



Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella on citizenship law: it's just bad

page 13



Bengal BJP chief faces flak for remarks against anti-CAA protesters

page 13



Queen grants Harry and Meghan's wish for an independent future

page 14

Kohli's India takes on Finch's Australia in ODI series from today

page 18



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NEARBY



Congress goes past forward in Delhi

NEW DELHI

The Congress' three-pronged Assembly election campaign entails reminding voters of the work done during its 15-year run under Sheila Dikshit, a clear stand on CAA-NRC-NPR, and targeting AAP and BJP over their 'lies' on regularisation of unauthorised colonies.

CITY ► PAGE 2

Anti-CAA stir in Gaya in its third week

GAYA

As the ongoing protest at Delhi's Shaheen Bagh against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens grabs national media attention, a similar dharna at Shanti Bagh in Gaya district of Bihar entered its 16th day on Monday.

NORTH ► PAGE 5

JNU teachers, students boycott classes

NEW DELHI

The academic blocks of JNU wore a deserted look on Monday, the first day of the winter semester, as students and teachers boycotted classes. They said normalcy would return only after Vice-Chancellor M. Jagadeesh Kumar was made to resign or was sacked.

CITY ► PAGE 4

SC not to review Sabarimala case, to examine 'larger issues'

Nine-judge Bench to decide constitutional questions raised by religious practices

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

NEW DELHI

A nine-judge Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde on Monday said its objective was not to review the Sabarimala women entry case but examine "larger issues" of law arising from practices such as the prohibition of women from entering mosques and temples, female genital mutilation among Dawoodi Bohras and the ban on Parsi women who married inter-faith from entering the fire temple.

The Bench, however, clarified that it would not go into the legality of issues such as the practice of polygamy and 'nikah-halala' in Islam.

Chief Justice Bobde explained that the basis of the Bench's judicial enquiry would be seven questions referred to a larger Bench by a five-judge Bench on November 14, 2019. He said the nine-judge Bench was only examining propositions of law raised about religious practices believed to be essential to various religions. The Bench would not go into the individual facts of the various petitions before it.

"We will decide questions of law on women's entry to mosques/temples, genital mutilation by Dawoodi Bohras, entry of Parsi women

Points to ponder

Seven issues were framed by the five-judge Review Bench for the larger Bench. They form the crux but may be re-framed for future hearing before the nine-judge Bench. The 'broad' issues are:



Not restricting itself to the Sabarimala case, the Bench will examine larger issues of law.

■ What should be the interplay between freedom of religion under Articles 25 and 26 and the right to equality under Article 14?

■ Right to practice religion is subject to 'public order, morality and health' under Article 25(1). What do these terms actually mean?

■ Is constitutional morality the over-arching morality in reference to the Preamble or limited to religious beliefs or faith?

■ Should and, if so, how far can a court enquire into whether a

religious practice is essential to a particular faith?

■ What is the meaning of the expression 'sections of Hindus' appearing in Article 25(2)(b) of the Constitution?

■ Whether 'essential religious practices' deserve constitutional protection under Article 26?

■ What is the extent to which courts should entertain PILs questioning religious practices filed by a third person who is not a member of that faith?

who marry outside their community into fire temple. We will not decide individual facts of each case," Chief Justice Bobde told lawyers in the courtroom.

On November 14, the five-judge Bench led by then Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi, instead of deciding the Sabarimala review entrusted to it, sought an "authoritative pronouncement" on the Court's power to decide the essentiality of religious practices. Framing seven questions, the Bench referred them to a seven-judge Bench. These referral questions included whether "essential religious practices" be afforded con-

stitutional protection under Article 26 (freedom to manage religious affairs).

Chief Justice Bobde, who succeeded Justice Gogoi, formed a Bench of nine, rather than seven judges, to examine these questions which concern multiple faiths.

On Monday, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the questions were too broad and needed fine-tuning.

Directive to lawyers

The CJI asked the lawyers involved in the case to hold a conference on January 17 to reframe/add issues to be examined by the nine-judge

Bench. The court posted the case for hearing after three weeks.

When lawyers sought to remind the court that the case challenging the Citizenship (Amendment) Act was scheduled for January 22 and the hearing before the nine-judge Bench ought to be heard without a break, the CJI said cases were being heard "chronologically".

But senior lawyers, like Indira Jaising and Rajeev Dhavan, said the Court cannot decide on the essentiality of religious practices. It was outside its jurisdiction.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

Retail inflation at 5-year high of 7.3% in December

Food inflation up to 14.12%; shortage of onions drives spike

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Retail inflation soared to a five-and-a-half year high of 7.35% in December 2019, with the shortage of onions driving the surge.

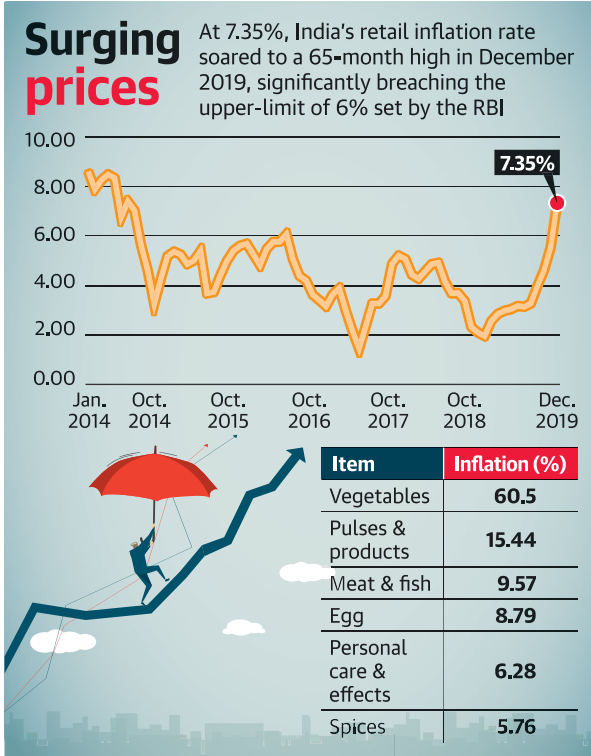
According to information released by the National Statistical Office on Monday, retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index was only 2.11% in December 2018 and 5.54% in November 2019.

