



NEARBY



Brutally thrashed, says actor Deepak Kabir

LUCKNOW
Theatre actor and cultural activist Deepak Kabir on Thursday alleged that the police not only brutally thrashed and abused him in custody but also labelled him an “urban Naxal”. Mr. Kabir, 44, was released from jail after a court granted him bail in a case of violence during a protest against Citizenship (Amendment) Act in Lucknow on December 19.

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Teenager in hit-and-run to be tried as ‘child’: SC

NEW DELHI
A loophole in juvenile law will see a teenager who allegedly drove his father’s luxury car over a 32-year-old man in Delhi being tried as a child rather than an adult who committed a heinous crime. A Supreme Court Bench observed that an offence which does not provide a minimum sentence of seven years cannot be treated as a heinous offence.

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Foreign envoys in J&K on a fact-finding visit

They met politicians, editors and elected grassroots leaders

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

A 15-member foreign envoys’ delegation arrived in Srinagar on a two-day visit to Jammu and Kashmir and met over 100 people, including senior Valley-based politicians, top newspaper editors and grassroots representatives.

They were seeking feedback on the ground situation post the revocation of the State’s special status, Pakistan’s attempts at interference and the immediate demands of the people.

Unlike the controversial tour of the European Union (EU) parliamentarians in October last year, these envoys, including U.S. Ambassador to India Kenneth I. Juster and the Norwegian Ambassador, drove past busy streets from the airport to reach Lalit Grand Palace Hotel. The venue is close to the sub-jail where National Conference (NC) vice-president Omar Abdullah has been detained since August 5. The envoys did not meet him.

No shutdown was observed nor was any violence reported, unlike during the EU parliamentarians’ visit.

During their interactions with politicians, local editors and elected grassroots leaders, the envoys posed pointed questions on the re-



Ground study: Foreign envoys arriving at the Srinagar airport on Thursday on a two-day visit. • ANI

SC verdict on curbs today

The Supreme Court will on Friday pronounce its verdict on the legality of the restrictions on the fundamental freedom of movement and the shutdown of communications in Jammu and Kashmir since August 5, following the withdrawal of Article 370. ▶ PAGE 12

vocation of Article 370 and wanted to know if Pakistan was making attempts to interfere, delegates at the meetings told *The Hindu*.

There was a common demand for restoration of Internet services, they added.

The foreign envoys, mainly from South American,

Why ban us, asks Congress

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh accused the Centre of adopting double standards by taking Ambassadors on a “guided political tour” of Jammu and Kashmir, while barring Indian politicians from the Union Territory. He sought “unfettered access” for all politicians. ▶ PAGE 12

African and Asian nations, held a closed-door interaction with a group of prominent politicians led by Altaf Bukhari, fast emerging as the face of a non-NC, non-Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) third front.

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JNU students beaten up during march

Ministry rules out V-C’s removal after talks with delegation of students, teachers

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

Several students of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) were beaten up on Thursday by Delhi police personnel as they tried to march towards Rashtrapati Bhavan after “unsatisfactory” talks with officials of the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry. At least four students received injuries when police used “mild force” to disperse the march. Around 11 students were also detained but later released.

Scores of people, since late afternoon, had assembled outside the HRD Ministry as a protest march starting from Mandi House culminated there. HRD Secretary Amit Khare met a delegation of nine representatives from JNU Students’ Union and JNU



Students being detained during a protest march towards Rashtrapati Bhavan on Thursday. • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Teachers’ Association demanding the removal of Vice Chancellor M. Jagadesh Kumar. The Ministry ruled out Mr. Kumar’s removal. “Removing the VC is not the solution. The basic issue on which the whole problem has arisen needs to be addressed first. Changing X, Y or Z is not

as important as resolving the issues that have come up,” said Mr. Khare.

Ministry officials, however, asserted that the “formula” decided during consultations with students and administration needs to be implemented. The university officials, including the Vice

Chancellor, have been called at the Ministry on Friday over students’ claims that the revised fees as decided during HRD intervention are not being implemented.

Towards evening, JNU Students’ Union president Aishe Ghosh addressed those gathered outside Shastri Bhawan and termed the MHRD meeting “unsatisfactory” and called for a march to Rashtrapati Bhavan. Students and protesters started moving but were stopped by the police. In the melee, several protesters were beaten up by the police and taken away in police vehicles. A male student suffered head injuries during baton charge.

(With inputs from Saurabh Trivedi and agencies)

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T.N., Kerala hunt for suspected Islamic ultras

Duo killed an SSI in Kanniyakumari

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KANNIYAKUMARI

Preliminary investigations into the gunning down of special sub-inspector of police Wilson, 57, at Padanthaalumoodu checkpoint in Kanniyakumari district on Wednesday night, point to the involvement of suspected Islamic extremists.

With the help of CCTV images, the police identified the assailants as A. Abdul Shameem of Thiruvithaan-

code and M. Thoufique of Malik Dinar Nagar in Kottar, Kanniyakumari.

Police sources said Shameem was involved in the murder of Hindu Munnani activist Suresh Kumar in Chennai in June 2014. He was arrested with some others but released on bail in



M. Thoufique (left) and Abdul Shameem

December 2019. He went underground thereafter.

Tamil Nadu Director General of Police J.K. Tripathy and ADGP, Law and Order, K. Jayanth Murali, who arrived in Kerala on Thursday, had an hour-long meeting with Kerala police chief Loknath Behera and ADGP, Law and Order, Sheikh Darvesh Saheb.

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Centre withdraws CRPF cover for Stalin, OPS

‘State govt. can provide them security’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has withdrawn the security cover of DMK president M.K. Stalin and Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam, a senior government official said on Thursday.

Mr. Stalin had Z-category security cover and Mr. Panneerselvam had Y-category proximate security cover, provided by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

The official said that the CRPF was tasked with providing proximate and mobile security cover to both the leaders only in Tamil Nadu, which now stood withdrawn. While Z-category is the second highest form of security cover, with 20-22

Stalin was given Z-category security cover and Panneerselvam Y-category

personnel involved, Y-category protection entails deployment of 11-12 personnel.

The official said that the State government could provide protection to the two leaders.

In July last year, around 1,300 security personnel were freed of VIP security duty after the MHA reviewed security cover of 350 individuals, including politicians.

Recently, the Centre withdrew the Special Protection Group cover of Congress leaders Sonia, Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi and replaced it with Z-plus cover of CRPF.

SC rebuffs plea to implement CAA

Court must independently review the law for elements of unconstitutionality: CJI

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde said the country was already going through difficult times and an endeavour should be made to maintain peace.

The CJI made the oral comments while hearing a petition seeking an “aggressive” implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), which fast-tracks benefits of citizenship to illegal immigrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan belonging to six minority religions but denies the same treatment to Muslims.

“Country is going through difficult times. There has been some violence. Endeavour now should be for



peace. Such petitions don’t help,” Chief Justice Bobde told the lawyer for Mumbai-based Puneet Kaur Dhanda.

Ms. Dhanda’s petition wanted the court to declare the Act “constitutional”.

The CJI scoffed at the prayer, explaining to the lawyer that any law passed by the legislature was anyway attached with “a presumption of constitutionality”. It was now for the Supreme Court to independently re-

view the law for elements of unconstitutionality in it.

“How can we just declare it [CAA] constitutional? There is anyway a presumption of constitutionality. You have been a student of law, you would know...” Chief Justice Bobde said.

The court, he said, had listed over 60 petitions challenging the legality of the Act for hearing on January 22. They argued that the Act shredded the nation’s basic

and fundamental value of secularism by discriminating in the grant of citizenship on the basis of religion.

The CJI remained non-committal when the lawyer sought an urgent hearing of his petition favouring the CAA. Ms. Dhanda asked the court to direct the Election Commission to take “strict action” against political parties “spreading false rumours and violence in the country”. The petition also sought legal action against those protesting against the CAA.

Protesters have said the Act is discriminatory in granting citizenship and had ripped apart the fabric of secularism.

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Maharashtra may reopen Loya case, says Minister

Foul play was alleged in judge’s death

STAFF REPORTER
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh on Thursday said the State government is open to reinvestigating the death of special CBI judge B.H. Loya if fresh evidence warrants it.

“Our government is open to reinvestigating the Loya death case. Some people are meeting me today to demand that the case be reopened. I will hear them out and if necessary, the case will be reinvestigated,” said Mr. Deshmukh. Asked whom he was meeting, the Minister said he could not divulge the names.

Loya, who was hearing

the high-profile Sohrabuddin Sheikh fake encounter case of Gujarat involving current Union Home Minister Amit Shah, died of cardiac arrest in Nagpur on December 1, 2014, when he had gone to attend the wedding of a colleague’s daughter. His death turned controversial after news reports suggested foul play.

BJP MLA Ashish Shelar criticised Mr. Deshmukh for his statement. “If the Supreme Court has closed the case, then what is the reason for the Home Minister to make such statements? Is he acting as per law or are political intentions behind this?” he said.

U.P. govt. suspends Noida SSP over objectionable video

Vaibhav Krishna had alleged corruption in the State police force in a ‘secret’ report to CMO, DGP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

Days after an objectionable video of Gautambuddha Nagar Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Vaibhav Krishna came to light, the IPS officer has been suspended by the Uttar Pradesh government.

Mr. Krishna had described the video as “morphed” and a move to “malign” his image. He filed an FIR and called it a move by his rivals to deflect attention from a “secret” report on rampant corruption in postings that he had submitted to the Chief Minister’s Office and the Director General of Police.

In a simultaneous action, five IPS officers named in the



Gautambuddha Nagar SSP Vaibhav Krishna (left) had described the video as ‘morphed’. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

report have been removed from field postings and an SIT probe has been ordered.

Official sources said the video was sent to the forensic lab in Gujarat and a preliminary report found it to be authentic. The inquiry report also found him guilty of violating the service rules as he leaked the secret report to the media. Mr. Krishna al-

so made news when he allegedly sent police officers to Meerut to detain a senior journalist to know the source of the video. A departmental inquiry has been ordered against him.

‘Police-scribe nexus’

The leaked report detailed an alleged nexus between police officers and journalists to influence transfer postings and cases. The report was published after four journalists were arrested by the Gautambuddha Nagar police for alleged publication of fake news about police officers.

Among the 14 IPS officers transferred by the Uttar Pradesh government on Thursday are Himanshu Kumar,

Ajaypal Sharma, Rajiv Narayan Mishra, Sudhir Kumar Singh and Ganesh Saha, whose names were mentioned in the report submitted by Mr. Krishna.

Fighting corruption

An official release said there was zero tolerance against corruption and a three-member Special Investigation Team has been constituted to investigate the matter and submit the report within 15 days.

The allegations of exchange of money for plum postings sullied the “clean” image projected by the Yogi Adityanath government and gave an opportunity to the Opposition to take on the government.

U.P. tops list in crimes against women

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The National Crime Records Bureau published the annual Crime in India Report 2018 on Wednesday. It was published with provisional data, as five States – West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Sikkim – did not send clarifications sought by the NCRB.

According to the report, 3,78,277 cases of crime against women were reported, up from 3,59,849 in 2017. Uttar Pradesh topped the list with 59,445 cases, followed by Maharashtra (35,497) and West Bengal (30,394).

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IN BRIEF

Woman tries to kill self at food outlet washroom

NEW DELHI
A woman in her 20s tried to end her life at a food outlet at Bahadurshah Zafar Marg here on Thursday, the police said. She had slit her wrist and was found bleeding in the washroom. She had come alone, ordered food and gone to the washroom. She was rushed to a hospital in a PCR van and is said to be out of danger.

1-yr-old undergoes rare liver transplant surgery

NEW DELHI
A 14-hour rare liver graft transplant surgery was performed on a one-year-old girl from Saudi Arabia at Artemis Hospital in Sector 51 here. Baby Fatima (name changed) underwent the living donor liver transplant, where only 1 out of 8 portions of the liver was used to provide a new liver to her. The surgery called Monosegment (Segment 3) living donor liver transplant is the first such case reported in Delhi-NCR, the hospital said.

15 Daryaganj violence accused granted bail

Accused told to appear at police station till further orders

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Thursday granted bail to 15 people who were arrested by the State police for alleged violence during protests against the amended Citizenship Act in Daryaganj last month.

Additional Sessions Judge Kamini Lau allowed the bail applications on the condition of a bond of ₹25,000 per head and surety of the like amount.

The accused persons have been directed to appear in person before the Station House Officer of Daryaganj police station on the last Saturday of every month, till further orders.

They are also required to surrender their passports and not to make any attempt to influence the witnesses in



the case.

Lawyer Rebecca John, who represented the accused people, had submitted before the court that the police arrested them from different places; that they were not involved in any violence; and that they did not have any political affiliation.

Ms. John also said that the arrested people were from low-income groups and that

they were in no position to influence any witness or tamper with the evidence.

The court had earlier directed the police to submit medico-legal certificates and the CCTV footage, in support of their allegations, for perusal.

The judicial custody of the accused people was on Monday extended till January 18. Thereafter, the hearing on their bail applications was transferred to another Tis Hazari court as the case was taken over by the Crime Branch.

