

NEARBY



New Year celebrations throw traffic out of gear

NEW DELHI
Massive traffic snarls were witnessed in central Delhi on Wednesday as thousands of people took advantage of the pleasant weather and flocked to India Gate and Connaught Place for New Year celebrations. Entry and exit gates of five Delhi Metro stations were closed around 6 p.m. to ease rush of passengers. Normal metro operations resumed after an hour.

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Businessman kills wife, daughter, himself

MATHURA
A Delhi-based businessman allegedly shot dead his wife and minor daughter before killing himself inside a car that was found on the Yamuna Expressway in Uttar Pradesh's Mathura district, police said on Wednesday. His minor son was found critically injured and has been hospitalised, the police said.

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Gaganyaan, Chandrayaan-3 in mission mode, says ISRO

Four astronauts shortlisted for space trip to undergo training in Russia: Sivan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Four pilots from the Indian Air Force (IAF) will leave for Russia this month to receive training as astronauts of Gaganyaan, the first Indian crewed flight to space.

They were shortlisted after a series of fitness and endurance tests, ISRO Chairman K. Sivan announced at a press meet on Wednesday.

The initial tests were conducted in the IAF's Institute of Aerospace Medicine, Bengaluru, and Russia. The four will leave in the third week of January to be trained at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Centre in Moscow, as per an agreement signed between the space agencies of the two countries last year.

Set for 2022

Gaganyaan, announced by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in August 2018, is the ₹10,000-crore Indian human space flight scheduled for 2022. It is designed to have 3-7 crew members spend 3-7 days in space in a 400-km orbit.

Dr. Sivan said Gaganyaan activities were on track. However it was not known yet how many astronauts would finally travel to space.

The first of the two pre-Gaganyaan flights with a humanoid will be launched this

On flight path

ISRO has planned 25 missions for the year 2020. Ground work for Gaganyaan and Chandrayaan-3 progressed smoothly in 2019. A status check:

1 Gaganyaan, the country's maiden manned space mission, is progressing well. Four Indian Air Force personnel have been identified for the mission and their astronaut training will start from the third week of this month in Russia

2 Chandrayaan-3, the country's third lunar mission, has been approved. The mission, which will cost around ₹600 crore, will also try to land in the lunar south pole like Chandrayaan-2. The take-off may get postponed to next year

3 Communication satellite GSAT-30 is 2020's first scheduled launch

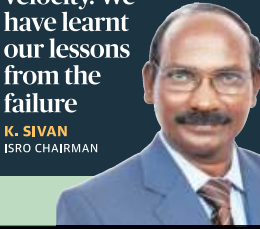
4 In the first half of 2020, SSLV or small satellite launcher will make its debut

ISRO has sought ₹14,000 crore as budget for 2020-21

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH CHANDRAYAAN-2

We are looking at all navigation guidance and control aspects. We learnt from telemetry data that the design could not take the large difference in velocity. We have learnt our lessons from the failure

K. SIVAN
ISRO CHAIRMAN



year-end along with some of the six shortlisted micro-gravity experiments, Dr. Sivan said.

ISRO has also quietly begun work on another soft landing mission to the moon with most of the same features of Chandrayaan-2 and almost on the back of the failure of the latter's lander on the lunar surface on September 7.

The launch of the nearly ₹600-crore Chandrayaan-3 is targeted for the end of this year or early 2021.

It will be almost a repetition of the July 2019 Chandrayaan-2 mission in the configuration of spacecraft, the landing spot on the

moon and the experiments to be conducted on the lunar surface, Dr. Sivan said.

The third mission, he said, was ISRO's bid to realise for itself the difficult technology of soft-landing on another planetary body. The agency is undertaking it as the landing module of the second mission crashed barely five minutes before it was to have landed on the lunar surface.

The lander and rover are estimated to cost ₹250 crore and will go to the moon on a propulsion model. The GSLV Mark III vehicle costs around ₹350 crore.

The Tamil Nadu government has started acquiring

2,300 acres of land in Thoothukudi district for ISRO's second launch port. Currently satellites are launched from the Sriharikota launch centre in Andhra Pradesh.

Dr. Sivan said Thoothukudi offers a locational advantage to launch towards India's South.

When ready, the new port will handle mainly the small satellite launch vehicle (SSLV) that is under development. SSLVs are meant to put a payload of up to 500 kg in space.

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'VIKRAM WAS NOT DESIGNED TO HANDLE SPIKE IN SPEED' ► PAGE 9

Peace on LAC can help solve border issue: Army chief

'We will build capabilities on northern, north-eastern fronts'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Maintaining peace and tranquillity on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China can set the stage for an eventual solution to the border issue, Army chief Gen. M.M. Naravane said on Wednesday.

"We have the Line of Actual Control with China. The border question is yet to be settled. However, we have made a little progress in maintaining peace and tranquillity along the borders and I am sure that situation will prevail," he said, adding that by maintaining peace on the borders "we can set the stage for an eventual solution". Gen. Naravane was talking to the media after a ceremonial guard of honour outside South Block a day after he took over as the 28th Chief of Army Staff.

Stating that both the western and northern borders were equally important, Gen. Naravane said that while we had been giving attention in the past to the western front, "the northern front also now requires equal attention." "It is in this context we are now going in for capability enhancement on our northern borders, which includes the north-east parts of the country."

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12



Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat with Army chief Gen. M.M. Naravane, Navy chief Adm. Karambir Singh and Air Chief Marshal Rakesh Kumar Singh Bhadauria in New Delhi. • PTI

Armed forces do stay far away from politics: CDS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The armed forces stay far away from politics, Gen. Bipin Rawat said on Wednesday after taking charge as the country's first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) on Wednesday morning.

His remark comes in the backdrop of his recent comments condemning student protests which drew sharp responses from political parties and on social media.

"Armed forces stay far away from politics. We work according to the directions of the government in power," he said, talking to the media after reviewing a tri-service guard of honour outside South Block.

Stating that the task cut out for the CDS was to integrate the three services and enhance their capabilities, Gen. Rawat said the CDS would "remain neutral within the Service [Army] and to all three services."

"It is important to ensure that the 1+1+1 combine of the three services should add up to more than 3 through synergy," he observed.

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GST gross revenue crosses ₹1 lakh crore

Mark breached for 2nd straight month

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ
NEW DELHI

Goods and Services Tax gross revenue crossed the one lakh crore-mark for the second successive month, with a collection of ₹1.03 lakh crore in December. This is almost 9% higher than the December 2018 GST collection of ₹94,726 crore, according to an official Finance Ministry statement issued on Wednesday.

While the December 2019 collection of ₹1,03,184 crore is slightly lower than the November 2019 collection of ₹1,03,492 crore, it does signal a trend of recovery after gross GST revenue dipped below the one lakh crore mark for the previous three months. The amount still falls short of the ambitious

₹1.1 lakh crore monthly target the Centre set last month for the remainder of the fiscal year.

The improvement is unlikely to be enough to enable the government to reach its GST revenue targets for the year.

The Centre had budgeted for ₹6.63 lakh crore in net GST revenue for the current financial year 2019-20, out of which it collected about 50% in the first eight months.

For the first time, the Finance Ministry released a state-wise break-up of GST collection from domestic transactions, which shows a 16% growth from the same period a year ago.

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War and peace



Battle remembered: People assembling at the 'Jayastambh' (victory pillar) at Koregaon-Bhima in Perne village, Pune, on the 202nd anniversary of the battle between the East India Company and the Peshwas in 1818. • JIGNESH MISTRY (REPORT ON PAGE 7)

Activist couple from Varanasi granted bail

They were arrested on December 19 while protesting against the citizenship Act

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

Activist couple Ekta and Ravi Shekhar, who were among the more than 60 people arrested in Varanasi for protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on December 19, were granted bail on Wednesday.

More than 50 others, including their colleagues and fellow environmental activist Saniya Anwar, were also granted bail, lawyers said.

Child at home

They are expected to be released on Thursday.

The incarceration of the couple, who run an NGO, Climate Agenda, in Varanasi,



The activist couple's daughter at a prayer meet. • FILE PHOTO

led to much outrage as they have a 14-month-old child at home waiting for their return.

Additional Sessions Judge Sarvesh Kumar Pandey granted bail to them on the submission of two bail bonds of ₹25,000 each.

Ms. Ekta and Ms. Anwar's lawyer Himachal Singh said

the bail order reached the Varanasi district jail late.

The activists and students of Banaras Hindu University and Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth were arrested on December 19 while marching towards the Beniabagh Maidan in the city in protest against the CAA and the NRC.

The police charged them with rioting, unlawful assembly, disobedience and assault. However, associates of those booked said the protest was peaceful and accused the police of excessive action.

According to the FIR lodged at the Chetganj police station, the protesters violat-

ed Section 144 of the CrPC and while they were near Sarvagovardhan, they allegedly raised "anti-national slogans". The police claimed they tried to reason with the protesters and explain that their march violated law and caused inconvenience to the public. "But they became more aggressive and broke out at the police force, shoving and punching, and started chasing those looking on," the FIR lodged by SHO Pravin Kumar said.

While the FIR alleged that the protesters created a sense of chaos and fear, forcing people to shut their shops, there is no mention of any violence.

Internet, SMS connectivity patchy in Kashmir Valley

Services not in full swing despite Centre's assurance

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

The J&K administration's move to restore SMS facility did not succeed on Wednesday, as telecom companies, except the BSNL, could not uplink the systems.

Scores of hospitals in the Valley remained without Internet connectivity for the most part of the day, contrary to the government's New Year announcement to resume it by Tuesday midnight after the 150-day shutdown.

Tens of thousands of users of companies such as Airtel and Reliance Jio complained



A journalist draws a blank on his cellphone at a media facilitation centre in Srinagar. • AP

that the promised service was not available on their phones on Wednesday. Around 40 lakh post-paid subscribers hoped to get connectivity on New Year's eve.

J&K government spokes-

man Rohit Kansal told *The Hindu*, "We have issued orders for restoration of SMS on all post-paid mobile cards. BSNL has made it operational and Airtel and Jio Reliance are working on it." He said the Internet facility had been restored in 28 hospitals. "There are cases of glitches and non-payment of fee too. We are in the process of restoring others too."

A senior official of Airtel, on condition of anonymity, said the company was alerted "very late about restoration of services". "Systems take time to uplink," he added.

