

IN BRIEF



Delhi HC rejects ED plea against bail to Ratul Puri

NEW DELHI  
The Delhi High Court on Tuesday dismissed the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) plea challenging the bail granted to businessman Ratul Puri, nephew of Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath, in a money laundering case connected to the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper scam.

Tharoor apologises for remark on Kejriwal

NEW DELHI  
Congress leader Shashi Tharoor apologised on Twitter after he was criticised for his remark that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal seeks power without responsibility, something which has been “the prerogative of eunuchs”. On Monday, he alleged that Mr. Kejriwal is making statements deploring the CAA and the NRC but has not taken any tangible action.

6 infants die in M.P. govt. hospital within 15 hours

BHOPAL  
The Madhya Pradesh government on Tuesday ordered a high-level inquiry into the deaths of six infants within 15 hours at the government hospital in Shahdol district. The infants, up to two-and-a-half-months old, died between 1 p.m. on Monday and 4 a.m. on Tuesday, said Dr. Rajesh Pandey, Chief Medical Health Officer.

Ritesh Pandey to be BSP chief in Lok Sabha

LUCKNOW  
Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati appointed Ambedkar Nagar MP Ritesh Pandey as the leader of the party in the Lok Sabha, citing the need to maintain “social harmony”. He replaces Amroha MP Kunwar Danish Ali. Mr. Pandey belongs to the Brahmin community.

CRZ rules eased for ‘Blue Flag’ beaches

States can construct infrastructure to enable international recognition, says Environment Ministry

JACOB KOSHY  
NEW DELHI  
The Environment Ministry has relaxed Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules that restrict construction near beaches to help States construct infrastructure and enable them to receive ‘Blue Flag’ certification.

Last year, the Ministry selected 13 beaches in India to vie for the certificate. This is an international recognition conferred on beaches that meet certain criteria of cleanliness and environmental propriety.

The earmarked beaches are – Ghoghala beach (Diu), Shivrampur beach (Gujarat), Bhogave beach (Maharashtra), Padubidri and Kasarkod beaches (Karnataka), Kappad beach (Kerala), Kovalam beach (Tamil Nadu), Eden beach (Puducherry), Rushikonda beach (Andhra Pradesh), Miramar beach (Goa),



Sea view: Tourists at Eden beach in Chinna Veerampattinam near Puducherry. The Ministry has selected 13 beaches in India to vie for the certificate. ■S.S. KUMAR

Golden beach (Odisha), Radhanagar beach (Andaman & Nicobar Islands) and Bangaram beach (Lakshadweep).

**Gazette notification**  
The Blue Flag certification, however, requires beaches to create certain infrastructure – portable toilet blocks, grey water treatment plants, a solar power plant, seating

facilities, CCTV surveillance and the like. However, India's CRZ laws don't allow the construction of such infrastructure on beaches and islands. Via an order on January 9, the Environment Ministry eased these restrictions for the “purposes of Blue Flag certification”.

“...Central Government hereby declares that for the

purpose of Blue Flag Certification in such identified beaches, the following activities and facilities shall be permitted in the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ), including Islands, subject to maintaining a minimum distance of 10 meters from HTL (High Tide Line),” the gazette notification notes.

The certification is ac-

corded by the Denmark-based Foundation for Environment Education, with 33 stringent criteria under four major heads for the beaches, that is, (i) Environmental Education and Information (ii) Bathing Water Quality (iii) Environment Management and Conservation and (iv) Safety and Services.

‘Eco-tourism’

The ‘Blue Flag’ beach is an ‘eco-tourism model’ and marks out beaches as providing tourists and beachgoers clean and hygienic bathing water, facilities/amenities, a safe and healthy environment, and sustainable development of the area.

The Blue Flag Programme started in France in 1985 and has been implemented in Europe since 1987, and in areas outside Europe since 2001, when South Africa joined.

Three V-Cs attend TMC’s anti-CAA demonstration

Oppn. raises questions on their conduct

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA

The presence of Vice-Chancellors of State Universities at a sit-in demonstration against the amended citizenship law organised by the students’ wing of the Trinamool Congress on Tuesday triggered a controversy with the Opposition raising questions on their conduct.

Three Vice-Chancellors - Subiresb Bhattacharya of North Bengal University, Dipak Kar of Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University and Deb Kumar Mulhopadhyay of Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University - were present at the agitation organised by the Trinamool

Congress Chhatra Parishad, which entered its fifth day on Tuesday.