On December 23, a magisterial court had turned down the bail pleas of the accused.

The said incident took place on December 20, after which the accused were arrested for alleged violence.

Cognisable crime in 2018: Delhi with over 2 lakh cases leads 18 metro cities

National Crime Records Bureau releases report on Thursday

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

The national capital registered a total of 2,37,660 cognisable cases followed by Chennai (85,027) and Surat (60,384) among 18 metro cities in terms of crimes in 2018, according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data released on Thursday.

The NCRB released the 2018 edition of the report, ‘Crime in India’, which stated that Delhi has witnessed a marginal rise in crime cases as compared to 2017. In 2018, Delhi accounts for a 29.6% share of the overall Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Special and Local Laws (SLL) among 19 metro cities.

The total number of IPC and SLL cases registered in 2017 was 2,24,346, according to data from the NCRB.

Chennai ranks second on the list of metro cities, with a share of 10.6%. In 2018, the total number of crime cases registered was 85,027, a



sharp rise from 41,573 cases registered in 2017.

Surat in Gujarat, and Mumbai in Maharashtra figure at third and fourth positions with shares of 7.5 and 7.1 % of the overall figure.

Together, India's 19 metro cities show a modest 10% increase in crime in 2018, according to the data from the latest edition of the ‘Crime in India’ report. In all, 8,02,267 cognisable crimes comprising 5,45,502 IPC crimes and 2,56,765 SLL crimes were registered in 19 metropolitan cities in 2018.

In 2018, the city topped with 460 murder cases fol-

lowed by Bengaluru (229) and Coimbatore (174). Under the head of death due to negligence, the Delhi records 1,715 deaths where as Chennai (4101) and Bengaluru (834).

In cases of death due to negligence of civic agencies, the city recorded only one death and four deaths in Ghaziabad in 2018. Three deaths were reported in Bengaluru and no deaths in any of the metro cities.

The NCRB said that the city recorded no death due to medical negligence and deaths due to negligence relating to rail accidents.

SAURABH TRIVEDI NEW DELHI

The national capital records the highest number of Crime Against Women (CAW) in 2018 among 19 other metropolitan cities, as per a report released by the NCRB.

In 2018, a total of 11,724 cases of CAW registered in Delhi accounts for 27.8% of total CAW cases registered in other metros. In 2017, 11,542 cases were registered. Mumbai is ranked second with 6,058 cases in 2018.

“Delhi recorded 137 cases of dowry deaths, three cases of murder after rape and 35 cases of abetment to suicide of women while five cases of acid attack and nine cases of attempt to acid attack,” the report reads. Out of the total crimes registered under the IPC against the women, the majority of the those (3131) involved “cruelty by husband or his relatives”.

The city recorded highest number of cases (1,367) under the Protection of Children from Sexual Violence Act (Girl Child Victims only).

High Court disposes of petition against Bollywood movie

CBFC asked producers to insert disclaimer on use of a word

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday disposed of a plea against Bollywood film *Tanhaji The Unsung Warrior*, which releases on Friday, after noting that the

Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) had asked the producers to insert a disclaimer on the use of the word “Maratha” in the movie.

The CBFC had asked the producers to insert at the

beginning of the film a: “disclaimer in English and Hindi that the word Maratha is a general term referring to all soldiers of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, and not used to refer to any community”.

Azad's medical treatment: court upset with Tihar

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

A Delhi Court which directed the Tihar jail authorities to provide treatment for polycythemia to Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad, arrested in connection with violence during anti-CAA protest here, expressed displeasure at the jail authorities, which took no action despite being aware of Mr. Azad's condition.

The court noted that it was the duty of the State to preserve life even if a person is incarcerated. It passed the order on Mr. Azad's plea for proper treatment at AIIMS where he had been undergoing treatment. The court was also given a report from AIIMS that confirmed that Mr. Azad is suffering from Polycythemia.

Mr. Azad, in his plea, said he required continuous medical check-up at AIIMS.

Shoaib Iqbal joins AAP

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI
Former five-term MLA from Matia Mahal constituency, Shoaib Iqbal, joined AAP on Thursday in the presence of the party's national convener Arvind Kejriwal.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said, "I want to welcome Shoaibji and his team to the party with all my heart. I strongly believe that his support will strengthen the work that we have done for the poor in Delhi. His addition to the party will help take forward the development that AAP always believes in and is devoted to."

Mr. Iqbal said: "AAP has worked towards the welfare and development of the downtrodden as well as the Dalit communities in Delhi. I have full faith in the strength of the party that it will come back with a record-breaking win of 70/70 Assembly constituency seats. I have worked with Arvind Kejriwalji during his 49-days government in Delhi, his attitude towards work is commendable."

Mr. Iqbal said won from Matia Mahal for five terms – 1993,1998, 2003, 2008, 2013 – and has served as the Deputy Speaker of Vidhan Sabha from 2003 to 2008, the party said.

CM's remark on bribery during Goa poll not appropriate: HC

Kejriwal had challenged two EC orders

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI
The Delhi High Court on Thursday noted that the controversial remarks on bribery made by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal during the Goa Assembly election campaign in 2017 were "not appropriate".

The court suggested he make general statements, which does not point a finger in the upcoming polls.

Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva said there were some "specific imputations" in the statement which were not appropriate.

The court also refused to endorse a draft statement placed before it on behalf of the AAP convener. It remarked that there cannot be an endorsement from the court on what one can say.

Next hearing

The court, however, did not pass any order in the case. The counsel appearing for Mr. Kejriwal sought an adjournment in the post-lunch session. The court will hear the case on April 24 next.

Mr. Kejriwal had challenged the Election Commission's two orders of 2017, one censuring him for his remarks with a warning that a repeat of the same



would lead to action against him and his party and the second directing lodging of an FIR against him for his comments. The Chief Minister, had during a series of rallies in Goa during 2017 elections, asked voters to "accept money from the Congress and BJP candidates but vote for AAP".

The BJP had filed two complaints against Mr. Kejriwal, seeking his prosecution under various sections of the Indian Penal Code for asking voters to accept money. The Congress too had condemned his statement.

The Election Commission had directed that a complaint be lodged against Mr. Kejriwal under the provisions of the Representation of the People Act dealing with bribing voters and the relevant sections of the IPC.

CM compares work done by Delhi govt., civic bodies

BJP turned the city into 'garbage capital of India', he alleges

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday presented a report – BJP's civic bodies model vs govt. model –, saying the BJP has turned the city into "garbage capital of India".

Mr. Kejriwal said there are two models of governance in front of the people of Delhi. "I hope that the people will cast their votes based on the good governance model of AAP in Delhi," he said.

"Delhi's children say that MCD's full form is 'Most Corrupt Department'," he said. The BJP's "biggest gift" to Delhi is the landfill in Ghazipur, he added.

"There are open garbage dumping grounds and heaps of waste in every nook and corner of the city. This is a matter of shame for Delhi, which secures the bottom position in the BJP's Swachh Bharat Mission. The Centre in December 2019 had rated Delhi's civic bodies at bottom 10 of the 49 largest cities for cleanliness," he said.

The report also compares the work done by AAP and BJP in education, health



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal at a press conference in New Delhi on Thursday. ■SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

BJP's biggest gift to Delhi is the landfill in Ghazipur. According to Supreme Court, the landfill will have to be marked with red lights to warn airplanes

ARVIND KEJRIWAL
Chief Minister

among other sectors. "The garbage and waste mountain in Ghazipuris expected to cross the height of the Taj Mahal. According to the Supreme Court, the landfill will have to be marked with red lights to warn airplanes," he added.

He said data shows that only 17 of the 230 engineers

in the north civic body do not have a chargesheet filed against them.

Full statehood
"People of Delhi want full statehood so that there is only one government in the city. It is not Kejriwal's demand," he said when asked why "full statehood" is not a main agenda for the party.

"Today people have chosen us, tomorrow it could be some other party, in the next five years or 10 years... Whoever party people chose, in democracy, all powers should be with them, which is not there today. This [current] system of governance is not good for the country, Capital or the people," he said.

Kejriwal owes ₹20K crore to civic bodies, alleges BJP

'Govt. has no achievements to show people'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has "no achievements" of his own government to show to the people and is yet to give ₹20,000 crore to the civic bodies, alleged the BJP on Thursday.

BJP State chief Manoj Tiwari and south Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri addressed a joint press conference where they sought to place "questions being asked by the people of Delhi" to Mr. Kejriwal, seeking to expose the "claims" of AAP through the exhibition of videos and tweets illustrating broken roads, waterlogging, roadside filth and schoolchildren "endangering their lives while crossing open drain".

"Even after five years, he is avoiding talking about the achievements of his government and running away from the people. This is a *jhadu government* not a government that performs. In order to cover reality, Kejriwal talks about irrelevant things but does not talk about water supply, DTC buses, pollution, lack of colleges, flyovers and roads," Mr. Tiwari said.

He said the government has to pay ₹7,712 crore to the South Delhi Municipal Cor-

Even after five years, he is avoiding talking about the achievements of his government and running away from the people

MANOJ TIWARI
BJP State chief

poration, ₹1,938 crore to the East body and ₹3,763 crore to the North body.

In order to paralyze the civic bodies out of "political malice", the Kejriwal government had not been releasing funds to the civic bodies due to which the people of Delhi are not being provided several "amenities", he alleged.

'One question daily'

"Has Kejriwal admitted that he has no answer to the questions being raised against his government? Out of the questions being raised by the people, we will ask him one question per day," Mr. Tiwari said.

"Today's question is why has Kejriwal concealed ₹20,000 crore due to the civic bodies like a thief? Since Kejriwal has withheld the funds, the civic bodies can't give salaries to its employees regularly," he said.

Tiwari flags off mega bike rally against JNU violence

Goel, other BJP leaders attend event

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Bharatiya Janata Party State chief Manoj Tiwari flagged-off a mega bike rally from the party's office here on Thursday against recent violence in Jawaharlal Nehru University.

He said the JNU incident was the "misuse" of the youth by opposition parties to "push their agenda".

Rally diverted due to stir

The "Vijay Abhiyan Sankalp Rally" was scheduled to pass through Mandi House, Kashmiri Gate and Britannia Chowk but was, however, diverted to bypass Mandi House owing to a march by students and teachers in the area, said Delhi BJP media relations head Neelkant Bakshi.

BJP MPs Harsh Vardhan, Gautam Gambhir, Parvesh Verma and Meenakshi Lekhi took part in different legs of the rally, which Mr. Tiwari termed "historic and perhaps the biggest bike rally in the Capital so far".

"This rally was against the rumour being spread among the youth over Citizenship (Amendment) Act and their misuse by political parties," Mr. Tiwari, who had BJP Rajya Sabha MP Vijay Goel as his pillion rider, said. "When the zeal and power of youth decide to maintain the unity and integrity of the country then no one can damage it. But, the frustrated opposition parties are trying to push the youth into anarchy for its electoral gain," he added. Mr. Goel said the rally had signalled "the political farewell" of the Kejriwal government in Delhi.

"When such a large number of youth give their political support then it becomes clear that the Kejriwal government is an obstruction to the development of Delhi. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the works will progress at double speed in Delhi and I am confident that BJP will form a government here," he said.

Catching some rays



An old man sits in the sun while the other exercises in a park on a cold morning in the city. ■R.V. MOORTHY

Wrong injection claims life of teen; doctor held

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 13-year-old girl died after allegedly consuming wrong medicines, the police said on Thursday.

DCP (South) Atul Thakur said 47-year-old accused doctor Banshi Lal, who ran a clinic in Sanjay Colony, has been arrested. The complaint was received from the victim's father, Bachchu Paswan.

"Paswan from Bhati Mines said his daughter died because of wrong medicines and injections given by Lal," Mr. Thakur said.

During enquiry, the police said Lal produced an ayurvedic degree, which was verified from the department concerned. "It was revealed that Lal never obtained any qualifications and is not entitled to practice any system of medicine," Mr. Thakur added.

Subsequently, a case under Sections 304 and 419 of the IPC & 27 DMC Act was registered on Wednesday. "Lal was produced before the court and then sent to judicial custody," the DCP said, adding that further investigation is under way.

Locals seek withdrawal of controversial land Bill

They demand protection of Aravallis as Haryana has the 'lowest forest cover in country'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GURUGRAM

A few local residents held a silent protest in front of Town Hall in Civil Lines here on Thursday seeking the withdrawal of the Punjab Land Preservation Act (PLPA) Amendment Bill, 2019.

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar was attending a grievance redressal meeting inside the Town Hall at that time.

"We are here to convey to our Chief Minister that we have elected this government to work for the welfare of the citizens. The PLPA Amendment Bill 2019 passed in the State assembly in February 2019 goes against the interests of the citizens and it needs to be withdrawn in the next Assembly session," said Sarika Verma, a protester.

The protesters sought the protection of the forests. They were holding placards, some of which read: "Protectors becoming Destroyers. Aravali Bachao", "Hamare Jungle Se Buri Nazar Hatao" and "Pragati-Van (Development is equal to forests)".