Anti-CAA protesters converge at India Gate, take mass pledge

They read out the Preamble on New Year’s Day, vow to defend the Constitution

**STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI**
In a bid to register their protest against the amended Citizenship Act, National Register of Citizens and National Population Register, scores of people gathered at India Gate on Wednesday and took a mass pledge to defend the Constitution. Amid heavy sloganeering, students from various universities, States and regular visitors to the monument participated in the “reading of the Preamble” on the first day of the year. Shivalika Acharya, a homemaker and a resident of Lucknow, said that she had come to the national capital in solidarity with the movement against the recently passed law. “My heart bleeds for the students. They have shown strength by taking the movement forward. The sit-



Students of Jamia university protesting against the citizenship law at India Gate on Wednesday. •SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

uation in Uttar Pradesh is quite grave which is why I have come to Delhi to be part of the protests. We (in U.P.) are always in the eye of storm. This fight is nothing less than the fight that freedom fighters fought,” said Ms. Acharya. City resident Hanna said:

“There is no other place than here that you can actually raise your voice. The CAA, NPR and NRC will end up taking away rights of several people. Maybe the government cannot see how the poor will suffer, but it is important for us to raise our voices against it. It is

My heart bleeds for the students.They have shown strength by taking the movement forward
SHIVALIKA ACHARYA
Homemaker
not like we don’t have documents to prove citizenship but we are still here to express solidarity with the uneducated, poor and disadvantaged.” The pledge taken by the people read: “We, the Young India, reiterate our resolve to fight for our sovereign, secular, democratic, socialist India. We are in no way going to discriminate our fellow people on the basis of gender, race, colour, language, sex, caste or religion. Equality and Justice, politically, socially and culturally is what we want to assure each other.”

Voice of dissent



Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna performing in New Delhi on Wednesday. Several activists and artistes recited poems, sang songs and performed plays to express their solidarity with people protesting against the amended citizenship law. They had gathered at the Constitution Club of India under the aegis of Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (SAHMAT). •V.V. KRISHNAN

Agitations continue in the city on New Year’s Day; Swara Bhaskar attends protest at Jamia



Actor Swara Bhaskar addressing a gathering outside gate number 7 of Jamia Millia Islamia in the city on Wednesday. •SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Actor lauds students’ efforts in continuing protests; she also visits protest site at Shaheen Bagh

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI**
Amid New Year celebrations, protests against the amended citizenship law continued in various parts of Delhi, including Shaheen Bagh and Jamia university, where agitators sang legendary poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s ‘Hum Dekhenge’. At Jamia Millia Islamia, which has become the epicentre of the protests in Delhi, scores of students and civil society members carrying the Tricolour and banners squatted on one carriageway of the road outside the university.

Bollywood actor Swara Bhaskar and her co-star from *Raanjhanaa* Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub attended a public meeting on the new legislation outside the university and lauded protesters’ efforts in continuing the agitation. “We have woken up late but now we have woken up. You [students] have woken up the entire country. We are here to thank you,” Ms. Bhaskar said and termed the amended Citizenship Act a “targeted” law. While Mr. Ayyub raised slogans ‘Hum EK Hain’ and ‘In-

We have woken up late but now we have woken up. You [students] have woken up the entire country. We are here to thank you
SWARA BHASKAR
Actor
quillab Zindabad’, Ms. Bhaskar recited lyricist Varun Grover’s poem against the citizenship law which has the punchline ‘Hum kaagaz nahi dikhayenge (We won’t show documents)’ Following the public meet-

ing, a candlelight march was organised by the alumni association of the university outside gate number 7, which has become a protest site after the December 15 violence. The students of Jamia welcomed the New Year with cries of ‘Inquilab Zindabad’ and ‘Azaadi’. The sit-in protest by women at Shaheen Bagh continued after a night where they welcomed the New Year by singing the national anthem and raising the slogan ‘Azaadi’. Ms. Bhaskar visited the protest site after addressing

the gathering at Jamia Millia Islamia. PinjraTod, a women’s collective of students and alumni of colleges across Delhi, alleged that a march being carried out by women in Jafraabad was halted by the police and RAF personnel, who even demanded their address proof. A senior police officer said the women were not halted or threatened but were told that prohibitory orders, banning the assembly of four or more persons, were in place following which they left the area.

Former employee held for robbery at pharmacy

**STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI**
A 28-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly committing robbery at knife-point at a pharmacy in Dwarka where he had previously worked for a few months, police said on Wednesday.

Ensure rights of jailbirds are not violated during surprise raids: HC

Court was hearing a PIL alleging rights violation in Tihar

**STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI**
The Delhi High Court has directed the prison authorities here to ensure that the rights of jail inmates are not violated during surprise searches in jail wards. A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice C. Hari Shankar directed the Delhi government and prison authorities to “strictly follow the Jail Prison Rules, 2018 and the standard operating procedure” whenever such surprise searches are carried out in the wards of jails, including high security wards. “It is the duty of the respondents [government and prison authorities] that the rights of the jail inmates are not to be violated much less their human rights,” the Bench said, while disposing

of a public interest litigation (PIL) initiated by it. **Letter from inmates** The PIL was initiated on the basis of an October 2017 letter received from some inmates of a high-risk ward of Tihar jail alleging that the Tamil Nadu Special Police, which takes care of the jail’s security, was gross violating human rights in ward number 8 and 9 of Tihar Jail. Following the court intervention, the Superintendent of the Jail submitted his report in which it was mentioned that a high-level inquiry was conducted by the DIG (Prisons). It was revealed in the report that a surprise search was conducted by the T.N. Special Police officials on the direction of the Deputy Superintendent and under

the supervision of Assistant Superintendent Jail, in the high security ward on October 12, 2017. Three broken tennis racket, some loose wire, and two rusted ‘iron patti’, all prohibited items were recovered from a barrack. During the inspection, the inmates started misbehaving and abused the search team and also manhandled them. Following which alarm was raised and minimum force was used to control the situation. The accused persons, who received minor injuries, were provided medical treatment, the report said. Taking note of the report, the court opined, “it appears that the use of force was to control the reaction of the jail inmates to seizure of prohibited articles”.

Businessman shoots wife, daughter before killing self

His minor son found critically injured

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MATHURA**
A Delhi-based businessman allegedly shot dead his wife and minor daughter before killing himself inside a car that was found on the Yamuna Expressway in Uttar Pradesh’s Mathura district, police said on Wednesday. His minor son was found critically injured inside the car and has been hospitalised, the police said. The incident came to light when a patrolling vehicle of the police noticed the static Mathura-registered vehicle at the 105th milestone near Vrindavan cut, Superintendent of Police Ashok Kumar Meena told reporters. Preliminary probe revealed that the man was disturbed due to family issues and business matters. He was also under monetary debt, which could be the

reason behind him taking the extreme step, Mr. Meena said. A purported note has been recovered from the vehicle and it is under a forensic probe, the officer said. “The car was locked from inside with the bodies inside. The window glass was broken by the police and the bodies retrieved,” he said. “The man was in the driver’s seat with a pistol in his right hand, while his wife and children in the back seat. The bodies were taken out when the police noticed the minor son breathing. He was immediately rushed to a hospital for treatment. The others were dead,” the officer said. **Suicide prevention helpline: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health, 011-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday (10 a.m.-7.30 p.m.)**

Air quality of Delhi-NCR			
Delhi	437	Gurgaon	416
Ghaziabad	412	Faridabad	433
Noida	438	Greater Noida	420
Legend: Good (0-50), Satisfactory (51-100), Moderate (101-200), Poor (201-300), Very poor (301-400), Severe (>401)			
AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M., YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) SOURCE: CPCB			

Air pollution ‘severe’ on 4 of the last 5 days

**STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI**
The air quality of the city was in “severe” category on Wednesday and is likely to slightly improve to the higher-end of the “very poor” category by Thursday, according to government-run monitoring agency System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR). The pollution has been in “severe” category for four out of the last five days, including Wednesday, according to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data. On Wednesday, the average level of PM2.5 – deadly respirable particles – was (421.7 ug/m3) more than seven times the safe limit (60ug/m3) as per Indian standards, in Delhi and NCR at 8 p.m., according to the CPCB. But the level is more than 16 times the safe limit (25 ug/m3) set by the WHO.

- DELHI TODAY**
Exhibition: “Pathfinders”, an exhibition of photographs from Leh-Ladakh at Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Exhibition: “Ashaas”, a group show of paintings by Ritu Saxena, Uma Gupta and Tulika Kukreti at Convention Centre Foyer, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Exhibition: “India: A Mapful Story”, an exhibition of unseen historical maps and other important engravings (circa 18th Century to 1946) by Anubhav Nath, Curatorial Director of QJas Art Gallery at 1AQ, Qutab Minar Roundabout, Mehrauli Road, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Exhibition: “Bronze - Single Edition”, a solo show of paintings by Tapas Sarkar at Chawla Art Gallery, Square One Mall, Saket, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.
(Mail your listings for this column at cityeditor@delhi@thehindu.co.in)

Tughlakabad-Aerocity metro corridor contract awarded

Work likely to be over in 3 years: DMRC

**STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI**
The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on Wednesday said that the first civil contract for the Tughlakabad-Aerocity metro corridor, proposed under Phase IV network, was awarded. The contract involves construction of metro viaduct from Sangam Vihar to Saket G block, including four elevated metro stations – Sangam Vihar, Khanpur-Deoli, Ambedkar Nagar and Saket G block. “The highlight of this section will be a double decker viaduct which will include the metro viaduct as well as an elevated six lane flyover from Sangam Vihar to Ambedkar Nagar. An underpass

will also come up at Saket-G. After construction of this stretch, the Mehrauli Badarpur road will be signal free from Sangam Vihar to Saket,” the DMRC said in a statement. Officials added that the work is expected to be completed in three years time. The Tughlakabad-Aerocity metro corridor will be a 20-kilometre-long stretch comprising 15 stations. “The corridor will connect the existing Kashmere Gate-Raja Nahar Singh (Violet Line) with the Airport Express Link,” said DMRC officials. DMRC spokesperson Anuj Dayal said: “A total of three civil contracts have so far been awarded for the Phase IV corridors.”



Making the most of it: Revellers take advantage of a sunny day to celebrate the New Year at India Gate; people enjoying themselves at Rajpath on Wednesday. ■SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA



Over 70,000 throng India Gate to celebrate New Year

Traffic in central Delhi forced to a crawl throughout the day and well into the night; entry and exit gates of five metro stations closed briefly around 6 p.m.

SAURABH TRIVEDI
NEW DELHI
Massive traffic snarls were witnessed in central Delhi on Wednesday as tens of thousands of people took advantage of the pleasant weather and flocked to India Gate and Connaught Place for New Year celebrations.
Entry and exit gates of five Delhi Metro stations were closed around 6 p.m. to ease rush of passengers. Normal metro operations resumed after an hour.
Special Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Taj Hassan said around 70,000 people had gathered at India Gate causing massive traffic jams.

There were 600 traffic policemen just in the New Delhi area to regulate traffic movement. “We focused only on regulation and flow of traffic. We had already issued advisories and updated live traffic situation on social media to keep motorists informed,” said Mr. Hassan.
“Traffic should be normal from Thursday onwards... it was because of New Year that so many people came out to celebrate,” said Mr. Hassan.
Unauthorised parking
Jams were seen on several roads leading to and around India Gate. Unauthorised parking and restriction of



Day into night: Traffic jam at India Gate; congestion near ITO on Wednesday. ■PTI, SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA



closed stations.
“As advised by police authorities, entry and exit at five stations: Central Secretariat, Udyog Bhawan, Mandi House, Pragati Maidan and Khan Market, have been closed temporarily from 6.05 p.m. onwards till further instructions,” said the DMRC.

