all complaints – pending or disposed – along with records and evidence. However, in response to an RTI query, the Lokpal said, "Till now, no regulations have been made by the Lokpal under Section 60..."

Similarly, asked about the setting up of a special wing to prosecute public servants

for corruption, as mandated by the Act, the Lokpal's office said, "The process of constitution of Prosecution Wing of Lokpal is yet to be initiated in consultation with the government of India."

The rules for the disclosure of assets and liabilities by public servants have not been notified either. This is a key provision as the amassing of assets disproportionate to the known sources of income is often the basis for a complaint. The draft rules of 2017 were referred to a Parliamentary Standing Committee, which submitted its recommendations to the government in July 2018. The Centre is yet to submit any Action Taken Report to the Rajya Sabha.

Congress firms up House strategy

Despite lack of numbers, it will vote against Citizenship Bill

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress will strongly oppose the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019, when it will be tabled in the Lok Sabha on Monday, party leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said after a meeting of the Congress parliamentary strategy group on Sunday.

The meeting was chaired by Congress president Sonia Gandhi at her residence. Though the Opposition doesn't have the number in the Lower House to stall the passage of the Bill, the Congress will vote against it to register its protest.

'Violates Constitution'

"We will oppose the Bill tooth and nail as it violates the basic idea of our Constitution, its secular ethos. What strategy we adopt on the floor of the House, you will get to see tomorrow," Mr. Chowdhury told *The Hindu*.

Apart from Mr. Chowdhury, Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, Congress chief whip Kodikunnil Suresh and



Charting the course: Sonia Gandhi, seen here with Rahul Gandhi at a recent party event, chaired a meeting on Sunday.

Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi attended the meeting.

Over the weekend, Mr. Azad tried to rally the Opposition parties to formulate a common strategy.

While the government will get support from the AIADMK and the Biju Janata Dal in the Rajya Sabha where it needs help for smooth passage, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party are likely to be part of the Opposition benches.

A chance for Congress

With several civil society organisations in the northeastern region opposing the Bill, claiming that it would change the region's demography, the Congress is viewing the Bill as a chance to make a comeback in the re-

gion that was once its stronghold but now dominated by the BJP.

The BJP-ruled Assam is witnessing protests. Sixteen Left-leaning organisations have called a 12-hour bandh for Monday in the State to protest against the Bill.

In Delhi, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said the Left parties would move amendments. "We strongly oppose the Bill which gives citizenship on the basis of religion, that too, to people from three countries," he said.

"The Bill is unconstitutional as there is no provision in our Constitution to give citizenship on the basis of religion. We are totally opposed to it," CPI general secretary D. Raja said.

AIADMK will support Bill in Rajya Sabha

SOBHANA K. NAIR
NEW DELHI

The AIADMK, which has 11 members in the Rajya Sabha, confirmed on Sunday that it would support the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, paving the way for its smooth passage in the Upper House.

"We have decided to support the Bill. Whatever reservations we have we will express in the House. But if it comes down to voting, we will vote in favour," a top party leader said.

The AIADMK was prevaricating on the issue, but has agreed to come on board. The BJP with seven members, the TRS with six and the YSR Congress Party with two are already on board. With this, the treasury benches will easily sail through the 120 mark.

The Trinamool Congress is likely to move a motion opposing the tabling of the Bill in the Lok Sabha on Monday. The CPI(M) will also move two amendments demanding removal of the 'religion' and 'country' clauses.

'We're duty-bound to help victims of Partition'

Ram Madhav defends Citizenship Bill

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India is duty-bound to give citizenship to persecuted minorities from neighbouring countries as they are "victims" of the decision to divide the country on religious lines (Partition), BJP general secretary Ram Madhav has said, defending the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill.

Non-Muslim refugees, who have come from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan after facing religious persecution, will be given Indian citizenship.

Mr. Madhav said a similar legislation was enacted in 1950 by the Jawaharlal Nehru government. "Let me remind the critics of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. The Nehru government had passed a similar Bill in 1950 for expulsion of illegal immigrants, mainly from the erstwhile Pakistan [Bangladesh] and categorically said minorities of East Pakistan wouldn't be covered under the Bill," he told PTI.

He asserted that India has always kept its doors open for oppressed minorities."

Mr. Madhav, who is party's pointsman for the

India has always kept its doors open for oppressed minorities

RAM MADHAV
BJP general secretary

northeastern States, said the government and Mr. Shah held extensive consultations with various stakeholders from the region to address their apprehensions.

He said the government would address all apprehensions of the States about the changes in their demography, language and culture due to this Bill.

Inner Line Permit

According to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019, which was distributed among the MPs, the new law will not be applicable in the Inner Line Permit (ILP) regime areas and those tribal regions which are governed under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Therefore, it will not be applicable to the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura as well as Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram where the ILP regime is applicable.

Pramila tables resolution in U.S. House on Kashmir

The bi-partisan resolution calls for end to restrictions in Kashmir and for India to respect international human rights law

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON DC

As India stepped up its efforts to lobby Congressional Democrats, a Democratic member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Pramila Jayapal, introduced a bipartisan resolution in the House calling for an end to the restrictions in Jammu and Kashmir and for the Government of India to respect international human rights law.

The resolution, co-sponsored by Steve Watkins, a first-time Republican Congressman from Kansas, says the U.S. House of Representatives "recognises the dire security challenges faced by the Government and India in Jammu and Kashmir and the continuing threat of state-supported cross-border terrorism," and that the House "rejects arbitrary detention, use of excessive force against civilians, and suppression of peaceful expression of dissent to security challenges."

The House, as per the re-

solution, urges the government to adhere to international human rights law in its pursuit of "legitimate security priorities."