The last time retail inflation touched 7.39% was in July 2014, just after Prime Minister Narendra Modi began his first term in office.

The hike in inflation in the vegetables category was at 60.5% last month in comparison to December 2018. Onion prices were above the ₹100 per kg mark in many major cities due to a 26% fall in production.

Overall, food inflation rose to 14.12% in December as against a negative rate of -2.65% in the same month of the previous year. It was also significantly higher than the 10.01% recorded in November 2019.

Along with vegetables, high prices of pulses, meat and fish also contributed to last month's spike. The inflation in pulses and products was recorded at 15.44%,



while for meat and fish it was nearly 10%.

The Centre has mandated the Reserve Bank of India to keep inflation in the range of 2-6%. The RBI is scheduled to announce its next bi-monthly monetary policy on February 6.

In its December policy, the central bank had kept the repo rate unchanged, cit-

ing inflationary concerns.

Independent credit rating agency ICRA's principal economist Aditi Nayar said the revision in rail fares, rise in prices of some categories of automobiles and an unfavourable base effect may contribute to a further increase in core inflation to around 4% this month.

(With inputs from PTI)

Feeling special!



Rewarding excellence: Cricketer Smriti Mandhana, left, receives the Sportsman of the Year award from actor Sharmila Tagore during the Sportstar Aces Awards in Mumbai as Mel Jones, Cricket Australia Director, looks on. ■ R. RAGU (REPORT ON PAGE 18)

HC rules Musharraf trial illegal

MEHMAL SARFRAZ

LAHORE

In huge relief for Pakistan's self-exiled former dictator, the Lahore High Court on Monday declared Pervez Musharraf's trial in the high treason case as "unconstitutional".

A special court had given death sentence to the ex-Army chief on December 17 for holding the Constitution in abeyance.

Lawyer Usama Malik said the High Court pointed out that Cabinet approval wasn't given for the formation of the special court and it was only constituted by the Prime Minister's Office and the Interior Ministry, which is illegal.

(With inputs from PTI)

Hizb ultras led police to rogue officer

Top commanders were tracked from Shopian to DSP's house

VIJAJTA SINGH
PEERZADA ASHIQ
NEW DELHI/SRINAGAR

The police had been on the trail of Jammu and Kashmir DSP Davinder Singh for at least two days before his arrest on Saturday, a senior government official said on Monday.

Singh was arrested while travelling in a vehicle with two wanted Hizb-ul Mujahideen militants and a lawyer.

Preliminary questioning of the DSP has suggested that he had been sheltering militants in lieu of money and wanted top Hizb-ul Mujahideen commander Syed Naveed Mush-taq alias Babu and his accomplices did stay in his house located next to the 15 Corps headquarters in Srinagar's high security Badamibagh area on Friday.

Officers of the country's



Buildings damaged during a fidayeen attack in Pulwama in August 2017. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

top intelligence gathering agencies – the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) – also questioned Singh in Kashmir.

Official sources said the agencies were looking into his connections within Kashmir and outside, especially across the border in Pakistan.

"So far, the investigations could not establish his links with any other police officer

or colleague within the Police Department or him being in touch directly with people in Pakistan or Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). However, investigations are still on and the operation is being widened," an official said.

The police officer came under the security agencies' radar after two top Hizb-ul Mujahideen militants, including cop-turned-militant commander Babu and Rafi Ahmad and lawyer Irfan Shafi left south Kashmir on Friday and headed towards Srinagar. They also made several phone calls on the way.

According to police sources, the officer arranged for the trio to move from Shopian to Srinagar. The three militants headed straight for Singh's Srinagar house.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

Oppn. appeals to non-BJP CMs to suspend NPR enumeration

SANDEEP PHUKAN

NEW DELHI

Leaders of Opposition parties on Monday demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and appealed to non-BJP Chief Ministers, who had earlier announced not to carry out a proposed nation-wide National Register of Citizens (NRC), to suspend the exercise of enumeration of the National Population Register (NPR) as it is "a prelude to a nation-wide NRC."

A joint resolution was adopted after a meeting – convened by Congress president Sonia Gandhi and attended by leaders of 20 Opposition parties – discussed the current political situation arising out of the widespread protests against the amended citizenship law and the violence on campuses.

'Centre exposed'

Ms. Gandhi asserted that the "Modi-Shah government stands exposed for its inability to govern and provide security to the people."

However, cracks in the Opposition unity were visible as the Trinamool Congress, the Samajwadi Party (SP), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) stayed away from the meeting.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), the Congress's all-weather ally, surprised everyone by boycotting the meet as it was upset over a reported remark by a Tamil Nadu Congress leader.

The Shiv Sena too talked of a "miscommunication" to explain its absence from the group of "like-minded parties."

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

Nitish against NRC, open to CAA debate

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said on Monday that a countrywide National Register of Citizens (NRC) was "needless" and had "no jus-

tification" but he was open to a debate on issues that have created "turmoil", including the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Speaking in the Assembly, Mr. Kumar said his govern-

ment agreed in principle to the National Population Register like it did 10 years ago when the exercise was last undertaken.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

'CAN'T BE PUNISHED' ► PAGE 14