Commuters were stuck in traffic jams on roads leading to India Gate, Connaught Place and ITO.
“It took me two hours to reach India Gate from Laxmi Nagar. By the time I reached there with my family, I had lost the desire to celebrate as it was so crowded,” said Pritam Pal Mehra, a resident of Laxmi Nagar.
Ambulances stuck
One of the commuters took to Twitter to inform the Delhi Police about an ambulance stuck in a traffic jam on Barakhamba Road. The police quickly replied that the information had been shared with

traffic police personnel in the area.
Another ambulance was stuck on Barapullah flyover towards Sarai Kale Khan.
The Delhi Traffic Police also updated commuters about the situation. It advised people coming from Noida to take the DND or Akshardham to reach Delhi as Road no. 13A, between Mathura Road and Kalindi Kunj, is closed to cars. Vehicular movement was also affected in north Delhi due to the breakdown of a truck on the Prembari flyover. Traffic movement on Jai Singh Road from Ashok Road side was closed due to heavy traffic.

31% decline in drunk driving challans this New Year’s Eve

Steeper fine, greater awareness behind decrease: police

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI
A total of 352 challans were issued for driving drunk on New Year’s Eve – a 30.8% dip compared to 2018 and nearly 80% less than 2017, said the police on Wednesday.
In 2018, 509 challans were issued for drunk driving; in 2017, 1,752 challans were issued. This year, violators were mainly youngsters and middle-aged, the police said.
There are several reasons behind the decline, including people being more aware of police strictness, increased police presence, and steeper fine under the amended Motor Vehicle Act, said the



The police said that most of the violators were youngsters. ■FILE PHOTO

police.
“Messages regarding strict action against people driving drunk were shared on social

media. Also, people have generally become more aware that they should take taxis and cabs if they are drunk at a party. Another factor is that the fine for drunk driving is now ₹10,000 and the public is aware of this,” said a senior police officer.
The Delhi Police had increased its presence near markets, malls, restaurants, pubs and bars. PCR Vans, Prakhars vans and Raftaar bikes were stationed at vulnerable points. Two doctors were also deployed for conducting medical examination of drivers to see whether they were under the influence of alcohol.

Only 36 drunk driving challans issued in Gurugram

In new approach, police assist inebriated revellers in reaching home safely

ASHOK KUMAR
GURUGRAM
This New Year’s Eve, Gurugram Traffic Police personnel donned the cap of “facilitators” to help drunk revellers reach home safely rather than issue challans.
As per the Gurugram Police, only 36 challans were issued for drunk driving on the intervening night of December 31, 2019 and January 1, 2020. Last year, the police had challaned 130 people for drunk driving.

Greater awareness
Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Himanshu Garg told *The Hindu* that the focus this year was not to issue challans, but to assist people and ensure that those in an inebriated state

People were requested to call for a cab or let someone who was not drunk drive the vehicle. The police also took the services of around 20 cabs for this purpose... they dropped off people safely to their homes

HIMANSHU GARG
Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic)

reach home safely.
“The people were requested to call for a cab or let someone who was not drunk to drive the vehicle. The police also took the services of around 20 cabs for this purpose that dropped off people safely to their homes,” said Mr. Garg.

The reduction in the number of drunk driving cases on New Year’s Eve was also partially attributed to increased awareness among the revellers and the hefty fine of ₹10,000 as per the amended Motor Vehicles Act rules that came into force on September 1.
The rules also provide for the suspension of the driving licence of the defaulter for three months.

Stricter rules
As per the statistics provided by the Gurugram police, 4,047 were challaned for drunk driving in 2019, though the number reduced considerably after the amendment in the motor vehicle rules.
The highest number of

drunk driving challans (604) were issued in March, the lowest (274) in May, before the new rules came into effect.
After the new fine rates came into force, only 37 and 23 challans were issued respectively in September and October. However, the number of challans rose to 230 in November and a total of 231 people were challaned in December.
Mr. Garg said that in the initial months after the amendment to the rules, the focus was on awareness generation and that the figures had risen in recent weeks. “Besides, the first few weeks were also lost in updating software of the e-challan machines as per the amendment,” he added.

Warm start to 2020

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI
Bright sunshine greeted Delhiites on the first day of 2020, bringing respite from the cold wave conditions that prevailed for 18 consecutive days – making it the second coldest December on record.
The maximum temperature on Wednesday was 20.4 degrees Celsius, a sharp contrast to Monday’s maximum of 9.4 degrees – the coldest day temperature ever recorded in Delhi. The minimum temperature on Wednesday was 2.4 degrees Celsius, five degrees below normal.
The temperature is expected to rise further on Thursday, but there is a possibility of light rain with generally cloudy sky, the meteorological department said, adding: “The maximum and minimum temperature on Thursday will hover around 6 degrees Celsius and 19 degrees Celsius.”

IN BRIEF



Follow principles of Sardar Patel: Patnaik
NEW DELHI
On the first day of the new year, the Delhi Police held its first event in the swanky auditorium at its new headquarters here. Police Commissioner Amulya Patnaik motivated his staff to follow the principles of India’s first Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Mr. Patnaik commended his staff for maintaining law and order and regulating traffic.

Businessman killed in road accident in Manesar
GURUGRAM
A 35-year-old businessman travelling with his wife and father was killed when a speeding truck rammed into their vehicle from behind in Manesar on Wednesday. The incident happened around 4 a.m. as Mohammad Salim was on his way to Delhi from Jaipur with his wife Shahnaz and father Islamuddin, who was driving. The car overturned due to the impact and land on the adjoining Delhi-Jaipur carriageway of the highway.

Javadekar blames AAP, Cong. for violent anti-CAA protests in Delhi

We all know which party indulges in riots, reacts Sisodia

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
Union Minister Prakash Javadekar on Wednesday accused the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress of “misleading” the people and “inciting” them for violence during protests against the amended Citizenship Act.
Demanding that both AAP and Congress apologise to the people for “spreading violence”, Mr. Javadekar, who is the BJP election in-charge for Delhi, said that “complete development” of the city would be the main issue for the party in the upcoming Assembly polls.
“AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan, Ishraq Khan, former Congress MLA Asim Khan and Matin Ahmed played an important role in misleading the minority community in Jamia, Seelampur and Jama Masjid areas,” he alleged.
Mr. Javadekar said the leaders had “spread rumours” that after the passage of the Act “*azan* in masjids would be stopped, loudspeakers from mosques would be removed, and



Union Minister Prakash Javadekar, flanked by BJP leaders Shyam Jaju and Vijay Goel (right), addressing a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday. ■PTI

wearing burqa would be banned”. Due to this “false propaganda” violence spread in Delhi, he claimed.
Mr. Javadekar said the BJP would contest the Delhi elections “with the confidence of emerging victorious” because of schemes such as in situ rehabilitation of slums.
‘Diverting attention’
Senior AAP leader and Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said the BJP was trying to divert people’s attention from real issues by making

such allegations.
“AAP completely opposes riots [violence] and we all know which party indulges in it. The masters of riots are accusing others and trying to distract attention of people from real issues... BJP is playing an old tape... Delhi’s elections will be fought on real issues,” he said.
Delhi Congress chief spokesperson Mukesh Sharma termed Mr. Javadekar’s charges “baseless” and a “drama” in the wake of Assembly elections.

‘Hiking Board exam fee will affect six lakh families’

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI
Aam Aadmi Party leader Manish Sisodia on Wednesday said that by increasing the Board examination fee of Class 10 and 12, the BJP had put a financial burden of ₹100 crore on six lakh families of Delhi.
“On June 22, 2019, the Delhi CM said that his government would pay the full CBSE exam fee for all Class 10 and 12 government school students. This fee was ₹450 for general and ₹125 for SC/ST,” he said.
“The BJP thought that this historic decision would affect their politics, so Delhi BJP leaders went to their national leaders to ask the CBSE to increase its fees. On August 2, 2019, CBSE raised the fee to ₹1,950 for general and ₹1,650 for SC/ST,” he said.
Mr. Sisodia said that the Delhi BJP should explain why CBSE was “forced” to increase the fee.
“This issue has affected six lakh families of Delhi,” the AAP leader added.

Cong. condemns hike in cooking gas price

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI
Delhi Congress chief Subhash Chopra on Wednesday hit out at the Narendra Modi government for inflicting a “heavy blow” on the people on New Year by hiking the price of cooking gas cylinder by ₹19.
“The BJP government has been increasing the prices of all essential items and ser-

vices... the latest hike in cooking gas price once again proves the incompetence of the Modi government to check price rise. The BJP government is anti-poor,” Mr. Chopra said.
The Delhi Congress demanded an immediate roll back of the hike and said that it would be organising a protest outside Shastri Bhawan at 2 p.m. on Thursday.

Timings

NEW DELHI

THURSDAY, JAN. 02

RISE

07:14

SET 17:37

RISE

11:59

SET 00:00

FRIDAY, JAN. 03

RISE

07:15

SET 17:37

RISE

12:29

SET 00:04

SATURDAY, JAN. 04

RISE

07:15

SET 17:38

RISE

13:00

SET 00:56

Delhi Weather

max

min

Delhi City

2002

Safdarjang

2002

Palam

1803

Delhi Palam Today

16°C

A moderate fog will be seen during cold morning. Rain/thundershower likely in parts.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow

16°C

Dense fog in parts will be seen during cold morning. Light to moderate Rain/thundershower.

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THE HINDU

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AMU winter vacation extended, no new opening date announced

‘Detailed schedule for opening in a phased manner shall be notified in due course’

ANUJ KUMAR
GHAZIABAD

The winter vacation of Aligarh Muslim University has been extended. The university was scheduled to open on January 6. No new date has been given.

On December 15, the winter vacation was advanced by a week and hostels were vacated after several students were injured in a clash with the police after a protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act allegedly turned violent.

An official statement from the public relations office of AMU said due to overall prevailing situation, winter vacation of Aligarh Muslim University for students as well as for the teaching staff, had been extended and the university would not be opening on January 6, 2020.

The decision was taken at a consultative meeting of the



Police personnel stand guard outside the Aligarh Muslim University campus. ■ FILE PHOTO

Deans of Faculties, Principals of Colleges and Polytechnics and other functionaries of the university under the chairmanship of AMU Vice-Chancellor Professor Tariq Mansoor on Wednesday.

“A detailed schedule for opening of the university in a phased manner, the conduct of remaining examinations which could not be held in December 2019, commence-

ment of classes for the next semester and the duration of the summer vacation shall be notified by the university in due course of time so that there is no academic loss to the students,” said Mujib Ullah Zuberi, Contoller of Examination.

He added that students are advised to regularly visit the university website.

Sources said the university

administration was waiting for the situation to defuse. “There are 10 thousand non-resident students, many of whom are still carrying on peaceful protest. Many resident students didn’t leave the city and continued to stay with their friends,” said a source requesting anonymity.