'Free detainees'

The resolution urges the Government of India to quickly release those arbitrarily detained; "lift the remaining restrictions on communications and restore internet access" across the region; "refrain from the use of threats and excessive force" against detainees and those protesting peacefully; refrain from conditioning the release of detainees on them signing bonds prohibiting political speeches and activities.

Ms. Jayapal's resolution asks the government to allow international human rights observers and journalists into Jammu and Kashmir and to operate freely across India, without threats.

It also urges the Government of India to "condemn, at the highest levels, all religiously motivated violence,



Pramila Jayapal

including that violence which targets against religious minorities."

'Unique relationship'

In its introduction, the resolution notes the "unique and important" relationship between the U.S. and India and refers to India being the birthplace of four major world religions.

The resolution has just been tabled thus far and has to go through a process before it is put to vote. However, Indian officials questioned how much support it would get from the Republicans.

"Indian Embassy staff had met with Steve Watkins's key staffers on a number of occasions and were categorically told by them that he would not be signing on to the resolution and that the Republican caucus was not in favour of the resolution," a spokesperson for the Indian Embassy told *The Hindu*.

Ms. Jayapal, who is Chennai-born and represents the 7th Congressional district from Washington state, is the co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Recent issues she has supported include legislation to prevent the separation of migrant families at the U.S. border and the monitoring of China's treatment of Uyghurs.

"I hope to work with the Indian government and my colleagues in Congress to strengthen the U.S.-India partnership, while protecting the human rights of the Kashmiri people," Ms. Jayapal said on Saturday. She welcomed the release

from jail on Friday of Mu-been Shah, a Kashmiri-origin, Malaysia-based businessman, who was detained under the Public Safety Act. Mr. Shah's niece had approached Ms. Jayapal about the case.

Briefing lawmakers

Indian officials have taken to explaining the country's position to a number of U.S. lawmakers at federal and state level as Capitol Hill's scrutiny of the restrictions in Kashmir began since Article 370 was removed by Parliament in early August.

The Indian Ambassador, his deputy and the Consul General in San Francisco met on separate occasions with Ms. Jayapal in the recent past to brief her on the situation and to explain to her that restrictions in Kashmir had been significantly eased, Indian officials told *The Hindu*.

"She has however remained rigid in her position, from when she initiated this resolution, until its tabling a

few days ago. As such, the resolution is imbalanced, factually incorrect and prejudicial to the close and cooperative relations and strategic partnership that India and the United States enjoy," the officials said.

"The longer these detentions drag on, the more you will hear not just in the United States but around the world from voices who, again, have been supportive of India more generally," Alyssa Ayres, a former high-ranking U.S. diplomat for South Asia, now with the Centre on Foreign Relations, told *The Hindu*.

"My sense is that there is broad sympathy for the terrorism challenge India has faced from Pakistan. But that question, four months on from August 5, is to some extent separable from the concerns this new legislation addresses: concerns for the indefinite detention of Kashmiris without charges, and the communications block remaining," Ms. Ayres said.

Officials dismiss concerns over U.S. resolution

India reaches out to Congressmen

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

The External Affairs Ministry has refused to comment on the U.S. House resolution on Jammu and Kashmir introduced by Indian-American lawmaker Pramila Jayapal, even as the government stepped up efforts to ensure that the resolution is not passed, with officials reaching out to Congressmen and women as well as the Indian diaspora.

Sources said India is also hopeful that House members of the India caucus will move the process in their favour, while former diplomats said the larger fallout was in the optics, not in its substance. "I think [the resolution] has a lot of sensation value, because while a motion on human rights in the U.S. House or Senate is not uncommon, but one tabled by a person of Indian origin is rare, and countries like Pakistan will use this for their propaganda purposes," former Ambassador to the U.S. Lalit Mansingh said.

"I think we have enough support on Capitol Hill for this resolution not to see the light of day this time as well," he added.

According to other diplomats, the introduction of the resolution is a concern because it is among the first such resolutions criticising India for restrictions in Jammu and Kashmir since 2000. However, officials dismissed those concerns and the fact that the resolution has been introduced by Republican representative Steve Watkins, and Ms. Jayapal, a Democrat, and said it had "limited resonance" and would not be endorsed by many.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor tweeted that it was a "shame" that Parliament was yet to discuss the situation in Kashmir while two U.S. lawmakers moved a bipartisan resolution in the House of Representatives.

Motion to suspend 2 Cong. MPs to be moved today

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi will move a motion in the Lok Sabha on Monday to suspend Congress members T.N. Prathapan and Dean Kuria-kose for the rest of the winter session for moving in a "threatening manner" towards Union Minister Smriti Irani.

Part of agenda

The Lok Sabha website has put up the motion for suspension as part of its formal agenda for Monday.

Last Friday, the Lok Sabha

had to be adjourned for the day over the government's insistence on an unqualified apology from the two members for their "threatening behaviour" towards Ms. Irani when she was speaking on the burning of a rape victim in Unnao in the House.

"This is the most condemnable behaviour. They came in a threatening position...when she was speaking,

She is a lady member of the House. It is most uncalled for and they should apologise," Mr. Joshi said in the House. However, when the two Congress members were not present in the House post-lunch, the Lok Sabha had to be adjourned following an uproar from ruling party members.

The winter session will end on December 13.

'Education is the best tool for social empowerment'

STAFF REPORTER
BHUBANESWAR

President Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday called upon academicians and students to focus on research and put the knowledge they have acquired to practical use.

"The academic community should be engaged in research in areas that create

not only a new knowledge base but also a knowledge base that sustains human society," Mr. Kovind said addressing the valedictory function of Utkal University's platinum jubilee celebrations. "Students and teachers should be sensitive to the empowerment of the marginalised," he remarked.