The Supreme Court had put a stay on the PLPA Amendment Bill on March 1,



Protesters stand outside Town Hall in the Millennium City on Thursday. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

2019, after the Haryana State Assembly had cleared it in February last year but a reply to an RTI application last month revealed that the Haryana Governor subsequently gave his approval to controversial bill which seeks to open 33% of the forest cover in the State for real estate development.

The protesters said Haryana already has the lowest forest cover in the country, a mere 3.59% and if the bill was notified by the government, then 60,000 acres of Aravallis in south Haryana and 10,000 acres in the Shiv-aliks would be concretised. Since another 50,000 acres of the Aravallis are not even

protected under any forest law, it is feared that the entire Aravallis would be destroyed if this Bill was notified.

'Violation of SC order'

Vaishali Chandra Rana, another protester, said: "The government is currently in violation of the Supreme Court orders. Instead of demolishing the illegal constructions on PLPA protected Aravallis, the government is trying to legalise them by opening our forests for the builder mafia through this Amendment Bill. This Bill comes into force from November 1, 1966, the date of formation of the Haryana, thus nullifying all actions un-

der the Punjab Land Preservation Act since 1966 making the Act totally redundant in Haryana."

Anuradha Prasad Dhawan said the Aravallis are the lungs of the National Capital Region and "act as natural barriers protecting us from the sandstorms coming in from the Thar". If the Aravallis were destroyed, NCR cities would turn into a dust bowl, she added.

Prem Singh Tanwar and Rajbir Singh, both from villages in the Gwal Pahadi area, said: "A lot of illegal encroachments have come upon the Aravalli forest areas and water bodies. How will the groundwater get recharged with all these illegal constructions coming up? We have complained to the authorities but nothing has been done."

"Aravalli forests cover less than 10% of Gurugram and south Haryana and less than 2% of the entire State. As citizens, we demand that the PLPA Amendment Bill is withdrawn and the Aravallis is protected under law so we can leave this natural heritage for our future generations," said Neelam Ahluwalia.

Three terror suspects held

'They are members of Tamil Nadu-IS'

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police Special Cell claimed to have arrested three members of Tamil Nadu-IS for allegedly planning a terror strike in the Capital, after a brief exchange of fire, said officials.

Two of them were out on bail in a Hindu Munnani leader K.P. Suresh Kumar's murder case, they said.

DCP (Special Cell) P.S. Kushwah said the accused have been identified as Khaja Moideen (52), Syed Ali Navas (32) and Abdul Samad (28), all from Tamil Nadu. The police said they received a tip-off about the trio who had allegedly pledged allegiance to ISIS. "We were informed that they had entered east U.P through Nepal and might move towards Delhi-NCR to carry out a terror strike," Mr. Kushwah said, adding that it was learnt that the persons were sent to Delhi by their foreign-based handlers.

The police said they were also informed that the accused had taken a room on rent and procured arms and ammunition. A trap was then laid near Wazirabad

We got information that the three might move towards Delhi-NCR to carry out a terror strike.

P.S. KUSHWAH
DCP (Special Cell)

Bridge and the three men were nabbed from the spot.

"Moideen has links with ISIS. After being released on conditional bail in the murder case of Suresh, he made planned to revive the ISIS network in India through his co-associates," Mr. Kushwah said.

The police said Moideen was associated with "radical elements and indoctrinated youth" throughout. He was first arrested in 2004 for organising a training camp "wherein people were converted into Islam and trained in handling weapons and martial arts". He was arrested in 2014 in connection with Suresh's murder and was later arrested by the NIA in a terror case.

Navas was earlier involved in an attempt-to-murder case apart from Suresh's murder case. Samad is postgraduate in computer application, they added.

DUTA protests against delay in release of funds

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA) protested against the delay in release of funds to 12 colleges run by the government at the Vidhan Sabha on Thursday.

Following the expansion of the university on account of EWS reservations implemented in 2019, additional funds are required to support the increased intake of students as well as additional teaching and non-teaching posts and infrastructure improvements, the teachers said.

The additional posts are also essential to mitigate the crisis for ad-hoc teachers, who face job losses, said DUTA. The union also highlighted that several colleges have started new courses but did not have adequate teaching positions to cater to the same. However, no additional posts had been created for the same, it said, adding that the delay in sanctioning the posts was adversely affecting the teaching process.



The fire broke out in the building in Patparganj on Thursday morning. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Owners have been identified: police

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 25-year-old man died in a fire that broke out at a printing press in Patparganj Industrial Area on Thursday morning, said officials.

Phool Dev from Bihar used to work as a help at the printing press, they said.

Fire call at 2.38 a.m.

A fire department official said a call regarding the blaze was received at 2.38 a.m. after which more than 30 fire tenders were pressed into service.

The fire was brought under control at 8 a.m. after which the cooling-off operation continued. The fire department said a search was conducted to see if anyone was trapped in the building. Dev was inside the building at the time of the incident and died due to suffocation, the police said. The blaze had engulfed the ground, first and second floors of the building except for the base-

☀️🌙 Timings			
DELHI			
FRIDAY, JAN. 10			
☀️ RISE	07:16	🌇 SET	17:42
🌙 RISE	17:18	🌅 SET	06:39
SATURDAY, JAN. 11			
☀️ RISE	07:16	🌇 SET	17:43
🌙 RISE	18:21	🌅 SET	07:38
SUNDAY, JAN. 12			
☀️ RISE	07:16	🌇 SET	17:44
🌙 RISE	19:28	🌅 SET	08:32

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	15	08
Safdarjang	15	08
Palam	13	08

Delhi Palam Today
15°C Moderate fog with dense in patches likely in a cold morning. Chilly cool moderate wind likely on a sunny day. Pollution will remain moderate.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
16°C Marginal change in day/night temperature. Dry cool day with few clouds expected.

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THE HINDU

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Six ex-Punjab policemen sentenced

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MOHALI

Six former Punjab policemen were on Thursday held guilty by the CBI court here in a 27-year-old case of disappearance of six members of a family.

Mohali's Special Judge Karunesh Kumar sentenced former Inspector Suba Singh, and Sub-Inspectors Bikramjit Singh and Sukhdev Singh to ten years in jail while another Sub-Inspector Sukhdev Raj Joshi was sentenced to five years in jail.

Rein in leaders violating ‘coalition dharma’, JD(U) tells Bihar ally

BJP MLC Sanjay Paswan had pitched for Chief Minister from his party

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA

The JD(U) on Thursday asked its Bihar ally the BJP to act against its leaders violating the “coalition dharma”, a day after BJP MLC Sanjay Paswan pitched for a Chief Minister from his party to replace Nitish Kumar.

JD(U) spokesman Rajiv Ranjan Prasad said deterrent action would have followed had a leader from his party made such a statement.

The State unit of the BJP distanced itself from the views expressed by Mr. Paswan, a former Union Minister.

“The people of Bihar now want to see a BJP leader as the Chief Minister... We are in a position to form a government in the State on our own, though we shall abide by whatever decision Narendra Modi and Sushil Modi



Sanjay Paswan with JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar • FILE PHOTO

(Deputy CM and BJP leader) take,” Mr. Paswan had told reporters on Wednesday.

The BJP quickly went into damage control, insisting Mr. Paswan's view was his own and not the party's official stand.

“Had a member of the JD

U) been guilty of repeatedly violating coalition dharma in this manner, he would have faced the consequences for sure. I hope the BJP takes note of leaders who keep shooting their mouths off despite Amit Shah's intervention and act against them,” Mr. Prasad said in a statement.

Mr. Shah, the party president and Union Home Minister, has said in more than a couple of TV interviews in the recent past that Mr. Kumar, serving his third consecutive term as the Chief Minister, will be the NDA's face in the Assembly polls.

Repeated demand

Mr. Paswan, a dalit leader, had raised the JD(U)'s hackles a few months ago, too, when he demanded that Nitish Kumar be replaced as Chief Minister by a BJP leader.

“Sanjay Paswan is a senior and respected leader of our party. He may have said something in his personal capacity. It is not the party's official stand,” BJP spokesperson Nikhil Anand said.

‘Congress only party that can provide secular rule’

Preamble cannot be allowed to be tinkered with: Amarinder

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

Terming the situation prevailing in the country as extremely distressing, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Thursday urged the youth to come forward to protect and safeguard the nation and its Constitutional principles of democracy and secularism.

He was addressing Punjab Youth Congress members and workers at the installation ceremony of the youth wing's newly-elected office-bearers, including its president Barinder Singh Dhillon here.



Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh •

Capt. Amarinder said the Congress was the only party that could provide secular, democratic rule in the country. “The Congress fought for India's independence and the Constitution was framed on the Preamble of a socialist secular democratic repu-

blic,” he pointed out, adding that though the various Articles of the Constitution had since undergone many amendments, the Preamble has remained untouched.

“The Preamble cannot be allowed to be tinkered with,” said Capt. Amarinder, hitting out at the current attempts by the BJP to divide the nation. “What prevails today is not Lok Raj but goonda raj.

We all know what happened with Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in Uttar Pradesh,” he said, underlining the need for youth to take the lead in saving the country.

Capt. Amarinder said that he would continue to lead the State in its growth and development and would not quit politics till he had ensured jobs for the youth and opportunities for all to grow in a progressive Punjab.

‘I will be there for you’

“This is my State, you are all my people...I will always be here for you, and will not go anywhere till I have ensured the welfare of every citizen of Punjab,” said the Chief Minister.

He also accused the previous Akalis with ruining the State to promote their self-interest and blamed them squarely for the spread of drugs in the State.

Punjab govt. nod for fast-track courts

The move aims to ensure speedy trial and justice in rape cases in the State

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The Punjab government has decided to set up seven fast-track courts to ensure speedy trial and justice in rape cases, besides three special courts to adjudicate offences against children will also be set-up.

The State Cabinet, which met under chairmanship of Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Thursday, also decided to establish 10 more family courts to cover all the districts of the State.

“Cabinet has approved

setting up of seven fast-track courts, with the creation of 70 posts to manage them, for dealing exclusively with the rape cases. Four of these courts will be set up in Ludhiana and one each at Amritsar, Jalandhar and Ferozepur. Seven additional posts of Additional and District Sessions Judges along with 63 supporting staff have been approved,” said an official statement.

The courts, to be set up at an approximate annual expenditure of ₹3.57 crore, will be implementing the provi-

sions of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018 to deal with the pending rape cases expeditiously.

Two months time

As per the amendment carried out in Section 173 of Cr.PC in 2018, trial of rape cases is to be concluded within two months, said the statement.

The Cabinet also paved the way for setting up a Water Regulation and Development Authority by approving enactment of The Punjab Water Resources (Manage-

ment and Regulation) Ordinance 2019.

The Ordinance, which was approved by the council of Ministers earlier at its meeting on December 4, 2019, is now all set for legislation as ‘The Punjab Water Resources (Management and Regulation) Bill, 2020’, according to the statement.

“The Bill proposes to set up a Punjab Water Regulation and Development Authority. The authority will be responsible for management of water resources of the State,” the statement added.

Withdraw PPP model for govt. hospitals in Rajasthan: JSA

‘NITI plan would reduce access to public health institutions’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

The Rajasthan Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (JSA) has demanded immediate withdrawal of the NITI Aayog's plan to link private medical colleges with the government district hospitals, in which the private entities can convert half of the hospital beds into paid beds.

The JSA urged Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot to reject the public-private partnership policy formulated by NITI Aayog for the health sector.

The JSA, which functions as a Statewide network of organisations working on health rights, said the NITI Aayog's proposal amounted to an “unnecessary intrusion” of the Union government with a “very regressive” model to commercialise the already small public health system. The PPP model, if executed, would further reduce access to public health institutions, it said.

JSA convener Narendra



CM Ashok Gehlot •

Gupta said it was ironic that the NITI Aayog was “so brazenly” admitting that the government lacked in resources and finances to meet the basic health needs of common citizens.

“This despite the fact that only 25% of non-hospitalised and 45% of hospitalised patients seek health care from public health institutions,” he said.

A NITI Aayog draft policy document has stated that the PPP model was being proposed for offering district hospitals to private entities to set up medical colleges in view of limited resources available with the Union and

State governments. The document also states that this model is based on the PPP arrangements operative in Gujarat and Karnataka and has been developed on the basis of “international best practices”.

An investigation by JSA has revealed that there was no PPP model operative in Karnataka and only one such arrangement was functional in Gujarat, involving the Gujarat Adani Institute of Medical Sciences, Bhuj, under a corporate social responsibility project.

Letter to CM Gehlot

In a letter to the CM, signed by Dr. Gupta, health activist Chhaya Pancholi and civil rights activist Kavita Srivastava, the JSA said that no consultations with the State governments were carried out by NITI Aayog before formulating the PPP model. The JSA requested Mr. Gehlot to reject the proposal with a message to NITI Aayog to desist from formulating such models in future.

Major fire at ESI hospital in Noida; no loss of life, injuries

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GHAZIABAD

A major fire engulfed the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESI) hospital in Noida on Thursday morning.

“Five fire tenders were pressed into service. No loss of life or injuries have been reported. All the patients were safely evacuated,” said Kamlesh Mishra, Fire Safety Officer, Noida.