Over 60 injured

Over 60 people, including 40 students, AMU security staff and policemen, were injured in the violence. At least four students who received serious injuries are still being treated.

A number of injured students had alleged that police and the Rapid Action Police indulged in excesses. Police have booked 56 persons, including a number of students, for holding a protest which later turned violent.

(With PTI inputs)

9 more deaths in Kota hospital, December toll rises to 100

‘Order issued for installation of central oxygen supply line’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
KOTA (RAJASTHAN)

At least nine more infants have died in the last two days of December at the JK Lon Hospital here, taking the death toll to 100 for the month, officials said on Wednesday.

The death of 10 children at the government-run hospital during a 48-hour period on December 23-24 had triggered opposition criticism and a visit by a team from the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR).

Four children died on December 30 while five on December 31, all mainly due to low birth weight, hospital superintendent Dr. Suresh Dulara said.

Hospital authorities, however, said the number of deaths reported at the health facility in 2019 has witnessed decline since 2014 when 1,198 children died.

The nursing in-charge of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, which specialises in looking after premature and sick newborns, has been replaced, Dr. Dulara said.

Efforts for upgradation and maintenance of equipment at the hospital have been put in place, following directions by the Congress government in the State.

Medical College Principal Dr. Vijay Sardana said an order has been issued for installation of central oxygen supply line at the hospital and the work would be completed within 15 days.

BJP team visit

The direction was issued a day after a BJP parliamentary team comprising of MPs Locket Chatterjee, Kanta Kardam and Jaskaur Meena visited the hospital and expressed concern over its infrastructure.

The panel had said that

two to three children were found on single beds and the hospital did not have enough nurses.

Dr. Sardana said the paediatric department at the health facility has been reconstructed, with its three units being functional in Jay Kay Lon hospital and a non-teaching unit working in New Medical College premises.

He said proposals for new OPD and emergency wards for paediatric and gynaecology departments have been incorporated in the proposed OPD Block under the Smart City Project.

Earlier, the NCPCR had served a show cause notice to the State government.

“Pigs were found roaming inside the campus of the hospital,” its chairperson Priyank Kanoongo had said.

A Rajasthan government committee ruled that the infants were given the right treatment.

Alwar hospital staff suspended after infant’s death in blaze

Inquiry has found medicos and others guilty of negligence

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

Six staff members of the Government Geetanand Children’s Hospital in Alwar, including two doctors, were suspended on Wednesday after an infant died in a fire that broke out in the hospital’s neonatal care unit due to a short circuit. An inquiry has found the medicos and others guilty of negligence.

A 22-day-old baby, who had sustained severe burn injuries in the fire on Tuesday, was referred to Jaipur’s Sir Padampat Mother & Child Hospital for treatment. She could barely survive a day and died of cardio-respiratory failure on Wednesday.

Besides the doctors – unit in-charge Mahesh Sharma and medical officer on duty Kirpal Singh – three nursing

staffers and one ward boy were suspended on the basis of a preliminary inquiry report. The services of an electrician, who was on contractual appointment, were terminated.

Alwar Collector Inderjeet Singh said the victim’s next of kin would be given financial assistance as per the State government’s guidelines. The infant, born on December 10, was admitted to the hospital on December 24 following difficulty in respiration and was recovering in the newborn care unit.

‘CCTVs not working’

The inquiry conducted by the Medical & Health Department’s Joint Director found that the CCTV cameras in the unit were dysfunctional for more than a year and the short-circuit in pow-

er supply could have been prevented if a miniature circuit breaker (MCB) was installed at the proper place.

There were 15 infants admitted to the neonatal care unit when the fire broke out in an oxygen pipeline connected to a radiant warmer early on Tuesday morning. The girl, who was in an incubator for treatment of pneumonia, suffered burn injuries on her face, chest and shoulder during the fire. As the fire broke out, other newborn children were shifted elsewhere in the hospital.

Alwar Chief Medical & Health Officer O.P. Meena said the fire in the hood of oxygen pipe connected to the incubator was caused by the sparking which occurred in the panel of radiant warmer due to high voltage.

Son of Bhajan singer found dead, one held

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
MUZAFFARNAGAR (U.P.)

The body of the missing child of a Bhajan singer, who was found dead along with his wife and daughter at their home in Shamli district Tuesday, was recovered on Wednesday from a car in Haryana’s Panipat, even as police arrested a 30-year-old man in connection with the case.

The body of the 10-year-old missing son of Ajay Pathak (42) was recovered with burns from the dickey of the car, police said.

Bhajan singer Pathak, his wife Neha and their daughter Vasudhra (12) were killed with sword at their home in Punjabi Colony in the neighbouring district Tuesday evening, they said.

Himashu Saini, who used to learn music from Pathak, was arrested in connection with the case.

Up and away



Hot air balloons in front of the Jahaz Mahal on the last day of Mandu Festival in Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday. ■ PTI

Woman found dead in hotel

PRESS’ TRUST OF INDIA
CHANDIGARH

A woman hailing from Punjab’s Sangrur was found dead with her throat slit at a local hotel here on Wednesday, police said.

The woman identified as Sarabjit Kaur was found dead by the hotel staff, they said. Preliminary investigation revealed that she had checked in the hotel along with her friend Maninder Singh on December 30. According to the CCTV footage, suspect Maninder was seen leaving the hotel on December 30 night.

Anti-mafia drive won’t spare any harasser: M.P. Minister

Hundreds of illegal structures brought down; State BJP cries ‘vendetta politics’

SIDHARTH YADAV
BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Minister for Public Works and Environment Department Sajjan Singh Verma has warned that no land mafia and anti-social elements will be spared in the crackdown unleashed by the Congress government in the State.

“No harasser will be spared by the tempest of the drive,” said Mr. Verma.

Given a “free hand” by Chief Minister Kamal Nath, the authorities, amid allega-

tions of expedient, political-ly motivated action, have brought down hundreds of illegal structures and apprehended scores of alleged kingpins enabling drug, land, sand and forest mafia and extortion rackets.

‘Clean and healthy M.P.’

“Mr. Nath wants a *swachh* [clean], *swasth* [healthy] and *surakshit* [safe] Madhya Pradesh. Mafia of all kinds have flourished in the last 15 years under the BJP government,” claimed Mr. Verma.



A building owned by businessman Jitu Soni being razed in Indore. ■ FILE PHOTO

On December 12, the Chief Minister had announced a law similar to the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act that would be

enacted to curb organised mafia in the State.

In Bhopal district alone, 53 acres of land worth ₹46 crore has been freed in 19 locations in the last week, according to the Collectorate. “The police are already apprehending those at the bottom, but the drive is about nabbing the kingpins. It’s not just an anti-encroachment initiative, but also an anti-mafia one,” Bhopal Collector Tarun Kumar Pithode said.

Demolition of illegal establishments of Indore-based Jitu Soni, a businessman and owner of an evening, marked the drive’s start on

December 5. Mr. Soni’s daily had published reports indicting senior government officials in the inter-State multi-crore “honeypot scandal”. Four days later, complying with a High Court order, the Bhopal administration razed a building housing the office of a journalists’ union.

State BJP president Rakesh Singh has accused the Congress government of playing “vendetta politics”. “In the garb of the drive, those having connections with the BJP are being targeted, while those friendly to the government are left untouched,” he alleged.

AMU, Jamia emerging as epicentres of national awareness

Lockdown of universities is a grim acknowledgment of the fact that rulers can’t intellectually engage with students on CAA

M. SALMAN IMTIAZ

Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) is a political parable in today’s lunatic times, holding protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. The police entered the campus, wounded students and filed multiple FIRs against hundreds of them under stringent laws, in connivance with the university administration. All this happened when our Constitution, which is held in high regard globally, is in the midst of a visible eminent threat for the first time since Independence. A deliberate attempt is under way to rewrite it on communal lines.

AMU, that has earned eminence in academic ranking, is also a political enterprise that once mounted resistance to the British rule and

contributed massively to nation building in the last 70 years. The university is locked today and the students have been forced to leave the campus. The forcible eviction of students from an institution of national importance is a wound that may heal with time, but the scars will persist.

Taken for granted

The CAA, when seen in conjunction with the National Register of Citizens (NRC), is preparing the grounds for violence in the nation. The silence that followed the revocation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and the Babri Masjid verdict was taken for granted so much so that now Muslims are at the verge of losing citizenship. What adds to our worries is that all the important arms of our

constitutional democracy – legislative, executive and judiciary – are openly displaying anti-Muslim prejudice.

COMMENT

When the political opposition in India fell like a pack of cards in Parliament, and Muslim leaders succumbed to their party lines while the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill was enacted, it was a conscious decision by thousands of students of AMU to fight back. Aware of the implications and existential threat this new legislation poses and committed to the founding principles of the university, the students rose to the occasion and gathered on the campus for days to protest against this draconian Act.

It was in the spirit of

AMU’s culture that the students opposed the communal and divisive CAA. From December 8 to 15, AMU students peacefully protested and demanded the rollback of the Act. On December 13, the AMU Students’ Union led a massive but peaceful march against the CAA and submitted a memorandum to the Chief Justice of India, asking him to declare the Act illegal and unconstitutional.

Partners in crime

Disturbed by the protests, the State machinery swung into action and barged into Jamia Millia Islamia and AMU, two universities with distinct character. The lockdown of the universities is a grim acknowledgment of the fact that rulers of the day lack the spine to intellectually engage with the students of the

minority community. It is possible for the regime to send Human Resource Development Ministry officials to JNU to engage with protesters, but AMU and JMI can only expect tear-gas shells, stun grenades, bullets, pellets and hermeneutical violence. To add to the misery of the students, the ugly role of the AMU administration, which was aware of the ongoing peaceful protests but chose to be partners in crime with the U.P. police and permitted them to invade the campus despite their horrible record against minorities, was no less than a criminal act. The amputated hands, broken bones and injuries to over 100 students will remain the signposts of the students’ resistance. The verbal violence faced by the students from the police, as docu-

mented in the 32-page students’ union report, reflects how structural violence and deep-rooted institutional hate against Muslims in India exists under the garb of democracy.

India is going through a serious constitutional crisis due to the BJP’s Hindi, Hindu, Hindust(h)an agenda, which urgently requires rescue efforts. The State believes that excesses will instill fear in the hearts and minds of Muslims, but that must not be allowed to happen. At AMU, we have committed to fight for a humane and inclusive nation rooted in our freedom struggle that makes us equal citizens despite diversity of faiths and identities.

M. Salman Imtiaz is the president of Aligarh Muslim Students’ Union (AMUSU 2018-19)

Satcom technology deployed for learning

Focus on generating awareness

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

The Congress government in Rajasthan has started using satellite communication technology in a big way to enhance the learning outcome in educational institutions and generate awareness about social welfare schemes, while giving priority to the five aspirational districts selected by NITI Aayog in the State.