Later in the day, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also visited the demonstration site on Rani Rashmoni Avenue and said she was happy to receive inputs from experts on the protests against CAA.

The presence of the Vice-Chancellors at the protest raised eyebrows as only a day ago as they had given a meeting called by Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar a miss. Mr. Dhankhar, who was upset with the development, said educational institutions and universities were being dismantled “brick by brick”.

Muzaffarpur shelter home case judgment on Jan. 20

Accused claim witness statements are not reliable

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI

Judgment in the Muzaffarpur shelter home case is now expected on January 20, as the accused persons on Tuesday claimed that statements of the witnesses were not reliable. The court has sought a response from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on the issue within two days.

During the proceedings on Tuesday, lawyers of the main accused, Brajesh Thakur, and the others, questioned the veracity of the testimony of prosecution witnesses.

The submission was made



A view of the Muzaffarpur shelter home. ■RANJEET KUMAR

in view of the CBI's statement in the Supreme Court that 35 girl inmates earlier believed to have been murdered had been found to be alive.

The murder allegations were made by some of the

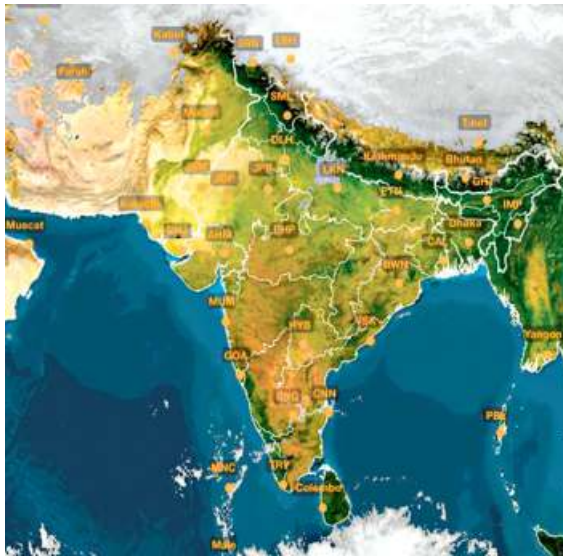
girls rescued from the shelter home.

This is the third time that the pronouncement of verdict has been deferred after it was reserved in October for mid-November last year. It was postponed the first time as the 20 accused could not be brought to the court premises due to a lawyers' strike. It was then rescheduled as the judge was on leave.

The case pertains to the allegation that at least 34 girl inmates of a shelter home in Muzaffarpur were sexually assaulted. The CBI took over the probe in 2018, following a Supreme Court directive.

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 Wednesday:** Dense to very dense fog very likely at isolated pockets over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, north Rajasthan and Bihar; dense fog at isolated pockets over Uttar Pradesh, south Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala.....	22.9	12.6	—	Kozhikode.....	—	34.6	23.6
Ahmedabad.....	24.9	12.8	—	Kurnool.....	—	32.9	18.2
Aizawl.....	25.9	9.3	—	Lucknow.....	—	21.5	9.3
Allahabad.....	25.3	11.6	—	Madurai.....	—	31.4	20.7
Bangaluru.....	29.5	16.4	—	Mangaluru.....	—	34.1	21.0
Bhopal.....	—	—	—	Mumbai.....	—	—	17.4
Bhubaneswar.....	28.5	13.0	—	Mysuru.....	—	31.1	16.7
Chandigarh.....	10.9	17.5	8.6	New Delhi.....	0.8	17.7	10.5
Chennai.....	29.2	21.2	—	Patna.....	—	17.2	7.6
Coimbatore.....	30.9	19.8	—	Port Blair.....	—	29.6	22.5
Dehradun.....	17.2	16.3	9.0	Puducherry.....	—	30.0	18.2
Gangtok.....	—	13.7	6.0	Pune.....	—	29.3	15.8
Goa.....	32.0	21.4	—	Raipur.....	—	29.9	13.0
Guwahati.....	25.9	10.9	—	Ranchi.....	—	27.6	8.0
Hubballi.....	29.0	16.0	—	Shillong.....	—	15.3	6.1
Hyderabad.....	32.0	16.6	—	Shimla.....	17.7	12.0	1.3
Imphal.....	23.1	5.5	—	Srinagar.....	—	—	—
Jaipur.....	—	10.2	—	Thiruvananthapuram.....	—	33.1	22.8
Kochi.....	32.0	23.4	—	Tiruchi.....	—	31.7	19.4
Kohima.....	24.2	5.8	—	Vijayawada.....	—	29.4	20.4
Kolkata.....	23.0	12.1	—	Visakhapatnam.....	—	27.6	18.1