Mr Mishra told *The Hindu* there were 243 patients in the hospital out of which 43 were in the critical unit. They were shifted to nearby private hospitals and the government hospital.

Situated in Sector 24, ESI hospital is a seven-storey building.

‘Fire caused by sparks’

Mr Mishra said the hospital authorities had listed the time of the fire as 9.15 a.m. “We got the call at 9.40 a.m. The fire started from the basement in the battery bank. Prima facie, it seems the fire was caused by sparking in one of the battery's terminal. It caused dark and dense smoke which causes suffocation. When we reached the spot, the building was filled with smoke,” he said.

Mr. Mishra pointed out the hospital lacked fire safety features.

“Fire safety equipment was not present on every floor and those which were there were not functioning properly. It was difficult to provide an outlet to the thick smoke. The fire was put out in half-an-hour but it took us more than three hours to get rid off the smoke.”

The officer admitted the patients had to spend time in the open before they were gradually shifted to nearby private hospitals and government hospital.

Dense fog claims 8 lives

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAIPUR

Eight persons were killed on Thursday when the van they were travelling in collided with a bus due to dense fog on the Jaipur-Bikaner national highway, the police said.

Six persons died on the spot while two succumbed to their injuries on the way to a government hospital here.

The police said the van driver failed to see the bus coming from the opposite direction due to dense fog.

Protests planned against PM Modi’s Kolkata visit over the weekend

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

Multiple civil society groups, social organisations, human rights platforms and cultural bodies in Kolkata have planned a demonstration under a common slogan on Saturday when Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit the city.

There will be posters and banners urging the Prime Minister “to go back.” An elaborate ‘civil disobedience movement’, branded as “no NRC, no NPR, no CAA campaign,” has been planned. Mr. Modi is expected to attend four programmes in the city over the weekend.

From early Saturday morning, the groups will mobilise people from the city and suburbs to march to two points. At Kaikhali traffic crossing near the airport, the objective will be to stop the Prime Minister from entering the city, the organisers said. However, it is not yet clear if Mr. Modi

will be flown into the city from the airport in an Army copter or taken by road all the way to his first programme venue in Dalhousie Square. He is expected to visit Belur Math founded by Swami Vivekananda on Saturday evening. The anti-NRC groups will also assemble near Raj Bhavan . “We

appeal to participants to carry on- ly the national flag and not the flag of any political party,” said Prasenjit Bose, a key organiser.

Meanwhile, protests continued in parts of Kolkata on Thursday. At one anti-NRC, CAA programme, research scholars from various universities and indepen-

dent institutes demanded “creation of awareness to examine the connection of government exercises [like NRC and CAA] with the day-to-day issues” of the people. The group, Democratic Research Scholars’ Organisation, said more than 100 scholar representatives participated in the programme.

Explosion in Naihati rocks both banks of Hooghly, 2 policemen hurt

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

A massive explosion in West Bengal’s Naihati on Thursday rocked both banks of Hooghly river in North 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts. Non-concrete roofs of a number of houses in Naihati were blown off and glass panels of many buildings, including the municipality in Chinsurah, were shattered due to the impact of the explosion.

The blast occurred when police were trying to defuse materials seized from a firecracker factory in Naihati. At least two policemen were injured in the blast.

Videos of the explosion showed an enormous cloud of smoke rising several metres over the surface, triggering panic among people who came out their homes in both districts. “We will investigate why the impact of the explosion was so high. Huge quantity of explosives were seized and the bomb disposal squad was trying to dispose them of,” said Barrackpore Police Commissioner Manoj Verma said. The materials were seized following an explosion in the firecrackers manufacturing unit at Naihati killed four workers on January 3.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar tweeted videos of the explosion saying it “leaves nothing to imagination”. “It calls for a thorough probe in view of its seriousness, intensity and damage caused. Only expert investigation can unearth issues involved. This ominous development should be an eye-opener for law enforcing and regulatory regime in State,” Mr Dhankhar said.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said she had sent the local MLA to take stock of the situation. “If there are any cracks because of the explosion we will provide compensation to the people,” she said.

Activists protest felling of trees for road widening in Berhampur

STAFF REPORTER
BERHAMPUR

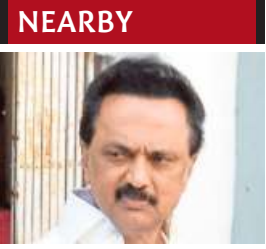
Environmental activists in Odisha’s Berhampur are protesting against indiscriminate cutting of trees for widening of two roads, despite past directive of authorities to transplant mature trees.

Since Wednesday, activists from different organisations, including Berhampur Sabuja Bahini (BSB), Anchaliika Vikash Parishad (AVP) and Mahatma Helping Hand, have started regular vigil to protect the remaining trees from getting cut. In August 2019, similar protests by green activists had saved 188 mature trees from getting cut from MKCG medical college campus in the city for road widening work.

At present, mature trees are being cut for widening of roads connecting Mango Market to old Berhampur area via Andhapasara road and the stretch from Mango market to sub-registrar office square.

Due to persuasion of BSB, office of superintending engineer of Roads and Buildings for southern circle, through a letter on July 19, had directed all its executive engineers concerned to limit cutting of trees during road construction or widening and transplantation of trees wherever possible.

The green activists alleged that despite the directive, 37 mature trees were cut down during past few days for widening of the two roads. “To save the rest of the mature trees, we started documenting all of them through special numbering on their trunks and photographs,” said BSB president Sibararam Panigrahy. There are 105 trees that face the danger of being cut down, he said.



T.N. to file defamation case against Stalin

CHENNAI
The Tamil Nadu government has decided to file a criminal defamation case against DMK chief M.K. Stalin for accusing Municipal Administration Minister S.P. Velumani of having indulging in corruption to the tune of ₹1,000 crore.

Keeladi reports in 24 Indian, global languages

CHENNAI
The findings of the Keeladi excavations in 24 languages were released on Thursday in Chennai and the copies are available at the stall of the Department of Archaeology. Tamil and English versions are priced at ₹50 and copies in other languages cost ₹200.

FSSAI issues directive on online usage of its logo

NEW DELHI
The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has directed that no entity can register its website with the domain name comprising the word 'FSSAI', or use its name and logo.

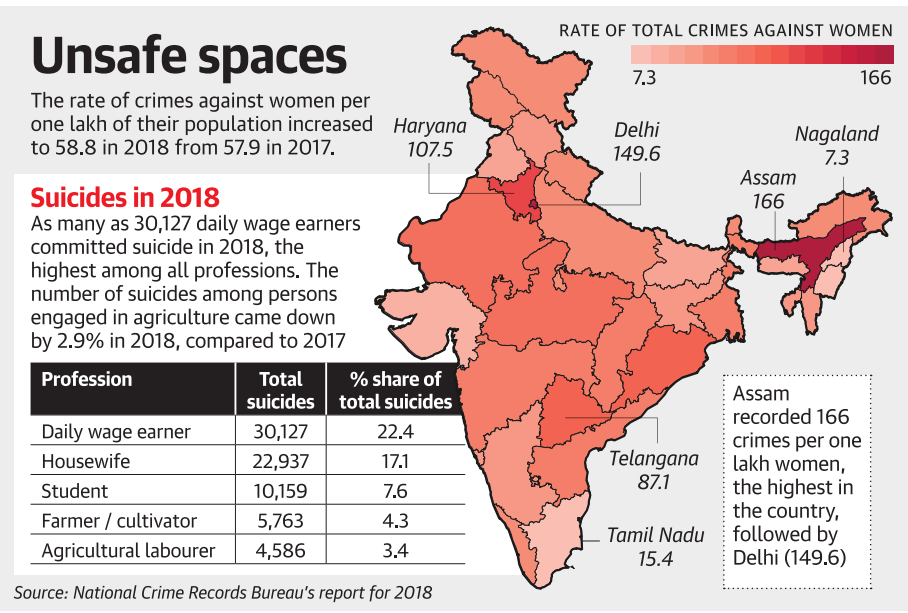
Teenager in hit-and-run to be tried as ‘child’: SC

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
A loophole in the juvenile law will see a teenager who allegedly drove his father's luxury car over a 32-year-old man in Delhi being tried as a child rather than an adult who has committed a heinous crime.
A Supreme Court Bench led by Justice Deepak Gupta on Thursday used its extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitu-

U.P. tops list in crimes against women

NCRB publishes Crime in India Report 2018

VIJAJTA SINGH
NEW DELHI
The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) published the annual Crime in India Report 2018 on Wednesday. It was published with provisional data, as five States – West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Sikkim – did not send clarifications sought by the NCRB despite repeated reminders.
The 2017 annual crime report was published on October 21 last year, after a delay of two years.
According to the report, 3,78,277 cases of crime against women were reported, up from 3,59,849 in 2017. Uttar Pradesh topped the list with 59,445 cases, followed by Maharashtra (35,497) and West Bengal (30,394). The conviction rate in rape-related cases stood at 27.2% even though the rate of filing chargesheets was 85.3% in such cases. Cruelty by husband or his relatives (31.9%) followed by assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (27.6%) constituted the ma-



For share of crimes against women, the report said.
The NCRB also released the Accidental Death and Suicides in India 2018 report, which said that 10,349 people working in the farm sector ended their lives in 2018, accounting for 7.7 % of the total number of suicides in the country. The total number of people who committed suicide in 2018 was 1,34,516, an increase of 3.6% from 2017 when 1,29,887 cases were reported. The highest number of suicide victims were daily wagers – 26,589, comprising 22.4% of such deaths.
The majority of the suicides were reported in Maharashtra (17,972) followed by Tamil Nadu (13,896), West Bengal (13,255), Madhya Pradesh (11,775) and Karnataka (11,561). “West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Meghalaya, Goa, Chandigarh, Daman & Diu, Delhi, Lakshad-

weep and Puducherry reported zero suicides by farmers/cultivators as well as agricultural labourers,” the NCRB report said.
The incidents registered under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes related Acts saw a decline from 6729 incidents reported in 2017 to 4816 in 2018. A total of 29,017 cases of murder were registered in 2018, showing an increase of 1.3% over 2017 (28,653 cases).

Panel approves scheme to ‘trade’ in forests

It allows Forest Dept. to outsource reforestation to non-government agencies

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI
The Forest Advisory Committee, an apex body tasked with adjudicating requests by the industry to raze forest land for commercial ends, has approved a scheme that could allow “forests” to be traded as a commodity. If implemented, it allows the Forest Department to outsource one of its responsibilities of reforestation to non-government agencies.

In the current system, industry needs to make good the loss of forest by finding appropriate non-forest land – equal to that which would be razed. It also must pay the State Forest Department the current economic equivalent – called Net Present Value – of the forest land. It's then the department's responsibility to grow appropriate vegetation that, over time, would grow into forests. Industries have often

complained that they find it hard to acquire appropriate non-forest land, which has to be contiguous to existing forest. Nearly ₹50,000 crore had been collected by the Centre over decades, but the funds were lying unspent because States were not spending the money on regrowing forests. The Supreme Court intervened, a new law came about with rules for how this fund was to be administered. About ₹47,000 crore had

Most political murders in West Bengal

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
West Bengal reported the maximum number of political murders in 2018, says a report by the NCRB. The number of murders due to “political reason” in the State stood at 12, followed by nine in Bihar and seven in Maharashtra. In all, 54 political murders were reported in the country in 2018. In 2017, the number of such cases stood at 98. However, the data is not in consonance with an advisory sent by the Ministry of Home Affairs to West Bengal government last year.
In a June 15 advisory, the MHA had said political violence had claimed 96 lives and that the “unabated violence” was a matter of deep concern. The NCRB said the clarifications on data were pending from West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Sikkim, and the data might be treated as provisional.

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 Friday: Cold day conditions likely over Bihar, sub-Himalayan West Bengal and Sikkim. Dense fog likely in isolated pockets over Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, west Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Odisha.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	21.0	13.0	Kozhikode	—	35.0	25.0
Ahmedabad	—	26.0	11.0	Kurnool	—	31.0	21.0
Aizawl	13.4	18.0	12.0	Lucknow	4.8	16.0	10.0
Allahabad	13.4	18.0	12.0	Madurai	—	32.0	21.0
Bengaluru	—	—	—	Mangaluru	—	—	—
Bhopal	—	—	—	Mumbai	—	29.0	19.0
Bhubaneswar	—	26.0	17.0	Mysuru	—	00.0	00.0
Chandigarh	2.9	14.0	6.0	New Delhi	10.8	15.0	8.0
Chennai	—	30.0	21.0	Patna	15.0	20.0	14.0
Coimbatore	—	30.0	21.0	Port Blair	—	31.0	24.0
Dehradun	32.2	18.0	5.0	Puducherry	—	30.0	19.0
Gangtok	3.3	7.0	3.0	Pune	—	27.0	15.0
Goa	—	33.0	21.0	Raipur	1.4	25.0	15.0
Guwahati	—	—	—	Ranchi	—	21.0	9.0
Hubballi	—	30.0	19.0	Shillong	—	—	—
Hyderabad	—	27.0	19.0	Shimla	27.2	7.0	2.0
Imphal	—	—	—	Srinagar	—	—	—
Jaipur	—	19.0	4.0	Thiruvananthapuram	—	32.0	23.0
Kochi	—	33.0	24.0	Tiruchir	—	31.0	21.0
Kohima	—	—	—	Vijayawada	—	30.0	21.0
Kolkata	—	23.0	15.0	Visakhapatnam	—	29.0	21.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	52	19	43	58	84	Good
Bengaluru	11	60	35	56	82	Poor
Chennai	60	42	53	115	42	Moderate
Delhi	9	28	49	289	148	Poor
Hyderabad	2	46	26	92	80	Good
Kolkata	10	93	41	259	170	Poor
Lucknow	14	66	57	360	66	Poor
Mumbai	9	61	41	159	145	Moderate
Pune	88	34	83	119	100	Poor
Visakhapatnam	9	76	52	151	191	Moderate

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.