The Science & Technology Department has taken an initiative to provide the facility of receive only terminals (ROT) and satellite interactive terminals (SIT) for getting the services of subject experts in the government schools and colleges and propagate various schemes in the remote areas with no Internet connectivity.

State S&T Secretary Mugdha Sinha said here on Wednesday that the technique would be used during the first phase in approximately 2,000 institutions coming under various departments, such as education, higher education, social welfare, minority welfare, woman and child development and tribal area development.

Subject experts

The students studying English and science subjects in the government educational institutions will get services of subject experts through ROT and SIT. Ms. Sinha said the level of English and science subjects would be increased among students

Technique would be used during the first phase in approximately 2,000 institutions coming under various depts in the State

MUGDHA SINHA
S&T Secretary

of Class VI to XII in order to get better results in the board examinations of Class X and XII.

The new programme’s facility will also be provided to all the 134 model schools, Kasturba Gandhi Girls’ Schools, Social Welfare Department’s hostels, children’s homes and students of a government college in each district. The institutions with the shortage of teachers will especially benefit from the geostationary satellite uplinking facilities.

Ms. Sinha said the people going for Haj pilgrimage, who were earlier required to come to Jaipur for training, would be trained at the district level through ROT and SIT installed in the government colleges.

The special focus of the initiative will be laid on the five aspirational districts selected by NITI Aayog – Karauli, Dholpur, Baran, Jaisalmer and Sirohi – where the satellite-related resources would be installed at the old age homes and children’s homes. Ms. Sinha said eight community radio stations run by the S&T Department would publicise education-related schemes in these districts.

Pattnaik wows New Year
revellers with sand sculpture

PRAFULLA DAS
BHUBANESWAR

About 90,000 people visited a sand sculpture made by well-known sand artist Sudarsan Pattnaik on Puri beach even as lakhs thronged the Lord Jagannath temple a few km away in the coastal Odisha town on the occasion of New Year's Day on Wednesday.

Mr. Patnaik carved the tree with "2020" written on the leaves and "Happy New Year" greetings below along with 20 of his students.

"Let Green be our motto to save environment. Happy2020," he tweeted along with a video of the sculpture.

The sculpture was completed on Tuesday evening and devotees and revellers who have gathered in Puri on the occasion of New



Sudarsan Pattnaik's sculpture. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Year's Day visited it. They appreciated Mr. Patnaik's concern for the issue of climate change.

Mr. Patnaik told *The Hindu* that he would strive to celebrate 2020 as 'Green Year' and highlight the issue of climate change wherever he goes to take part in sand art festivals across the world.

Situation not good enough to
repeal AFSPA: Manipur CM

'Insurgency-related violence has decreased in the State'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh has said the law and order situation in the State has improved in recent years, but it is still not conducive to repeal the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act.

Mr. Singh said insurgency-related violence has decreased in the State during the last three years and he has apprised the Union Home Ministry of the improved situation. "The law and order has definitely improved. However, we need to wait for a better situation so that the AFSPA can be repealed," Mr. Singh said.

Official sources said a to-



N. Biren Singh. ■FILE PHOTO

tal of 233 insurgency-linked incidents were reported in 2016, which came down to 167 in 2017 and 127 in 2018.

Time to review

In November 2018, Mr. Singh had said that the time had come to review the AFSPA, but since the State shares border with foreign coun-

tries, the security aspect has to be considered.

The Act allows Army personnel to use force, "even to the causing of death", in order to maintain public order, and also grants them executive powers to enter and search any premises and arrest without any warrant. It was imposed in Manipur in 1980 when the State was a hotbed of insurgency. It was withdrawn from seven Assembly segments in Imphal following intense agitation. Social activist Irom Chanu Sharmila was on fast for more than 13 years demanding its repeal after 10 civilians were killed by Assam Rifles on November 2, 2000.

5 killed as truck
overturns on
hut in Bengal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BURDWAN (W.B.)

Five persons of a family, including two children, were killed after a sand-laden truck lost control and overturned on a hut in West Bengal's Purba Burdwan district, police said on Wednesday.

The incident occurred on Tuesday night at Shikarpur village under Galsi police station limits, a police officer said.

While five persons, including a two-year-old boy and nine-year-old girl, were killed on the spot, one person was rescued from the debris and admitted to Burdwan Medical College and Hospital in a critical condition, he said.

Green activists promote indoor plants

'Let us get back mother nature to our homes as family member' is their slogan

STAFF REPORTER
BERHAMPUR

A movement to increase the number of indoor plants in every household of the city was started on Wednesday by the Berhampur Sabuja Bahini, an organisation of youth activists.

Their slogan is 'let us get back mother nature to our homes as family member'. It is the follow up of the successful 'save trees from metal intrusions' movement by the BSB, said its president Sibaram Panigrahy.

BSB activists have already saved around 2,000 trees in Berhampur from getting seriously injured by metal intrusions like nails and wires that causes their untimely death.

Berhampur Municipal



Berhampur Sabuja Bahini activists with plants to be given away to area residents. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Corporation had also appreciated their effort and imposed fine on persons and institutions hurting trees. This effort is being replicated in other urban areas.

"With rising pollution, indoor plants can help improve the environment within our homes. Growing small plants within home increas-

es our love towards the environment outside," said Sanakar Narayan Beja, Ganjam district eco-club coordinator.

With various indoor plants that can be easily grown within a house, the BSB activists took out an over 15-km-long cycle rally. Several organisations, in-

cluding the Marwari Mahila Samity, Anchalika Vikash Parishad and Mahatma Gandhi Helping Hand, extended support and solidarity to the movement.

Help city residents

The BSB activists would help city residents in procurement, planting and technique of growing different varieties of indoor plants. The organisation is already a part of the Green City movement started by the BeMC.

Endocrinologist Sunil Kota and ophthalmologist B.N.R. Subudhi, who flagged off the cycle rally, said indoor plants will help in improving mental and physical health of people. The plants will oxygenate the air within a home, they said.

Tripura to ban
unauthorised
e-rickshaws

SYED SAJJAD ALI
AGARTALA

The Tripura government would not allow unauthorised e-rickshaws to ply on the roads after the expiry of a new deadline. The State government on Wednesday announced that the new deadline is January 10.

The government has so far given three extensions and the last one expired on December 31. The traffic and transport agencies had to suspend seizure of unauthorised e-rickshaws and other similar modes of transport after the operators launched noisy protests in Agartala early last year.

One operator had allegedly killed self fearing he would not be able to repay bank loan.

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‘Tiger on the move stayed near Ajanta for a week’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AURANGABAD

A tiger from Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary stayed in the jungle near Ajanta Caves in Aurangabad district for a week last month, a forest official said on Wednesday.

The tiger, known as TPWL-TIC1, is fitted with a radio collar and has been on the move for the past 10 months. It was found to have stayed in an area two km away from Ajanta Caves, said deputy conservator of forests Satish Wadaskar in Aurangabad. Since it was fitted with a radio collar to keep a track of its movements, the tiger is believed to have travelled about 1,500 km, though not in a linear route.

Mr. Wadaskar said, “The tiger entered the region surrounding Ajanta and Fardapur on December 18 and 19 and moved towards Dnyanganga Sanctuary in Buldhana district on December 26.” He said the tiger was in the area at a time when the tourist season at Ajanta was at its peak. “Our teams were stationed in Ajanta and we were observing its movements. The tiger hunted some wild animals, but did not go near human settlements.”

368 held in Ahmedabad for consuming alcohol

41 arrested for possessing liquor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
AHMEDABAD

Over 400 people were arrested for consumption or possession of liquor during New Year celebrations in Ahmedabad, police said on Wednesday. Manufacture, sale and consumption of liquor is banned in Gujarat.

People came out at the Sabarmati riverfront and some prominent lakes in the city in large numbers around midnight to welcome 2020, a police official said, adding that no untoward incident was reported from any area. However, several people were caught drinking or possessing liquor in Sardarnagar, Bapunagar and Meghaninagar.

“As many as 368 people were arrested for consumption of liquor, while 41 others were held for possessing liquor last night,” Deputy Commissioner of Police

MVA govt. holds emergency meet to shore up GST revenue

Finance Minister says State’s GST collection last year fell short of estimated target of ₹1,42,000 crore by 10%

SHARAD VYAS
MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government held an emergency meeting on Wednesday to discuss ways to increase its revenue and ease the burden on the State’s finances. The government had announced a ₹25,000 crore farm loan waiver after taking charge.

The Centre’s non-payment of the Goods & Services Tax (GST) compensation has also added to the worries of the Maha Vikas Aghadi government. “The meeting was about how to increase the GST revenue,” said Finance Minister Jayant Patil after the meeting, which was chaired by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

Mr. Patil said the GST collection for 2019 had fallen short of the estimated target of ₹1,42,000 crore by 10%. He said, “Since the implementation of the GST regime, the State’s revenue has dipped. The Centre has not compensated us for it. We are making efforts to secure the compensation from the Centre and looking at means to increase revenue at the same time.”

The Shiv Sena has already warned of a looming ‘conflict’ with the Centre if compensation for revenue losses borne by States is not paid on time. Mr. Patil had recently warned of an imminent



Jayant Patil

tax hike to shore up adjusted revenue on account of implementation of the GST regime in the State. Last month at a pre-budget consultation meet in New Delhi ahead of the Union Budget, Mr. Patil had said the State government would be compelled to even increase general taxes if the Centre fails to provide the GST compensation at the earliest.

On Wednesday, Mr. Patil said there were technical issues with regard to the merger of the scam-hit Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank with the Maharashtra State Co-operative (MSC) Bank.

He said, “The PMC Bank’s operations are spread over three States. So there are difficulties in merging it with the MSC Bank. We are looking at the option of merging the PMC Bank with another bank that fits the legal requirement.”

Govt.’s remote control in New Delhi: Fadnavis

Zilla parishad poll campaign begins

SHARAD VYAS
MUMBAI

Former chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday alleged that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government is being run from New Delhi and not Matoshree, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray’s residence in Bandra.

Making a veiled reference to Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Mr. Fadnavis said the MVA’s remote control is being held by the ‘Matoshree’ in New Delhi. Mr. Fadnavis made the statement at an election rally in Palghar on Wednesday, adding fuel to the allegations that the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party have greater control over the affairs of the MVA.

Kicking off the campaign for the zilla parishad polls in the district, Mr. Fadnavis asked voters to give a befitting reply to the Shiv Sena for “betraying the public mandate”. The Opposition leader said, “It



Devendra Fadnavis

is unfortunate that the Sena has to compromise with those who abused Hindutva ideologue V.D. Savarkar. The voters much teach them a lesson.”

Mr. Fadnavis said the voters were not at fault for giving a clear mandate to the BJP-Sena alliance in the Assembly polls. He said, “But it is the Sena which backstabbed the voters and betrayed their mandate. A government with this foundation cannot run for long,” he said. The zilla parishad polls will be held in Palghar on January 7 and the results will be declared the next day.



Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra Ajit Pawar addresses the media at Bhima-Koregaon on Wednesday. •PTI

nistries,” a source said. According to sources, rural development, co-operation and housing are with the NCP and agriculture with the Sena, and the Congress is keen on getting at least two of these four departments. The Congress has been allocated revenue, public works and energy, among other ministries. The NCP has bagged the important portfolios of home and finance

Asked about the disgruntlement among some senior MLAs of the Congress and the NCP over exclusion from

the Cabinet, Deputy Chief Minister and NCP leader Ajit Pawar said, “It is not wrong to have expectations.”

Meanwhile, Cabinet minister Jayant Patil said there were no differences between the allies over the allocation of portfolios. Mr. Patil, who heads State unit of the NCP, was speaking to reporters at Mantralaya.

Mr. Patil was speaking after attending a meeting chaired by the Chief Minister on how to increase the Goods & Services Tax revenue.

Irish PM leaves for Delhi after celebrations in Goa

Visit to ancestral village special: Varadkar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PANAJI

Ireland’s Prime Minister Leo Varadkar left for New Delhi on Wednesday afternoon after New Year celebrations in Goa, an official said.

Mr. Varadkar, who is on a private visit to India, stayed at a plush resort in North Goa district to welcome 2020. He had arrived in the coastal State on Monday.

“His entire trip was private and he did not even avail of any police security for it,” a senior police official said. The Irish Prime Minister flew in an AirAsia flight from the Dabolim airport in Goa to New Delhi in the afternoon, the official added.

On Sunday, Mr. Varadkar, who is of Indian origin, visited his ancestral village of Varad in Sindhudurg district in Maharashtra along with his family members. It was his first visit to the village, said



Leo Varadkar

Mr. Varadkar, who became the Prime Minister of Ireland in June 2017. His father Ashok Varadkar, a doctor, moved to the United Kingdom in the 1960s.

The visit was a “special moment” as three generations of his family gathered at Varad, the Irish Prime Minister said after the villagers felicitated him.

Gujarat plans to double Garvi Gurjari stores across India

Total number of outlets likely to go up to 50

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

The Gujarat government has announced plans to double the number of Garvi Gurjari outlets, which showcase and retail traditional handicrafts, artefacts and clothing made by the State’s artisans.

The State’s Cottage Industries department runs 25 such outlets in eight States across India, and the plan is to add another 25 in the near future.

Recently, the Gujarat government opened a new showroom at Juhu to extend the brand’s presence. The store operates under the banner of Gujarat State Handloom and Handicraft Development Corporation (GSHHDCL), a State government undertaking.

Dharmendrasingh Jadeja, Minister of State, Cottage Industries, Food and Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection, Government of Gujarat said, “Our showrooms are getting good response as all the products are made by the artisans and artists from various districts of Gujarat.” He said the main



Products on display at a Garvi Gurjari showroom. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

We are taking these products to the people at rates that are 35-40% lower than market rates

DHARMENDRASINGH JADEJA
Minister of State, Gujarat

objective of expanding the retail network is to encourage the artisans and their art form as well as to enhance their income.

Besides income from showroom sales, the artisans and their groups are given subsidies, soft loans and other facilities by GSHHDCL, which is also helping them sell their

products at exhibitions. “The products in the showrooms are of high quality and were once used by royal families. Through these showrooms, we are taking these products to the people at rates that are 35-40% lower than market rates,” the minister said.

Shankarbhair R. Dalwadi, Chairman, GSHHDCL said artisans from the State have been provided with facilities for production of handmade products. Apart from handmade clothes, artefacts, paintings, show pieces and jewellery will be available in the Juhu showroom, he said.

‘VBA foiled move to spark riots at Bhima-Koregaon’

People behind 2018 riots shielded by former government in tough position now: Prakash Ambedkar

SHOUMJOIT BANERJEE
PUNE

Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) chief Prakash Ambedkar on Wednesday claimed his party and allies of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government foiled a move by certain people to politicise the Bhima-Koregaon battle celebrations and spark riots this year.

Mr. Ambedkar was speaking after paying obeisance at the Ranstambh or victory pillar in Perne on the 202nd anniversary of the historic 1818 battle of Bhima-Koregaon. The celebrations went off without incident under taut police vigil. Besides the 5,000 policemen of the district police force, 1,500 home guards and 12 to 15 SRPF companies were deployed on the occasion, taking to the total force manning the crowds up to 10,000 personnel.

Mr. Ambedkar said, “At the time of the Namantar (name change) movement in 1977-78 to rename Marathwada University in Aurangabad as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar University, there were politically engineered riots across the State, with atrocities on Dalits. This was due to the changed political scenario in the State at the time. Similarly, the changed political scenario



Tight vigil: Security personnel arrive at Ranstambh or victory pillar in Perne on the 202nd anniversary of the historic 1818 battle of Bhima-Koregaon. on Wednesday. •JIGNESH MISTRY

this time [the ascendancy of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014], too, led to the orchestration of the Bhima-Koregaon riots in 2018 with a view to make political gain.” However, the VBA chief, in a thinly veiled jibe at the BJP, said the right-wing party’s support to riot mongers was foiled owing to the efforts of the VBA and political parties presently in the ruling government.

“Due to the transformed political scenario today, the people who were behind the 2018 riots and who were

shielded by the then government, find themselves in a tough position when that government is no longer in power,” Mr. Ambedkar said.

He further expressed satisfaction with the security arrangements, remarking that the police and the district administration had made extensive arrangements to preclude any untoward incident.

“The police have also kept up a strict vigil on certain trouble-mongers and have either detained them or barred them from enter-

ing Bhima-Koregaon,” Mr. Ambedkar said.

Earlier, a veritable sea of Buddhist pilgrims, representatives of Ambedkarite outfits, politicians, students and other visitors congregated near the 60-foot obelisk to pay homage to the fallen soldiers in the 1818 battle. Along with the Mr. Ambedkar, Deputy Chief Minister and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Ajit Pawar and Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment and Republican Party of India (A)

president Ramdas Athawale visited the spot.

Speaking to reporters after visiting the victory pillar, Mr. Pawar said he came to offer tributes on behalf of the people of Maharashtra. “This pillar has a rich history and every year lakhs of people come here. The resting place of Chhatrapati Sambhaji [Shivaji’s son], too, is nearby [at Vadhu Budruk village]. So, I have come to pay homage to both the martyrs of the battle as well as Chhatrapati Sambhaji’s valour... Some untoward incidents marred the celebrations two years ago, but the present government is taking the utmost care and a massive security deployment is in place to prevent any law and order situation. I urge people coming here to pay homage to maintain peace and not place faith in rumours,” said Mr. Pawar.

The obelisk is dedicated to the bravery of the Mahar soldiers who fought against the Peshwa forces in the 1818 battle. While the outcome of the Koregaon-Bhima battle was inconclusive, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s visit to the place on January 1, 1927, revitalised its memory for the Dalit community, making it a rallying point and an assertion of pride.



A.P. Deputy CM's TikTok video goes viral

VIJAYAWADA
Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister P. Pushpa Sreevani's TikTok video on Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy has gone viral on the social media platforms. In the video, she is seen praising Mr. Reddy through a song, "Rayalaseema muddu bidda mana Jagananna." It comes in the wake of the government's plan to have three capitals. There is a demand to make the Rayalaseema region the Executive capital.

PM on a two-day visit to Karnataka from today

BENGALURU
Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be visiting Karnataka for two days from Thursday. He will visit Siddaganga Mutt in Tumakuru on Thursday to pay respects to Shivalakumara Swami, who passed away recently, and inaugurate a museum in memory of the departed seer. On Friday, he will inaugurate the 107th edition of the Indian Science Congress in Bengaluru.

Church row: Kerala to bring in ordinance to ensure burial rites

Both Orthodox and Jacobite factions could use graveyards

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

The Kerala Cabinet has approved a draft ordinance to end the disputes between the Orthodox and the Jacobite factions of the Malankara Church on conducting last rites.

Briefing reporters, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said here on Wednesday that in the wake of the raging disputes between the two factions over burials, the Cabinet decided to recommend to the Governor to promulgate an ordinance and cleared the draft.

As per the ordinance, members of both factions could use the graveyard in their parish after conducting the last rites by a priest of their choice outside the church. Within the church, they would have to seek the



No consensus: A file photo of Jacobites staying inside the church as members of the Orthodox faction came to pray.

services of the priest in charge, irrespective of the faction to which they belong to.

Rule of law

This follows the disputes between the two factions over burying bodies. (The Orthodox faction that got a Supreme Court order in its favour on managing churches had come face to face with the Jacobite faction at various places).

Mr. Vijayan clarified that the ordinance does not infringe on the tenets laid by the court order and was aimed at ensuring the rule of law. The government would take action against those trying to disrupt the rule of law, he said. Repeated efforts of the government to evolve a consensus among the factions had failed to attain fruition owing to the stance of the Orthodox who stayed off the parley.

Orthodox faction cries foul

**STAFF REPORTER
KOTTAYAM**

Terming the draft ordinance cleared by the Kerala Cabinet on Wednesday a move to impose parallel administration in parishes and cemeteries under its control, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church accused the State government of moving unilaterally against it and vowed to challenge it legally.

In a statement, Episcopal Synod secretary Yuhanon Mar Diascoros said the latest move of the government was aimed at giving undue benefit to the Patriarch faction.

The ordinance contradicted the essence of the Supreme Court order on the administration of churches and cemeteries, he said.

Suresh Krishna calls for more Tamil songs in concerts

Stresses need for striking balance between lyrics and music

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI**

Stressing the need for striking a balance between lyrics and music, Suresh Krishna, Chairman, Sundaram Fasteners Ltd, said "when language is not understood, the audience switches off."

Presiding over the Sadas of the Music Academy on Wednesday, Mr. Krishna made a strong case for including more and more Tamil songs, arguing that "when a song in other than Tamil is rendered music dominates and not the lyrics."

"There should be a balance between lyrics and music. Music tends to dominate when lyrics are not understood," he said after conferring the Sangita Kalanidhi award on vocalist S. Sowmya. "Music must touch," he said and pointed out that "Carnatic music today restricts the audience to a certain section and in my opinion is not desirable."

Mr. Krishna also made it clear that the Carnatic Trinity could not be replaced as they were part and parcel of the cultural identity of the Tamils, but Tamil songs should be given space. "We



Proud moment: Suresh Krishna, Chairman, Sundaram Fasteners Ltd, conferring the Sangita Kalanidhi award on vocalist S. Sowmya at the Music Academy in Chennai. The Music Academy president N. Murali looks on. ■K.V. SRINIVASAN

should not make Mother Tamil plead. We should respect Tamil. If you want to captivate a larger audience, I personally feel more Tamil songs must be sung," he said.