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing							Yesterday
CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>2</sub>	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE	
Ahmedabad.....	32	23	30	—	—	—	In observation made at 6.00 p.m., Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh
Bengaluru.....	08	59	27	150	—	—	recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 371 indicating a dangerous level of pollution. In contrast, Gandhinagar, Gujarat recorded a healthy AQI score of 54
Chennai.....	81	44	50	185	—	—	
Delhi.....	18	54	51	366	240	—	
Hyderabad.....	03	87	50	160	142	—	
Kolkata.....	13	123	42	325	266	—	
Lucknow.....	24	47	64	421	—	—	
Mumbai.....	06	28	39	73	117	—	
Pune.....	72	22	23	111	97	—	
Visakhapatnam.....	—	87	62	263	230	—	

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

**SO<sub>2</sub>:** 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.

**NO<sub>2</sub>:** Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

**CO:** Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

**PM2.5 & PM10:** Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

‘Policy on rare diseases another piece of paper’

Nothing more than an illusion: patient groups

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN NEW DELHI

Calling it just another piece of paper that is far from reality, groups working in the area of rare diseases in India have said that the National Policy for Rare Diseases-2020, released recently by the Union Health Ministry, is nothing more than “an illusion”. It offers no clarity on long-term financial assistance, they said.

The government, in its policy paper, has proposed financial support of up to ₹15 lakh under an umbrella scheme of the Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi for rare diseases that require one-time treatment. Beneficiaries for such financial assistance would not be limited to Below the Poverty Line (BPL) families, but extended to 40% of the population eligible as per the norms of the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, for their treatment in government tertiary hospitals only.

‘Alternate funding’

It has also proposed that the Government will “endeavour to create alternate funding mechanism through setting up a digital platform for voluntary individual and corporate donors to contribute to the treatment cost of patients of rare diseases”.

For prevention and control, the Ministry has noted that it will work at encouraging people to seek pre-marital genetic counselling, identification of high risk couples, and create awareness about early detection rare diseases. “The 2017 policy on rare diseases had proposed a ₹100 crore corpus fund allocation for the treatment of patients with rare diseases, which was a Centre-State partnership of 60:40, with each State forming a technical committee to evaluate patients’ applications. That has come down to ₹15 lakh support for diseases needing one-time treatment. Clearly, now, after a major lag, the policy has come with no hope in sight,” noted a release from the Lysosomal Storage Disorders Support Society.

The society’s president Manjit Singh said, “Policy 2020 is far from reality and lacks genuine interest in providing much-needed treatment to ‘treatable’ Rare Diseases.” Prasanna Shirol, founder of the Organization for Rare Diseases India (ORDI), said that the policy is a “plain mockery of the situation of patients”, and that proposed solutions such as the creation of a digital platform for crowd funding were not reliable. “The policy is just another document without much substance,” he said.

PM must prove his charge or apologise: IMA

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Tuesday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to deny or prove his alleged statement that top pharmaceutical companies bribed doctors with women escorts. The country's largest doctors body demanded that the PM should apologise if he fails to do so.

“Reports have appeared in the media regarding the purported statement by Hon. Prime Minister Narendra Modi that top pharmaceutical companies bribed doctors with women escorts. IMA takes strong exception to the statement if it has been really made by the Prime Minister,” a media release from IMA said.

The PM reportedly spoke about ethical marketing practices during a meeting with top pharmaceutical companies earlier this month. “IMA wants to know if the government had details about companies involved in supplying women to doctors why it chose to invite them for a meeting in PMO rather than initiate criminal proceedings,” the IMA statement said.

In November, a study published by Pune-based Support for Advocacy and Training to Health Initiatives revealed that doctors accept incentives from pharmaceutical companies in the form of leisure trips, tablets, gold jewellery and petrol cards.

Railways to offer content on demand by 2022

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA NEW DELHI

Train journeys could soon become a more entertaining with the Indian Railways planning to offer access to “high quality, buffer free” video content to passengers. The project, to be implemented by PSU RailTel, is expected to be rolled out fully in the next two years. RailTel has selected Margo Network, a subsidiary of Zee Entertainment, as the digital entertainment service provider for providing content-on-demand (CoD) on trains and at railway stations, a statement said.