PM_{2.5} & 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



Mining deep

While opening up the coal mining sector, the govt. must protect the interests of Coal India

The Centre's decision to liberalise norms for entry into coal mining and relax regulations on mining and selling coal in the country is significant in many respects. Amendments to two legacy Acts through the Mineral Laws (Amendment) Ordinance 2020 cleared by the Cabinet on Wednesday will free the sector from restrictions that were inhibiting its development. This will open up the coal mining sector completely, enabling anyone with finances and expertise to bid for blocks and sell the coal freely to any buyer of their choice. Until now there were restrictions on who could bid for coal mines – only those in power, iron and steel and coal washery business could bid for mines – and the bidders needed prior experience of mining in India. This effectively limited the potential bidders to a select circle of players and thus limited the value that the government could extract from the bidding. Second, end-use restrictions inhibited the development of a domestic market for coal. The ordinance essentially democratises the coal industry and makes it attractive for merchant mining companies, including multinationals such as BHP and Rio Tinto, to look at India. The move was overdue considering that the country spent a huge ₹1,71,000 crore in coal imports last year to buy 235 million tonnes; of that, 100 million tonnes was not substitutable, as the grade was not available in India, but the balance 135 million tonnes could have been substituted by domestic production had it been available.

Large investment in mining will create jobs and set off demand in critical sectors such as mining equipment and heavy commercial vehicles. The country may also benefit from infusion of sophisticated mining technology, especially for underground mines, if multinationals decide to invest. However, for that to happen, the government needs to do more such as whittling the time taken for approvals of mining leases and also easing the procedures for clearances. The test would come when 46 producing mines, whose leases expire in March, come up for bidding shortly. The opening up of coal mining effectively ends Coal India's (CIL) monopoly status. Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi took care to emphasise that CIL has been and will be allotted adequate blocks and that it will be supported and the interests of labourers will be taken care of. The company has been set a target of one billion tonnes production by 2023-24 – last year, it produced 606 million tonnes. CIL is a Maharatna PSU and tremendous public resources have been invested in the company over the years. It is the government's responsibility to ensure that CIL is not compromised the way BSNL has been by the opening up to private players. The company employs about three lakh people, is listed and is a national asset. It has to be nurtured even as private players are welcomed.

A continent on fire

Australia must adopt policies that will foster environmental protection

Australia's catastrophic fire season that began in August last year is unprecedented, and has caused large scale destruction, mainly in New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland. Fire is no stranger to the dry continent's woodlands, but the inferno this time has devastated over 10 million hectares of land, killing at least 25 people and tens of millions of animals, besides forcing the evacuation of entire communities. Shocking images of kangaroos burnt in their tracks as they tried to flee and koalas desperately escaping the fire are indelibly imprinted in the consciousness of people around the world. This is a moment of reckoning for Australia. The government of Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who has sought to downplay the impact of changing climate, is struggling to pacify angry citizens who are calling for a reconsideration of the country's relationship with fossil fuels. Warnings have been sounded by scientists that even with a global average temperature rise of 1°C, the raging fires have engulfed an area the size of Switzerland. In a world set to warm at least half a degree more in coming decades, Australia's encounters with devastating fires could become more frequent, perhaps even once in eight years, making large parts of the continent uninhabitable. The current fire season presents a cross-roads, and a wise choice would be to move to a greener future, one that strengthens an already diverse economy through innovation.

As scientists have been pointing out for years, the coal industry has a sway over politics in Australia that is disproportionate to its share of economic production. This was evident when Mr. Morrison held up a big piece of the black rock in Parliament in a gesture to highlight its economic importance. The display may have reassured the mining industry, which has torpedoed a profits tax in the past, but it shocked researchers who worry about greenhouse gas emissions increasing in Australia, and in countries to which it exports the fuel. Credentialed specialists at the country's Climate Council have had to crowdsource funds to continue their work after the official Climate Commission was shut down by the government six years ago. Today, they are raising the alarm over the lowest ever rainfall recorded in parts of NSW and Queensland, and high peak temperatures, producing a tinderbox effect across the large Murray-Darling Basin. The situation is bound to worsen without policy change, as temperatures are predicted to soar to 50°C. Over the past half century, the number of hot days and very hot days each year have steadily increased. It would be tragic if this scientific insight is ignored. Long-term prosperity for Australians and a future for its charismatic animals can be secured only through policies that foster environmental protection.

A nation losing democratic steam

Beyond the undermining of India's pluralism, the CAA signals New Delhi's low regard for neighbouring countries



KANAK MANI DIXIT

These are bewildering times for members of civil society in countries bordering India, who are no longer able to appeal to New Delhi on the platform of reason, pluralism and even humanity. When New Delhi appeared arrogant or tone-deaf in the past, there were ways to make yourself heard, but today there is a silencing within that weakens not only the spirit of India, but the prospects of peace in South Asia.

While the first term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi saw adventurism, from demonetisation within to blockade without, his re-elected government seems intent on changing the face of India through majoritarian intolerance under the banner of Hindutva. While putting fear in minority communities, this trajectory is also accelerating India's economic decline and weakening New Delhi's international influence.

A geopolitical folly

While the adoption of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in December has triggered India-wide dissent, it began as an act of geopolitical folly. For domestic appeasement, Home Minister Amit Shah and Mr. Modi brought forth a Bill that essentially accused three selected countries of discrimination against their Hindu, Jain, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Parsi minorities. In one stroke, New Delhi distanced itself from the friendly state establishments of Dhaka and Kabul, and deepened

the divide with Islamabad.

Even discounting the fact that residents of glass houses must resist the urge to throw stones, this was an unexpected accusation. While no South Asian country is free of majoritarian discrimination, the concern of New Delhi's rulers was clearly not the well-being of the minorities of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, who have been in fact been made more vulnerable by the Act. The Indian authorities did not engage in sustained international effort to address the issue, such as through the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. The appropriate approach here would have been to join the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, and to be open to foreigners of any faith or persuasion who seek refuge. To cherry-pick among non-citizens on the basis of religion was crass.

Now, the human rights community and intelligentsia in the neighbouring countries are left in an awkward position when challenging the CAA's selectivity – their interest is to promote inclusion within rather than demand that India become an 'equal-opportunity' host for Muslims as well. Nevertheless, one must challenge India's Home Ministry as to why the CAA ignored the larger number of Muslims of different sects enduring sectarian strife. These include Ahmadiyya and Shia, particularly Hazara, of Pakistan and Ahmadiyya and Bihari Muslims of Bangladesh. And why ignore the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India and the vulnerable Rohingya of Myanmar?

In reality, the adoption of the CAA is just a way-station on the Hindutva highway, which considers not just modern-day India but all of the notional 'Jambudvipa' as the Hindu homeland. Those gal-



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

loping along this highway believe in a selective rendering of a Hindu subcontinent overrun by invaders from the northwest. This exclusivist project seeks to paint the variegated belief system of 'Hinduism' with a broad ideological brushstroke. Faith has been turned on its head, becoming less a quest for spiritualism. Many god-men, god-women, gurus and babas have boarded this Hindutva wagon, notably the *mahant* of Gokarnath temple who is now also the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister.

The Indian establishment has thus super-charged its social engineering campaign, specifically targeting the country's Muslim citizenry. The campaign started with the revocation of the autonomous status of Jammu and Kashmir, followed by the Ayodhya verdict that privileged mass belief over evidence. The enactment of the CAA and the scheme to confirm citizenship through the National Register of Citizens is part of the plan.

Hunger for political power

Of course, India's population of 200 million-plus Muslims will not be going anywhere. India is their homeland, and they have no extra-territorial magnet similar to Israel vis-à-vis the Jewish people. One searches, therefore, for an explanation as to why Indian society has

CDS and the path to jointmanship

His role is not just about tri-service cooperation, but also to ensure that acquisitions do not exceed capital allocations



HARSH V. PANT
& KARTIK BOMMAKANTI

The announcement on a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) last year and the appointment of Gen. Bipin Rawat as the first CDS has been one of the key policy decisions made by the Narendra Modi government in its second term. In the aftermath of an emphatic election victory in May 2019, Mr. Modi pushed the needle on a long-pending reform for the establishment of a CDS, which was recommended by the Kargil Review Committee in 2001. The CDS will be "first among equals" in that he will consult and solicit the views of the services, but the final judgment will be the CDS's alone and he will be the principal military adviser to the Defence Minister.

The role here will be confined to the acquisition matters exclusive to each service and won't extend to the procurement of big-ticket items such as warships or fighter aircraft, which will remain under firm control of the Department of Defence (DoD). The CDS will be the single-point military adviser to the Defence Minister on

matters involving all three services and the service chiefs will be obliged to confine their counsel to issues pertaining to their respective services. The CDS is also vested with the authority to provide directives to the three chiefs.

A chief as well as an adviser

Additionally, the CDS will lead the Department of Military Affairs (DoMA) dealing with the three services. Gen. Rawat will enjoy the rank of Secretary within the DoD and his powers will be confined to only the revenue budget. However, he is vested with the authority in prioritising inter-service procurement decisions as Permanent Chairman-Chiefs of Staff Committee. While the CDS does not enjoy any command authority, in his capacity as DoMA, he will wield control over issues governing promotions, travel, appointment to key posts, and overseas assignments. Consequently, the CDS will enjoy a substantial amount of influence. He will also perform an advisory role in the Nuclear Command Authority (NCA). Above all, his core function will be to foster greater operational synergy between the three service branches of the Indian military and keep inter-service frictions to a minimum. Fundamentally, the CDS will perform two roles, as the single point military advisor to the Defence Minister and as head of the DoMA.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

With his inauguration as India's first CDS last year, Gen. Rawat has hit the ground running with some important announcements. He has sought the establishment of an Air Defence Command (ADC) by directing the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) to develop a proposal by June 30. An integrated ADC will enable nationwide coverage, prevent fratricide in the event of war and sustain jointmanship in air defence operations. In addition, Gen. Rawat has declared his intention to synergise logistics support, particularly in areas where two or more services are co-located.

Three main challenges

Gen. Rawat faces three main challenges. First, there are concerns over matters relating to service parochialism, though there have

thus been led to the cliff's edge. This seems to be motivated by nothing more than a hunger for political power using religion and ultra-nationalism as tools. Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah have essentially lined up behind Muhammad Ali Jinnah's two-nation theory, leaving India's Muslims emotionally drained and fearful.

In a world increasingly defined by populist ultra-nationalism, seen in the ascent of figures like Donald Trump, Rodrigo Duterte and Jair Bolsonaro, India with its ancient-civilisational and modern-Gandhian heritage should have been framing the democratic response to myriad pressing issues, from global warming to nuclear weaponisation. A confident, egalitarian-minded India would also have been leading the discourse on international migration and challenging China for its internment camps for Uighurs and for using facial recognition technology for surveillance. Instead, we have a regime whose topmost leader terms Muslim immigrants as 'termites' fit to be dumped into the Bay of Bengal; which keeps Rohingya refugees away with threats of deportation; and which is itself rushing to catch up with Beijing in building internment camps and using facial recognition and drones to control dissent.

Looking at India from the outside, we see a ruling establishment that values mythology more than history and a society losing its scientific edge, its great universities being run to the ground. India under Mr. Modi is losing democratic steam, with its weakened courts, progressively politicised military, and a police force and investigating agencies that are willing instruments of power-brokers. Many of us have been there, done that.

The genie that has been released through the enactment of the CAA must be forced back into the bottle, taking into consideration the sheer scale of human tragedy possible in the subcontinent. And, while the ongoing country-wide dissent against the CAA by lay-citizens has been spontaneous and heartfelt, it may not be enough to challenge a party that has just been elected with an overwhelming majority for a five-year term.

Seeking greater federalism

One used to regard India's Central government as the protector of citizens when the States went renegade, but what happens when the Centre goes rogue? Devolution of power and authentic federalism is clearly the solution for human dignity and social justice in a country as vast and diverse as India. Here, as a former Chief Minister of Gujarat, Mr. Modi could have set an example as the great federalist Prime Minister. Instead, he has presided over a further Centralisation of governmental power, with the Hindutva agenda part and parcel of this process.