To drive home the point, he gave a few examples from Ms. Sowmya's concert. Rejecting the argument that all the Tamil poems were not lyrical, he said there were enough of them. "At least there will be 10,000 songs. But they are not sung as frequently as other songs. There are 4,000 Divyaprabandhams, 11,000 Kambaramayana songs, 24,000 Villi Bharatham songs, Thevaram and Thiruvasa-

gam, Thiuppugazh, Papanasam Sivan songs, and Muthaiah Bhagavathar songs," he said. Earlier, he presented Sangita Kala Acharya awards to Seetha Narayanan and M.S. Sheela. Nagaswaram player Vyasarpadi G. Kothandaraman and vocalist V. Rajkumar Bharathi received the TTK Awards. The Musicologist award was given to Arati N. Rao.

Music Academy President N. Murali said apart from marking the birth centenary of stalwart musicians, vocalist R. Vedavalli completed 60 years of her concert career at the Academy. "She has performed continuously, except once," he said.

Muslims take out rally demanding scrapping of CAA

The legislation goes against the secular traditions of India, says IUML leader



Huge protest: Muslim organisations taking out a massive rally against the CAA in Kochi on Wednesday. ■H. VIBHU

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOCHI**

Waving the national flag, thousands of Muslims, under the aegis of the coordination committee of Muslim organisations, took out a massive rally in Kochi demanding the scrapping of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

In his inaugural address, Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) Kerala president Sayed Hyderali Shihab Thangal said Muslims of India, who had a history of valiantly taking part in the freedom

struggle, would reject demands for proving their citizenship.

Muslims have the legacy of Umer Khali who resorted to non-payment of tax as a mode of protest much before the nationalist freedom movement, he said.

"The Muslims of the country will declare that India belongs to all Indians. Every Indian who was born here has the freedom to live and die here. Those attempting to curtail freedom will fail miserably," Mr. Thangal said.

The new legislation is aimed at denying citizenship to the Muslims of the country.

The legislation goes against the secular traditions of the country and its pluralistic society, he said.

Kanthapuram A.P. Aboobacker Musliyar, general secretary of the All India Sunni Jamiyyathul Ulama, said the campaigns against the legislation led by the Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and others would be supported.

Karnataka to convene meet on border row

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU**

Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa has decided to convene a meeting of Ministers and senior officials to explore legal options before the State government to put an end to the alleged border dispute with Maharashtra.

Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai said, "The issue is already a 'settled matter'. But Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has been raking up the issue for political mileage. Former Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar too had said long ago that the border row with Karnataka was settled and there was no dispute at all."

The Minister said the government would challenge the neighbouring State's claims on its territory in the Supreme Court.

No more obstacles for Pharma City project: Telangana Minister

'State has got investment and manufacturing zone approval'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD**

Telangana Industries Minister K.T. Rama Rao on Wednesday said there were no more obstacles in the way of the Pharma City project at Mucherla, 40 km from here, as the State government had obtained the National Investment and Manufacturing Zone (NIMZ) approval and the environmental clearance for it from the Centre.

The land acquisition for 10,000 acres was also over while 2,000 acres more was needed, Mr. Rao told presspersons here.

He said the government would launch Pharma City as the world's biggest pharma cluster this year, something which he would inform the board meeting of the Indian Pharmaceutical Association in Mumbai in a few

days. The same had already been conveyed to the top brass of the Piramal group, global conglomerate in pharma industry, seeking its participation.

Basic infrastructure

Mr. Rao said basic infrastructure at the Pharma City like setting up sub-stations and laying roads had already commenced. The government would have to work on establishing an effluent treatment plant to make it a pollution-free project.

Listing the projects for the next decade for Telangana, Mr. Rao said the focus would be on giving impetus to electronics, manufacturing, textiles and food processing. Metro rail works would be launched in the old city of Hyderabad after the Jubilee Bus Station-Mahatma Gand-

hi Bus Station corridor was opened to traffic.

Municipal Act

He expressed his conviction to implement the new Municipal Act effectively this year, holding officials responsible for any lapses and taking the public into confidence.

The officials would be answerable if building permissions for houses of more than 75 sq yds were not given within 21 days as stipulated under the Act. The permissions would go to the applicants on the 21st day either by e-mail or any other electronic mode of communication.

The government would be liberal with the public by accepting on-face value self-certification for permission to houses less than 75 sq yds.

Lead kindly light



Nursing students celebrating the WHO's announcement of declaring the year 2020 as the 'Year of nurse and midwife' by lighting candles at Mananchira square in Kerala's Kozhikode on Wednesday. ■S. RAMESH KURUP

SIT files chargesheet in Koodathayi case

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOZHIKODE**

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the Koodathayi serial murders submitted the chargesheet in the murder of Roy Thomas before the Thamarassery Judicial First Class Magistrate Court-II in Kozhikode district on Wednesday.

The chargesheet, running into 1,800 pages, was the first of six sensational cases in which the prime accused, Jolly Joseph, allegedly eliminated two branches of the Ponnammattom ancestral family after giving them cyanide-laced food or drink over a period of 14 years.

The 47-year-old was named the first accused in the murder of her former husband Roy on September 30, 2011. Along with Jolly,

the chargesheet also named M.S. Mathew aka Shaji, 44, and Prajikummar, 44, who allegedly helped Jolly in getting the cyanide and a former Communist Party of India (Marxist) functionary K. Manoj, 41, who helped to forge documents.

Jolly's mother-in-law Annamma Thomas; her father-in-law Tom Thomas, a retired Education Department officer; Sily, wife of Shaju Zacharias, Jolly's second husband; Sily's two-year-old daughter Alpine; and Annamma's brother-in-law Mathew Manjادی were the other victims.

The case focused on aspects such as profile of accused, victimology, carrying out murders and their links with forgery, and behaviour of key suspect, crime scene.

Kerala for steps to curb alien plants' growth in NBR

The spread of invasive plants, especially Senna Spectabilis, poses major threat to forest areas of Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

**E.M. MANOJ
KALPETTA**

The Kerala Forest and Wildlife department is gearing up to adopt comprehensive steps to arrest the rampant growth of invasive alien plants, especially tree species like 'Senna Spectabilis', in the forest areas of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR), including the Wayanad wildlife sanctuary.

"The spread of invasive plants, especially Senna Spectabilis, is posing a major threat to the forest areas of the reserve, owing to its quick growth and coppicing character," B.N. Anjan Kumar, Chief Conservator of Forest, (Wildlife, Palakkad), told *The Hindu*.

The tree species had been found in nearly 10 km sq



Dangerous trend: Invasive plants such as Senna Spectabilis arrest the growth of other indigenous species of trees.

area of 344.44 sq km of the sanctuary around five years ago. But now it has invaded more than 50 sq km of the sanctuary in a short span of time, Mr. Anjan Kumar said.

This showed its high invasive nature.

A recent study of the Ferns Nature Conservation Society with the support of the Forest department re-

corded the presence of the plant on 78.91 sq km area of the sanctuary.

Tiger reserves

The plant started to invade in adjacent tiger reserves, including Bandipur and Nagarhole in Karnataka and the Mudumalai tiger reserve in Tamil Nadu, P.A. Vinayan, president of the society, said.

Earlier, it was planted as avenue trees along roadsides in Wayanad. Due to massive flowering and drying of bamboo species in the Wayanad, lots of open spaces were created which were occupied by Senna Spectabilis.

An adult tree grows up to 15 to 20 metres in a short period of time and every year distributes thousands of seeds after the gregarious

flowering. The thick foliage arrests the growth of other indigenous species of trees and grass, and causes food shortage for the wildlife population, especially herbivores, during summer. More-over wildlife would not feed on the leaves of the tree as it was not palatable for them, Mr. Anjan Kumar said.

Chemical measures

"The 'vayal' ecosystem (marshy land) of the forest area now houses this plant in large numbers. The allelochemicals produced by this plant adversely affect the germination and growth of the native species," said T.K. Hrideek, scientist, KFRI, who conducted an extensive study on invasive plants.

"The KFRI has developed

some physical and chemical measures to tackle the threat of the plant. Though we have been following the physical method to tackle the issue for the past five years, it was yet to make any desired effect. Hence we are planning to adopt an integrated method by combining the physical as well as chemical measures to address the issue," Mr. Anjan Kumar said.

Inter-State meets

As the same threat is being faced by the adjacent tiger reserves, managers of the reserves agreed to follow the similar steps to tackle the threat.

The issue would be further discussed with them in the inter-State meetings to be held soon, he said.

IN BRIEF



Govt. cuts import duty on crude, refined palm oils

Acting on the ASEAN and the India-Malaysia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements, the Centre on Wednesday slashed import duty on refined palmolein from 50% to 45%, while that on crude palm oil (CPO) from 40% to 37.5% with immediate effect. Opposing the move, the Solvent Extractors' Association of India said the action will have a serious impact on the domestic palm oil refining industry and oilseeds farmers.

Odisha's 1st rock garden to come up in Berhampur

Odisha's first rock garden being established in Berhampur is likely to be ready to welcome tourists by October 2, 2020. The foundation stone for the garden, being constructed on a nine-acre area, was laid down on Wednesday. The project, taken up by the Berhampur Development Authority, would cost ₹8 crore.

22 tableaux proposals accepted for Republic Day

Proposals for tableaux of 16 States, Union Territories and six Ministries and departments have been shortlisted for the Republic Day Parade 2020, the Defence Ministry said on Wednesday. Of 56 proposals, 22 were shortlisted after five meetings, the statement said.

ED attaches assets worth ₹18 crore in Tirunelveli

The CBI has attached nine wind turbine generators and land worth over ₹18 crore of Surat-based Nakoda Limited for alleged loan defaults of ₹2,107 crore. The properties are located in Tirunelveli. The ED had earlier attached assets worth ₹375.71 crore in the same case.

Puducherry CM rules out any rethink on SEC appointment

Follow MHA order and due process, says Kiran Bedi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
PUDUCHERRY

Puducherry Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy on Wednesday ruled out any rethink on the appointment of former bureaucrat T.M. Balakrishnan as State Election Commissioner (SEC).

In the wake of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) directing the government to select the SEC in a "transparent" manner, Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy pointed out that the MHA had not cancelled the appointment. Hence, Mr. Balakrishnan would oversee the upcoming local body polls, he stated.

"The incumbent SEC was appointed after the Speaker gave the right to the elected government to appoint the poll officer. MHA has not cancelled the appointment. Moreover, the MHA or Lieutenant Governor have no



Conflict returns: The SEC appointment has become the latest flash point between Puducherry Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi and Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy.

power to remove an SEC," he said at a press conference.

In response to objections raised by Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi over the appointment, the MHA last month directed the government to "select the State Election Commissioner through a transparent, competitive and fair process, where applications are invited through an all-India advertisement and selection is made through a Selection Committee headed by the

Chief Secretary". The MHA had also vested the power to finalise the terms and reference of the Selection Committee with the Lieutenant Governor.

Asked about the fate of the Lieutenant Governor's recent order directing the Chief Secretary to finalise the Selection Committee, Mr. Narayanasamy said: "The order can be put in the dustbin. Mr. Balakrishnan has already started the process of conducting the civic

body polls. He will continue with his work."