And this is why it is vital to recognise the institutional resistance to the CAA emerging from the States run by non-BJP parties. Amidst the gloom, one sees in the State-side reaction not only an immediate response to the CAA, but the glimmer of possibilities of a longer-term restructuring of the Indian state towards governance that is more accountable to the people. The centripetal force represented by Narendra Modi requires a centrifugal counter from the States of India.

Kanak Mani Dixit, a writer and journalist based in Kathmandu, is founding editor of the magazine 'Himal Southasian'

been no initial indications in this regard. If he privileges support for the Army, his parent service, he is likely to put himself on a collision course with the Naval and Air Force chiefs. A corollary is that as an infantry officer, he may become susceptible to bias in matters concerning procurement decisions or personnel issues focused on the infantry. The latter outcome could vitiate his capacity to address the needs of the armour and artillery corps. Any parochialism could potentially derail the primary objective of creating the CDS – promoting synergy and shaping acquisition priorities both within and between the services. Indeed, one of the tasks the CDS is to avoid wasteful expenditure and duplication of equipment in the inventories of the services.

But, the CDS's role is not simply about tri-service cooperation, it is equally about fostering better cooperation between the MoD bureaucracy and the services and ensuring that projected and planned acquisitions of the services do not exceed capital allocations. A secondary challenge stems from the sheer levels of manpower in the Indian Army, which is the service that consumes the lion's share of the defence budget. As it is a manpower-intensive fighting force, pruning the number of personnel in the Army will remain perhaps the most vexed challenge for pos-

sibly the entirety of Gen. Rawat's tenure. This will demand innovation, given the fact that infantry-based operations geared for counterinsurgency warfare, which a large part of the Army is dedicated to undertaking, are manpower intensive.

There are no instant remedies, but one pointer is towards greater investment in Artificial Intelligence (AI) over the long term, a process that has already begun, but will require a dedicated push from the CDS over the course of his tenure. The application of AI technology is likely to lend itself to tanks and artillery systems, as is visibly evident from the vigorous pursuit of AI by China's People's Liberation Army.

The final challenge facing the CDS will be the extent to which he can encourage the services to support indigenisation. Cost saving is not simply about reducing manpower in the Army, it is equally about getting all the services, particularly the capital-intensive services, to rally behind a committed enterprise to support the native Research and Development for production and eventual deployment of weapons systems, which when procured from abroad drive a massive hole in the budget.

Harsh V. Pant is Director of Research at Observer Research Foundation, Delhi where Kartik Bommakanti is an Associate Fellow

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.

Dialling down tensions

Fortunately, better counsel has prevailed and U.S. has backed away from escalating the conflict (Front page, "Trump backs away from further conflict after Iran hits U.S. troops," Jan. 9). The truth behind the diametrically opposite claims of "minimal damage" by U.S. and "80 American terrorists" having been killed by Iran may or may not be known immediately. But, the world has heaved a sigh of relief that a disastrous war has been averted. As it has taken the revenge for the assassination of Qassem Soleimani, Tehran should desist from issuing further threats. It would be in the best interests of the volatile region for Iran to make peace with the U.S. As President Donald Trump

has called upon the other signatories of the earlier nuclear accord to work for a new deal, Iran should also come forward to negotiate a fresh accord.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI,
Hyderabad

JNU V-C should resign

After remaining absent for long when a set of his students were attacked by masked hooligans with allegiance to right-wing elements, it is uncharitable that Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) Vice Chancellor M. Jagadeesh Kumar advised the affected students to bury the past. Looking at the manner in which the events took place – goons were allowed free entry into the campus; the security guards and the police acted as mute spectators to the gruesome

attacks; and electricity was cut off for some time – we can deduce that the administration must have had some knowledge of what was in store. Mr. Kumar should submit his resignation immediately, in deference to the wishes of the students and teachers.

THARCIOUS S. FERNANDO,
Chennai

Centrist bias

The founders of the Indian Constitution cannot be faulted for framing a Constitution with an explicit 'Centrist bias', considering the background of Partition (Op-ed page, "The Indian Constitution's unitary tilt," Nov. 9). Perhaps they hoped that the democratic process would deepen in the years to come and electoral reforms would

follow. This has not happened, as amply revealed by the lack of any meaningful electoral reforms. A single-party dominance would not have occurred had India switched to proportional representation. As a consequence, the Bharatiya Janata Party, which secured 37.36% of votes, is now in a position to initiate changes which have far-reaching implications. The declaration of a few States that they will not implement the Centre's moves on citizenship is unlikely to have any significant impact. More than legality, it is the fiscal dimension that is going to dampen the activism of States. In India's fiscal federalism, powers are disproportionately tilted in favour of the Centre. The

Goods and Services Tax has further exacerbated this. Part of the problem lies in the unwillingness of the States to tap the potential of the assigned taxes. Kerala, which is in the forefront of the opposition to the Centre, is in deep fiscal stress and mostly dependent on the Centre to meet its committed items of expenditure. The message that comes out of the recent developments seems to be: to fight the centralisation tendencies, the States have to become more fiscally independent.

JOSE SEBASTIAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

Schisms within Islam

The writer has rightly diagnosed Islam's internal schisms as the cause of and not as the consequence of U.S. interference in West

Asia (Editorial page, "Betrayals from outside and within," Jan. 9). But his proposed cure – an appeal to Muslims to shun orthodoxy – appears as a mere palliative. Conspicuous by its absence is any mention of the role of Muslim nations like Saudi Arabia in propagating extremist ideology. Ordinary Muslims are powerless to counter the coalition of powerful rulers and fundamentalists. How then can the syncretic and benign Islamic vision that remains in the margins of popular imagination go mainstream? Where is the courageous reformer who will challenge the intolerant scriptural narratives?

V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,
Thiruvananthapuram



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What is the state of ‘open source’ in India today?

PARLEY

It is the new normal, but we still need to go a long way to adopt open source tools in Big Data

The open source movement, which has focused on democratising technology access, has over a two-decade history in India. In a conversation moderated by Jacob Koshy, Venkatesh Hariharan and Sangeeta Gupta discuss its relevance to digital technology, privacy, and software patenting. Edited excerpts:

Open source (OS) has been a part and parcel of software programming and code development for a while. Since the advent of Linux (an OS operating system) in the 1990s, what do you think is the state of the OS movement in India now?

Venkatesh Hariharan: When we started the campaign for more OS in 2000, we had political, cultural and economic reasons to believe it was important. Politically, we wanted to ensure more diversity in the kind of players that existed in the market with twin objectives: that we were independent from a technology standpoint and that software was localised to Indian languages. From a cost perspective, if we were dependent on multinational companies for core technology like operating systems, that would have been a drain on the exchequer. So that was the logic. Today, some of the largest e-governance projects and start-ups in India are running on OS. The early days when we had to campaign for people to use OS is over; now we are in a new era where OS is the new normal.

Sangeeta Gupta: In the initial years, there was a lot of focus on OS versus proprietary. From a NASSCOM perspective, we’ve always believed that while it’s important for us to promote OS, it’s also important to give users a choice: do they want OS or some other proprietary software? I think some government decisions helped propel OS adoption in India. One [reason] why OS was held back in the early years was the lack of capability in fixing technical issues that OS software could bring in versus using proprietary software, which your regular vendor also knew how to fix, such as a Microsoft Office or a Windows. That

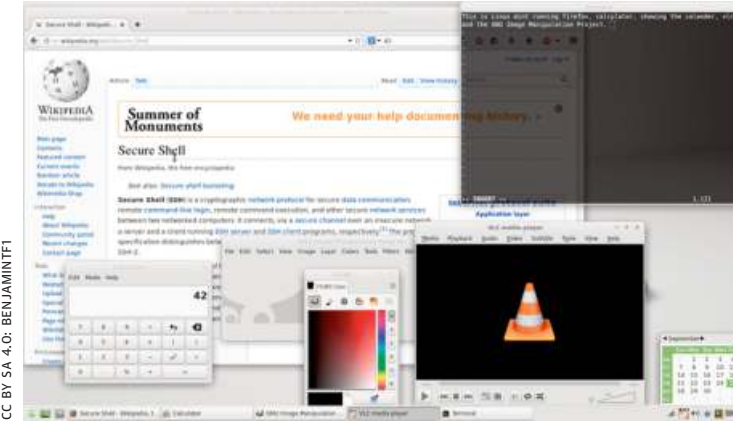
is what has happened now with the democratisation of technologies, cloud computing, Artificial Intelligence (AI) – OS has become much more mainstream.

Do you think proprietary forms have co-opted OS? Yes, sharing software and tweaking source code happens, but largely have major tech companies monopolised OS?

VH: The commercial support for OS ensures that people can use it in mission-critical applications like the stock exchange or e-government applications. That has played a major role in boosting the adoption of OS. Now, if you look at the amount of code that has been written, in the initial days OS was an imitation of proprietary software or a replacement for it. For instance, Linux as an alternative to NetWare or Unix for Microsoft. The pace of innovation in OS, because of its collaborative nature, outstrips that in proprietary software. So, if you look at the current areas of explosive growth such as Big Data and analytics, the pace of innovation in OS is so rapid that there is no proprietary competitor. We are in an OS 2.0 era where we are no longer catching up with proprietary software; we have leapfrogged. We see the pragmatism of Microsoft joining the open invention network. And now what they are realising is that OS is not a competitor, but maybe an OpenOffice is a competitor to Microsoft Office.

One of the things about OS was that it would democratise code creation and train coders to use basic tools to make commercial products. Do you think the government and the tech industry have done enough to promote OS technologies and introduce them in school and engineering curricula?

SG: Software education in universities in India continues to lag behind. But it’s good to see the All India Council for Technical Education and others introduce new courses on some of the newer technology



areas. NASSCOM is trying to do a number of things to upskill software developers and students and bring in the industry-academia connect.

The promise of OS was that programmers everywhere could learn to code and apply them to various contexts. But India has few creators and is mostly a passive consumer of technology. Have barriers imposed by language along with limited access to technical education sharpened the digital divide?

VH: The digital divide has been bridged: the mobile phone is in the hands of an estimated 800 million people today. It’s the first computing device that they have been introduced to. Combine this with the fact that bandwidth has become far cheaper in India. Among the largest YouTube channels are three Indian channels. That has also changed a lot of things in terms of consuming technical content, which is relevant to OS. We also need to work on the mindset of people. We are in an era where people have to continuously update themselves.

SG: When we look at the digital divide, I think the first part of it is about access, where you may have your low-hanging use cases like entertainment. This access has been addressed to a great extent because [content on] the computer was once only in the English language. The computer was expensive and was meant for people who could afford it. I think the ability of the smartphone combined with cheap data has enabled a lot of access for people. I believe, by the use cases, people are starting with entertainment

We are in an open source 2.0 era where we are no longer catching up with proprietary software; we have leapfrogged. We see the pragmatism of Microsoft joining the open invention network.

VENKATESH HARIHARAN

and some other things. There is hope that we will get into more effective usage, whether it’s for healthcare or education. Some of these will be locally built for India. And some of these may be solutions that we will adopt from other markets. But I do believe that many of these entertainment apps have played a role in removing the fear of technology from people’s minds.

There was a time when debates around OS and proprietary used to be around the patenting of software. We’re in the era of AI, machine learning, Internet of Things. But multinationals continue to be the biggest patentees in India. We’ve moved into a post-OS era. Are debates around software patenting even relevant now?

VH: We will continue to see pressure on the Indian government to allow for patenting of software. The law says that software per se is not patentable. But the interpretation of ‘per se’ has been twisted and that game of football has been going on for almost a decade now. The intent of Parliament was that software shouldn’t be patentable. The reason we will continue to see pushback by multinational companies is because these are the largest patent holders anywhere in the world and the ba-

lance of power and software patentees is with them. If patents are allowed in India, they will be able to charge royalties from domestic software technology players. There are billions of dollars at stake for this and it is never going to go away unless the Indian government removes the term ‘per se’ from Section 3(k) of the Indian Patent Act.

SG: I agree. But given that we are living in a world still dominated by companies, India needs to invest in building its own intellectual property. And that means we need to have our own patents. We see a number of Indian service companies patenting whatever products or solutions they are building in the U.S. and other key markets. So I don’t see this as an era where patents will not exist; I think patents will become an even more important tool for supremacy or whatever you want to call it in this new technology era.

When these initial debates were happening in the ‘90s, it was a world of globalisation. But now we have more trade barriers and authoritarianism. So should India get more serious about patenting?

VH: We’re living in an era where data is abundant and I look at the commonality between code and data. The ideals of the OS movement were about collaboration and the shared ownership of knowledge. And within that context, the proliferation of data and the fact that it’s only a few players who are able to monetise that data means that we now need to move to an era where it’s not just a few platforms that benefit from our data, but that individuals are able to leverage and are empowered with their own data. So, in a sense, I see a commonality with the OS movement in that even a college student sitting in Sweden or any other part of the world should be able to write an operating system that can be used in any part of the world. Now, we should be able to build systems where individuals can take control of their data and be in control of how other people monetise it and leverage it for loans, etc.

Privacy, or the lack of it, is the dominant concern around the technology debate. What can the OS movement contribute,

beyond activism and legislative participation, to make ordinary Indians more informed about protecting their privacy?

VH: Clearly we need new approaches. What might happen in the next few years is that there will be AI tools which will act as personal data brokers between me and the platform so that I need not surrender my privacy to access book and music recommendations from platforms. Many of these tools will be built on the back of OS. And the other bit of it is that the platforms that are being built in India, like the account aggregator, are built on top of OS. The idea and intent is to give people more control over data.

SG: The data privacy issue requires every creator to build trust. Trust is going to be an important feature for any data-led industry as we move forward. There are two or three different roles that the OS sector could play. One is organisations like the Mozilla Foundation, which is doing a lot of good work in demystifying what privacy notices mean for the average user and how they could make privacy-aware decisions. The second is when you create tools that will help organisations either enhance their compliance on privacy or create an intermediary between me and the organisation that is providing me the tools or software to do that. The third can be about building privacy-maturity discussions or building frameworks. OS has a key role to play.

Do you think legislation will help regulate the scene?

SG: Legislation is important; there is the Data Protection Bill. Our focus at NASSCOM has also been about practices. It should not only be about regulations. Whether you have the right practices that will help comply with these regulations is equally, if not more, important.

VH: The government has two roles. One, lawmakers have to ensure that they pass laws that benefit citizens. And the second is that the government is also one of the largest data controllers apart from platforms. So what kind of governance they have around the data is going to be a really critical part of the data ecosystem in India.

Teaching research ethics better

Image preparation should be included as part of the UGC’s course on research ethics

R. PRASAD

Years after ignoring the elephant in the room, the UGC has finally made it compulsory for PhD scholars to take up a course on research and publication ethics as part of their pre-registration course work. Effective from the coming academic session, the course carries two credits and entails 30 teaching hours. It covers several aspects of research conduct, publication ethics and misconduct, open access publishing and databases, and research metrics. But on closer scrutiny, it looks like the course will not help much. It will create “awareness about publication ethics and misconduct” but it will not equip students to steer clear of unethical research practices. For instance, ‘scientific conduct’ deals with a range of issues that research students might face during research. This includes plagiarism, falsification and fabrication, misrepresentation of data, selective reporting, duplicate publication, and segregation of data and publishing as multiple papers. All this is to be magically covered in just five hours.

Substantial copying of text from previously published papers and even paraphrasing without due citation are quite common in papers published from India, particularly from state universities. The introduction of plagiarism-checking software in most universities and compulsory checking for plagiarism prior to paper publication by most journals has largely addressed the problem.

Preparing images

While the course does cover data falsification and fabrication, there is no mention of teaching researchers the basics of preparing images for publication. While certain changes to images are acceptable, hundreds of papers are corrected or retracted every year for image duplication and manipulation. Unlike plagiarism, journals have woken up to inappropriately altered images and manipulation only since the early 2000s.

As Dr. Elisabeth M. Bik and others had noted in a June 2016 paper in the journal *mBio*, the instances of “inappropriately duplicated images” suddenly peaked in 2003 and has been 4-5% since then. Over 8,100 papers

screened from *PLOS One* for a 16-month period from 2013 to 2014 revealed that papers published from India had 1.93-fold higher probability of containing “problematic images”, the highest in the world.

Unlike in the case of data falsification and fabrication, duplication and manipulation of images is relatively easy to identify post-publication. That *PubPeer*, a website that allows independent scientists to publish post-publication review of scientific papers, is flooded with reviews of papers with questionable images is proof that the scientific community has become alert to a malice that has so far been largely overlooked.

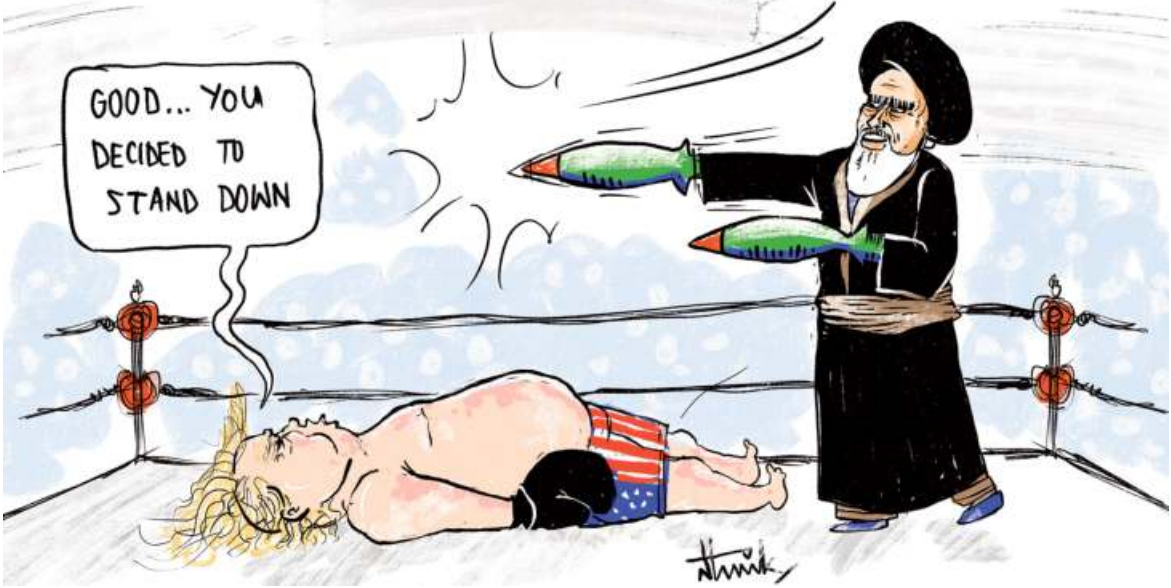
A big Indian problem

In India, dozens of papers with questionable images have been published by researchers from a few Council of Scientific and Industrial Research labs, and reputed institutions such as IIT-Dhanbad, the Indian Institute of Science, and Bose Institute. It is far worse in the case of state universities. Recently, Dr. Bik identified problematic images and plagiarised text in over 200 papers from Annamalai University in Tamil Nadu. Several papers from Periyar University in Tamil Nadu and Banaras Hindu University too can be found on *PubPeer*.

The magnitude of the problem can be judged by scanning the largest database of retracted papers maintained by the *Retraction Watch* blog. The blog reveals that of the 1,050 papers from India retracted since the 1970s, 330 have been for plagiarism and nearly 200 for image duplication and/or manipulation. There is no ballpark figure for papers corrected for problematic images. Though the U.S. and China have the most number of journal papers retracted, India has a higher rate of retractions, says a paper in *Science*.

If UGC is serious about teaching research and publication ethics, it should make scientific conduct and publication ethics separate courses with sufficient teaching hours or retain it as a single course and devote more time to teach research ethics and include image preparation as part of the course.

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NOTEBOOK

Political cartoons in the age of memes

Social media can both challenge and inspire cartoonists

SATWIK GADE

The job of the editorial cartoonist has changed considerably since the advent of social media. The editorial cartoon used to be placed on a pedestal; this is no longer the case.

With the advent of 24x7 news channels, access to breaking news stopped being the privilege of the newsroom. Since an editorial cartoonist’s job is to observe and comment through the comic medium, the exclusivity of observation was the first loss. What they still retained, however, was the space for response, the hallowed political cartoon space. At the time, political cartoons did not evolve to the video format beyond the occasional *Gustakhi Maaf* (a TV programme with puppets). The cartoon space of important newspapers could inform readers what political news was ‘trending’ the previous day. Cartoons be-

gan to be shared via email and became ‘viral’ in the email era. All these changes only served to make the cartoonist’s space more sacrosanct.

But social media changed all that. Today, everybody has a space to respond. And there is no exclusivity of observation whatsoever. At times, a child sitting in his bedroom can access expert opinions of distinguished journalists more quickly than an editorial cartoonist can while sitting in a newsroom. He can also respond to it without being bound by the necessary drawing skills. In other words, with the creation of memes, the cartoonist’s life has changed forever.

Today we live at a time where the ‘one point witty comment’ space has become the most crowded and dynamic space on the Internet. Observations in this space are not always commonplace; they are often deep and insightful. In

fact, some of the most profound observations come from regular people with a small number of followers. All these changes have forced cartoonists to reflect not just on political affairs, but the space they occupy in political humour.

These rapid changes have also pushed cartoonists from the cosy and exclusive gentleman’s club into the muck of unfiltered online commentary. This can be a harrowing experience, but often liberating too. Having your ego shattered a hundred times a day can educate you but also free you in a way.

However, not all is bad. I find memes and web cartoons a great way to exercise my brain. A lot of stray comments serve as inspiration for my work, and college students are sometimes my mentors. People ask me to address specific issues, so there is constant feedback. And amidst all the trolling I deal with, I al-

so receive really positive comments.

The political climate is also important for cartoonists. What has really changed over the last decade or so is the manner in which cartoonists have been censored. India once again finds itself in an authoritarian regime without a sense of humour. Cartoonists want to say a lot but are often silenced by editors, trolls, political parties and the worst of them all, Sections 124A and 295A of the Indian Penal Code.

We find solace in the fact that the best work and the most dynamic ways of resistance always come in the worst of times. Cartoonists must balance the dual task of being neutral and witty political observers and being activists who constantly push boundaries and attempt to reclaim lost spaces through innovation and persistence. These are not easy times, but they sure are exciting times.

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 10, 1970

U.K. collusion with Pakistan disclosed

Brigadier Ghansara Singh, who was Governor of Gilgit at the time of partition of the country in August 1947, exposed here [Srinagar] to-day [January 9] in detail British collusion with Pakistan in capturing Gilgit. Ghansara Singh was appointed by the Jammu and Kashmir Government to take over charge of Gilgit from the British Government to which Gilgit had been leased by Kashmir for 60 years. After termination of British rule in India the Brigadier flew to Gilgit on July 31, 1947 but was taken prisoner in a mutiny jointly sponsored by British officers and some Muslim officers. Eleven months later he was sent to Pakistan from where he was sent to India in exchange of prisoners after another three months. Brigadier Ghansara Singh, who is 79 and leads a very active life in Jammu, fully supported the view expressed in the book “Slender was the Thread” by Lt-Gen. Sen that what happened in Gilgit in 1947 prior to and during the tribal invasion of Jammu and Kashmir strengthened the inference that British officers were involved in Pakistan’s plan and that the loss of Gilgit was the result of “piratical action.”

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 10, 1920

Prison Reform.

(From an editorial)

The evidence tendered by Lt Col. Fearnside to the Jail Committee, at Coimbatore a day or two ago, is of a nature to attract the attention of these who are interested in ameliorating the lot of the Indian prisoner. All the evidence tendered by Col. Fearnside is not to hand, but we may be excused for commenting on some important matters in which an experienced jail officer’s opinions are of exceptional interest. Apart from his suggestions and views on jail management and control, Colonel Fearnside’s evidence related to matters of wider application in which large sections of the public are interested; such as imprisonment for debt, the abolition of transportation to the Andamans, and Government competition with private enterprise. With regard to civil prisoners, Colonel Fearnside was of opinion that imprisonment for debt should be abolished as in England. But the Debtor’s Act imprisonment for debt was abolished in England in 1869, and it now exists only as a punishment in certain cases which involve fraud, misconduct, wilful disobedience to an order of the Court, and intention to abscond.

FROM PAGE ONE

Foreign envoys in J&K on a fact-finding visit

“We apprised the delegation of the current situation. We told them that people were hurt by the abrogation of Article 370; the matter is before the apex court now,” said Mr. Bukhari. He stressed the need to restore statehood for Jammu and Kashmir, introduce domicile laws to safeguard land, and find jobs for the locals.

The politicians also called for “immediate release of all political leaders and the youth in the Valley.” Prominent political faces that met the foreign envoys included Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Party Nationalist’s Ghulam Hassan Mir, PDP’s Noor Muhammad Sheikh, Rafi Mir, Javaid Baigh, Abdul Raheem Rather and Majeed Padder and Congress’s Hilal Shah and Shoaib Lone.

PDP action
Shortly after the meeting, a tweet from the PDP’s official handle said, “Certain party leaders are part of parleys which go against the interests of J&K, the official position and core beliefs. The disciplinary committee has recommended expulsion of these leaders.”

However, Rafi Mir told *The Hindu* that he did not go against people’s aspirations or the party’s stand. “I have my own mind and no one can control me,” he said. Mr. Mir said he shared his “way forward to restore peace and normalcy in J&K” with the envoys. No prominent civil society group or trade body met the envoys. An NC spokesman termed the visit “a guided tour.”

The Army hosted the envoys at its headquarters in Badamibagh and apprised them of the current security scenario, including the issue of terrorism, and Pakistan’s attempts to “destabilise the situation on the Line of Control (LoC) and the mainland in the Union Territory.”

The envoys left for Jammu in the afternoon, where they will meet Lt. Governor G.C. Murmu on Friday. Government officials involved in the planning of the visit said that they were “satisfied” with its outcome, and their objective had been to “show first-hand the efforts being made by the government to bring normalcy”.

SC rebuffs plea to declare CAA constitutional

Ms. Dhanda said an “anti-India stand has become fashion of many students belonging to these institutions [Jamia Millia Islamia and Jawaharlal Nehru University] which, otherwise, were famous for the achievements of their legendary students.” She sought strict action by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting against newspapers and media houses that were “spreading false informa-

tion and rumours”. She asked the Supreme Court instead to clarify and declare that the CAA was “not against the spirit of Constitution of India and in no sense against any citizen of India”. The plea may be listed on January 22 along with the 60 anti-CAA petitions filed by parliamentarians, civil rights groups, NGOs, political parties, activists and citizens from all walks of life across the country.

T.N., Kerala launch hunt for suspected ultras

The Kerala Police released the police photographs of the suspects and footage from the surveillance cameras. They also announced a reward for information leading to the capture of the two men.

Mr. Tripathy visited the Padanthalumoodu check-post in the afternoon. “Efforts are on to nab the assailants,” he told journalists before leaving to pay his respects to the slain police officer, whose body was buried with police honours around 3.30 p.m.

Police said the assailants were seen entering a mosque near the check-post after the shooting and might have fled in a vehicle parked behind the mosque. A surveillance camera later picked them up at Parassala in Kerala.

Deliberate act
Though it was initially stated that the police officer was shot dead by the occupants of a car when he checked the vehicle, CCTV footage collected from the spot showed that the assailants, who came to the Padanthalumoodu check-post on foot, entered the check-post around 9.25 p.m. and opened fire at Wilson at

point-blank range. The officer died on the spot. “It categorically proves that the assailants had intentionally killed the police officer,” an officer privy to the ongoing investigation said. Meanwhile, the Karnataka police with the help of their Tamil Nadu counterparts, had nabbed a person from Ambasamudram and two others from Tenkasi in connection with a case registered in Bengaluru. An officer said, “The killing of Wilson is an obvious attempt to send strong signals to the Tamil Nadu Police as few of their accomplices have been nabbed. A police team recently searched the houses of Shameem and Thoufique and grilled their family members to get more information about the duo. So it’s an attempt to threaten the police force,” the police officer suspected. Meanwhile, a special team from Kanniyakumari district searched the house of S. Al Kabir, 28, at Vazhukodai in Tirunelveli around 4 a.m. on Thursday. “Since Kabir reportedly has links with the trio nabbed by the Karnataka police, we are looking for him,” the police said.

Nirbhaya case convict files curative plea

“After the pronouncement of judgment in 2017, there have been as many as 17 cases involving rape and murder in which various three-judge Benches of the Supreme Court have commuted the sentence of death,” the petition contended. It argued that this “corpus of case law” had caused

a “definite change” in the sentencing jurisprudence. Hence, this would require Sharma’s case to be reheard. The court had recently dismissed a review petition filed by another of the four condemned men, Akshay Singh, to review its May 5, 2017 judgment confirming the death penalty.

SC to rule on J&K curbs today

Petition said the restrictions crippled essential services and communications

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court will on Friday pronounce its verdict on the legality of the restrictions on the fundamental freedom of movement and the shutdown of communications in Jammu and Kashmir since August 5.

The judgment will be delivered by a three-judge Bench, led by Justice N.V. Ramana.

The clampdown followed the revocation of the special right and privileges enjoyed by the Kashmiri people under Article 370 and the bifurcation of the erstwhile State into the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

Anuradha Bhasin, one of the petitioners and Editor of *The Kashmir Times*, said the restrictions had crippled the freedom of the press, essential services and even communications between families. A pall of suspicion was cast on the entire seven million people, who lived in a state of imprisonment. Restrictive orders under Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Cr.PC) were issued without application of mind, she said. Activist Enakshi Ganguly and Con-



On guard: Security personnel setting up a road block after the arrival of 16 envoys from foreign countries in Srinagar on Thursday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

gress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad are the other petitioners.

However, the Jammu and Kashmir government had maintained that normalcy had returned to the Valley.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for Jammu and Kashmir, had said the authorities acted on heaps of material, including intelligence and military, about inflammatory material and speeches, circulation of fake news, morphed images and videos spread on social media.

PDP a divided house

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAMMU

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) patron Muzaffar Hussain Baigh on Thursday took pot-shots at jailed party president Mehbooba Mufti and backed the demands to restore statehood and grant domicile laws on land and jobs.

“Ms. Mufti made a wrong statement that ‘If Article 370 is scrapped no one will raise

the national flag in J&K’. It should not have been made. You cannot threaten Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval to get your demands fulfilled,” said Mr. Baigh at a press conference here.

He said Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah understand the people of Jammu and Kashmir and “were not anti-Muslim”.

Mamata to skip Opposition meet on CAA

CM upset over ‘violence by Left and Congress’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said in the Assembly that she would stay away from the January 13 meeting of the Opposition parties in protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act convened by Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

Ms. Banerjee said her decision followed the violence unleashed by the Left and the Congress during the 24-hour general strike on Wed-

nesday. The strike affected life and violence was also reported from different parts of the State.

‘It is hooliganism’
“I won’t attend the meeting convened by Sonia Gandhi as a protest against the Congress-Left hooliganism during Wednesday’s strike,” she said. She said she would fight against the CAA and the NRC alone. She said she had earlier agreed to participate in the meeting but had withdrawn after what the CPI(M) and the Congress had done. The decision of the Chief Minister assumes importance as the Trinamool Con-



At the forefront: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee leading a rally in North 24 Parganas. ■ PTI

gress chairperson had held multiple protests against the CAA including a march at Madhyamgram in North 24

Parganas on Thursday. Leader of the Opposition and Congress MLA Andul Mannan said he received a

India, Sri Lanka hold ‘productive’ talks

Visiting Minister seeks support for vocational training and capacity building

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India and Sri Lanka on Thursday discussed the “entire gamut of bilateral ties”, during talks between the visiting Sri Lankan Minister of Foreign Relations, Skills Development, Employment and Labour Relations, Dinesh Gunawardena, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar here on Thursday.

The visit by the Sri Lankan Minister, his first visit abroad after taking charge, comes after the visit by Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in November as “a follow-up” to his discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

More cooperation
“The Sri Lankan Foreign Minister reiterated the importance laid by President Rajapaksa on exploring newer areas of cooperation with India with emphasis on skill development, vocational training and capacity build-



Boosting ties: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, right, with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena. ■ PTI

ing and requested India’s support,” the External Affairs Ministry said, laying emphasis on skilling and opportunities for people-to-people ties.

Mr. Gunawardena also met Minister for Skill Deve-

lopment and Entrepreneurship Mahendra Nath Pandey, and Minister of State for Labour and Employment Santosh Kumar Gangwar.

However, officials declined to comment on whether the meeting with

the new Sri Lankan Foreign Minister had discussed taking forward some of the commitments made by the previous Sri Lankan government on infrastructure projects in Trincomalee and Colombo as well as the Northern region, or about taking forward the Economic and Technical Cooperation (ETCA) preferential trade agreement talks that have been stalled for several years.

On climate change
According to the Ministry, the ministers also discussed issues of climate change and terrorism.

In a tweet after the meeting Mr. Jaishankar said he had “productive discussions” with his counterpart on “bilateral issues and regional concerns”. In response Mr. Gunawardena described the discussions as “cordial”.

On Friday Mr. Gunawardena will visit the Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya.

Gangster caught after 20 years on the run

Ejaz Lakdawala had escaped from the country

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

After spending over 20 years on the run, gangster Ejaz Lakdawala was arrested by the Crime Branch of the Mumbai Police in Patna on Wednesday. Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Radeshmukh lauded the police’s efforts at a press interaction in Mumbai.

Lakdawala, 50, who fled

the country some time between 1998 and 1999, was wanted in a string of cases, including murder, attempt to murder and extortion, registered since 1989. Crime Branch officers said that so far, they had 25 cases registered against him. His daughter Shifa alias Soniya was arrested by the Anti-Extortion Cell on December 28 last in a fake passport case, and has been in police custody.

On Wednesday, the Anti-Extortion Cell received information that Lakdawala



Ejaz Lakdawala

would be in Patna and rushed a team there. “A team of the Mumbai police sought our assistance in arresting

someone in the Jakkanpur police station area last night [Wednesday] and the local police helped it arrest Ejaz Lakdawala... After his arrest, the Mumbai police completed the legal formalities, and Lakdawala was handed over to them,” Bihar Additional Director-General of Police (Law and Order) Amit Kumar told journalists in Patna.

The reason for his return to the country has evoked curiosity, with the police believing that he could have come down to help his daughter come out of jail.

Centre has double standards: Congress

‘Indian politicians barred from J&K’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday accused the Union government of adopting double standards by taking Ambassadors on “guided political tourism” to Jammu and Kashmir, while barring Indian politicians from the Union Territory.

“We don’t have a problem with the visit of the envoys, but the government is adopting double standards by allowing the envoys to visit Jammu and Kashmir, but not Indian politicians,” Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said at a press conference.

The party’s attack came on a day when the Ambassadors from 16 countries, including U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Juster, arrived in Srinagar on a two-day visit to Jammu and Kashmir. It is the first visit by diplomats since last August when the erstwhile State was divested of its special status and bifurcated into Union Territories.

Mr. Ramesh pointed out that former Chief Ministers Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah, of the National



Jairam Ramesh

Conference, and Mehbooba Mufti of the PDP, were still in detention. Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha and another former Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad and CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury had to take the Supreme Court’s permission to visit Srinagar, he said.

“We demand that the government allow all politicians unfettered access to Jammu and Kashmir and not resort to guided tours for envoys,” he said. “There have been no meaningful political activity in Jammu and Kashmir since August last. We demand that the Centre immediately start a meaningful political process.”

Justice Dilip Bhosale quits Lokpal post

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Lokpal member Justice Dilip B. Bhosale (retd.) has resigned from his post citing personal reasons.

“I have tendered my resignation from the post of judicial member, Lokpal on January 6, with effect from January 12, 2020, due to personal reasons,” tweeted Justice Bhosale on Thursday.

There is a provision for eight Lokpal members, who are appointed for a term of five years or till 70 years of age.

Modi govt. policies harm economy, says risk firm

Eurasia Group puts out report

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

India has been ranked the fifth highest “geopolitical risk” in 2020, according to a list of 10 global risks in the year ahead, compiled by the Eurasia Group, a leading global political risk management consultancy. It said that in its second term, the Narendra Modi-led NDA government’s “social” policies were affecting India’s economic agenda and foreign policy image.

“Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spent much of his second term promoting controversial social policies at the expense of an economic agenda. The impacts will be felt in 2020, with intensified communal and sectarian instability, as well as foreign policy and economic setbacks,” said the report entitled “Top Risks 2020”, co-authored by Ian Bremmer and Cliff Kupchan of the Eurasia Group, pointing to the widening fiscal deficit, low GST collections, and the latest six-year low in GDP growth.

What makes the Eurasia Group listing significant is that this is the first time in many years that India has

been mentioned for social and political developments.

Mr. Bremmer, who is the founder and president of the Eurasia Group, has also in the past been a major supporter of reforms under the Modi government, and praised him in several articles and television appearances since 2014. In June 2019, Mr. Bremmer wrote for *Time* magazine that Mr. Modi was “India’s best bet for economic reform”.

Poll shift
“It really shifted with the election,” Mr. Bremmer told *The Hindu*, when asked about the shift in his opinion. “[Mr.] Modi’s need to win while the economy was softening led him to deprioritise reform and turn to Hindu nationalism and the RSS. Both political strands were always there, but the priorities changed, and that led to the change in our view,” he added.

According to the report, amongst the risks for India in 2020 are “sectarian conflict”, anti-CAA protests, and possible violence in Kashmir, which it describes as a “powder keg” after the dilution of Article 370.

APPEAL

Name of Patient: **Master Mohd Yasin Sheikh, 3 years.**
Hospital Name: **Christian Medical College.**
Diagnosis: **Thalassemia major.**
This is a type of Blood Disorder which is life threatening. The best option for him would be to undergo Allogeneic Peripheral Blood Stem Cell Transplant (PBSCT). The estimated cost of PBSCT at this hospital is approximately **Rs. 14,00,000/-**. We request kind hearted Philanthropists to save him. Kindly send donation by Cheque / D.D / M.O favouring Save Poor Lives and on the back of cheque write **A/c: Mohd Yasin Sheikh S/B Account No. 20000913487, State Bank of India, Raja Annamalapuram Branch and IFSC Code: SBIN0001855**, which is exempted under 80G of I.T. Act.

Contact: SAVE POOR LIVES REGISTERED PUBLIC CHARITABLE TRUST, (ADMIN DIVISION) Flat No. A1, Ceebros Garden, Ground Floor, Old No. 76, Kamarajar Salai, Raja Annamalapuram, Chennai-600028, Ph: 044-42044165, Mobile: 9884607377, E-mail: savepoorlives@gmail.com Our website: www.savepoorlives.com

DONATION GIVEN TO PATIENTS UPTO MARCH 2019 FOR Rs. 4,26,89,335/- AND SCHOLARSHIP 7,30,800/- NOVEMBER DONATION GIVEN Rs. 4,71,734/-