Bedi's response

Reacting to Mr. Narayanasamy's statement, Ms. Bedi said, "The Chief Minister appears to be having repeated problems with his choice of words." She reiterated that the MHA had directed the Chief Secretary to appoint the SEC "after due process".

Ms. Bedi said the Chief Minister's contention that she was running a parallel government had been challenged in the Madras High Court. "The judgment is reserved and expected soon. It might do him good to wait for the final verdict."

On the issue of free rice, Mr. Narayanasamy said the government would move court against the MHA order directing the government to transfer money to beneficiaries' accounts instead.

The Chief Minister insisted that the rules framed by the Assembly stipulate distribution of free rice instead of cash.

'Vikram was not designed to handle large spike in speed'

Defects corrected in Chandrayaan-3 modules, says Sivan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BENGALURU

Indian moon lander Vikram may have most likely crashed on the moon because the navigation control and guidance mechanism in the penultimate phase was not designed to handle the large spike in speed that developed in the last 3-5 minutes of its descent.

This problem has been corrected in the new modules of Chandrayaan-3 which is due to be sent



K. Sivan

"We are looking at all navigation guidance and control aspects. We learnt from telemetry data that the design could not take the large difference in velocity. We have learnt our lessons from the failure."

ISRO's internal failure analysis committee has evaluated the debacle, he said, while denying that Chandrayaan-2 was launched without doing thorough tests, or that it had delayed other projects due in 2019.

around the end of this year. ISRO Chairman K. Sivan, facing questions directly for the first time since the failure of the mission, said:

8 new buildings likely under new Central Vista

Parliament House will be triangular, says official

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

Eight new government office buildings, a new Parliament House and a residential complex near the South Block that could house the homes of the Prime Minister and the Vice-President are among the projects under consideration for the Centre's redevelopment of the Central Vista, a Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry source said.

The Central Public Works Department (CPWD) is likely to issue tenders for individual projects for the revamp of the 3-km-long Rajpath

'No automatic conviction for abetment of suicide'

SC annuls conviction of dowry accused

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

A person accused of dowry harassment cannot be automatically convicted for abetment of suicide, the Supreme Court has held in a judgment.

A Bench of Justices Navin Sinha and B.R. Gavai held that "even if it is established that the woman concerned had committed suicide within a period of seven years from the date of marriage and that her husband has subjected her to cruelty, the court is not bound to presume that suicide has been abetted by her husband."

The court is required to take into consideration all other circumstances of the case, it said.

"We are of the view that merely because an accused is found guilty of an offence punishable under Section 498A of the IPC and the death has occurred within a period of seven years of the marriage, the accused cannot be automatically held guilty for the offence pun-



ishable under Section 306 (abetment of suicide) of the IPC by employing the presumption under Section 113A of the Evidence Act. Unless the prosecution establishes that some act or illegal omission by the accused has driven the deceased to commit the suicide, the conviction under Section 306 would not be tenable," Justice Gavai said in the recent judgment.

In the present case, the apex court set aside the conviction of the husband for abetment of suicide of his wife but upheld the case of dowry harassment against him.

Revenue official held for graft

DEVESH K. PANDEY
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Wednesday arrested an additional director-general of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) and two others for allegedly demanding a bribe of ₹3 crore and accepting ₹25 lakh as the first instalment from an exporter.

Chander Shekhar, the senior DRI official, was in charge of the agency's Ludhiana division.

The other two accused have been identified as Rajesh Dhanda, a close friend of the official, and Anup Joshi, a clearing house agent.

"The complainant, a resident of Delhi, submitted a complaint to the CBI that a clearing house agent and a close friend of the ADG, DRI-Ludhiana, had demanded ₹3 crore on behalf of the public servant to ensure that he would not be implicated by the DRI pertaining to the seizure of his documents," said the agency.



Major revamp: A residential complex near the South Block is also under consideration.

vernment staff than the existing bhavans, most of which are set to be demolished. While Shastri Bhavan, Krishi Bhavan, Nirman Bhavan and Vigyan Bhavan would be demolished, "a political call" would have to be taken for newer buildings like the External Affairs Ministry's Jawahar Bhavan, the source said.

The new building, for which the process of land-use change of a 9.5-acre plot was started on December 21, 2019, would be triangular or "wave-shaped", the source said. According to the December 21 notification, the Master Plan-2021 of Delhi would be amended to change the plot opposite the existing Parliament House from 'recreational' use to "Parliament House".

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



Forecast for Thursday: Cold day conditions likely in isolated pockets over Uttarakhand. Thunderstorm accompanied with hail and lightning likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, east Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, coastal Andhra Pradesh.

Table with 4 columns: CITY, RAIN, MAX, MIN. Lists weather data for various Indian cities.

Table with 6 columns: CITIES, SO2, NO2, CO, PM2.5, PM10. Includes a color-coded legend for air quality.

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.

Court allows banks' plea to utilise Mallya's assets

SONAM SAIGAL
MUMBAI

A special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court on Tuesday allowed the application made by a consortium of 15 banks led by the State Bank of India to utilize all movable assets and shares that belong to fugitive economic offender Vijay Mallya.

However, the court also stayed the same till January 18 for parties to appeal the same in the Bombay HC.

On February 5, 2019, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had submitted an affidavit through its deputy director to an application filed by the consortium of banks, seeking to restore Mr. Mal-

lya's properties, who has defaulted on loans of over ₹9,000 crore.

The assets comprise properties attached by ED and shares of United Breweries Holdings Limited, that were attached by the special court as soon as Mr. Mallya was declared an offender.

Senior counsel Rajeev Patil appearing for the banks told The Hindu that, "movable assets and shares had been seized under provisions of the CrPC and proceedings under the PMLA are yet to begin."

Amit Desai, representing Mr. Mallya said, "the court has lifted the attachment of assets and we are waiting for the order copy."

Saplings planted across T.N. toll plazas

STAFF REPORTER
VELLORE

Members of the Institute of Road and Transport Technology Alumni Association (IRT'TAA) have joined hands with the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to plant saplings across 46 toll plazas in Tamil Nadu.

Inaugurating one such programme at Pallikonda Toll Plaza in Vellore district on Wednesday, L. Sridhar, programme co-ordinator, termed the planting of 15 different species a humble beginning.

"Initially, we plan to plant around 200 saplings near each toll plazas across the State," Mr. Sridhar said. The current bunch of volunteers are engaged in planting saplings at toll plazas in Krishnagiri, Vaniyambadi, Pallikonda and Chennasamudhiram in Walajahpet.

Table with 2 columns: CITY, RAIN. Lists rainfall data for various cities.

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Infrastructure push

The challenge is in making the plan to boost investment in infrastructure work

For an economy that is tottering, a big bang announcement from the government can sometimes work to turn around sentiment. The unveiling by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday of a mega push to infrastructure investment adding up to ₹102 lakh crore over the next five years belongs in this category. Projects in energy, roads, railways and urban infrastructure under the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) have been identified by a task force. About 42% of such identified projects are already under implementation, 19% are under development and 31% are at the conceptual stage. The NIP task force appears to have gone project-by-project, assessing each for viability and relevance in consultation with the States. Considering that the NIP will be like a window to the future, a constant review becomes paramount if this is not to degenerate into a mere collation and listing of projects. A periodic review, as promised by the Finance Ministry, is necessary. The government's push on infrastructure development will not only enable ease of living – such as metro trains in cities and towns – but also create jobs and increase demand for primary commodities such as cement and steel. From this perspective, this push to invest in infrastructure is welcome.

Identifying the projects to be put on the pipeline is the easy part. Implementing and commissioning them will be the more difficult one. There are a few hurdles that the NIP task force needs to watch out for. First, the financing plan assumes that the Centre and the States will fund 39% each while the private sector will chip in with 22% of the outlay. Going by the present fiscal situation, it will be no small challenge for the Centre to raise ₹39 lakh crore, even if it is over the next five years. The financial position of States is even more perilous. Second, the ₹22 lakh crore expected from private investment also looks steep considering the lack of appetite for fresh investment by the private sector in the last few years. In fact, this factor has been a major drag on economic growth. Given the scale of investment, debt will play an important role and it remains to be seen if banks have gotten over their apprehensions on infrastructure financing as a major part of their bad loans originated there. Finally, cooperation from States becomes very important in implementing infrastructure projects. The experience on this count has not been very happy till now. While these are genuine obstacles that the task force needs to manage, these should not detract from the need for a concerted effort to invest in infrastructure. The key will be following up and reviewing the pipeline at regular intervals.

A persisting variance

Even better performing States have not fared well in achieving gender equality

The NITI Aayog's Sustainable Development Goals Index for 2019, released on Monday, does not reveal any surprising information. The South's Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka are joined by Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Goa as the best performers while the northern/north-central and north-eastern States have been laggardly in achieving the UN-mandated goals by 2030. Poor performers such as Uttar Pradesh have shown discernible advances in the indices – measured between 2018-19 – especially in adopting cleaner energy and improving sanitation. But the regional divide is stark in basic livelihood goals such as “eradication of poverty”, and “good health and well being” or even in measures such as “industry, innovation and infrastructure”. This points to variances in both State governance and in administrative structures and implementation of welfare policies. The South, led by Kerala and Tamil Nadu, has done much more in orienting administrative institutions to deliver on basic welfare, leading to actions on health care, education, poverty eradication and hunger, with a governance structure tuned to competitively monitoring actions on these fronts. The converse is true of northern States – Bihar and Uttar Pradesh – where outcomes have remained relatively poor despite there not being much of a difference in the governance structure. The obvious answer to the puzzle could be the presence of historical socio-political movements that have resulted in greater circulation of elites in power and which have addressed issues related to welfare more thoroughly in the South – Kerala and T.N in particular. Yet even these States need to go further in reaching the UN's SDGs and achieving the living standards of both the first world and other developing nations.

The western States, especially Gujarat and Maharashtra, are also better off in economic growth and industry, indicating a diversified economy, higher employment ratios, skilled labour and better entrepreneurial culture. A major fault-line in India is in achieving gender equality, where barring middling performers such as Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Jammu & Kashmir, the rest of the country falls short. Low sex ratio (896 females per 1,000 males), poor labour force participation and presence in managerial positions (only 17.5% and 30%, according to the report), high level of informality of labour, a major gender pay gap (females earn 78% of wages earned by males in regular salaried employment), lack of adequate representation in governance (14.4% in Parliament, but 44.4% in local government) besides high crime rates against women and girls are among the major national level indicators that have contributed to this. States need to climb a mountain to achieve gender equality, but immediate steps such as enhancing women's participation in governance through parliamentary reservations would go a long way in addressing several of the issues faced by them.

The new worry of depleting diplomatic capital

It would be a gross misreading by India to dismiss global reactions to its domestic events as interference in its affairs



SUHASINI HAIDAR

In the initial year of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first tenure (2014-19), his foreign policy moves were given priority. Putting the past with the United States behind him – it had cancelled his visa for nearly a decade and criticised his actions in Gujarat – Mr. Modi's government forged an extra close bond with the Barack Obama administration, opening a new chapter in Indo-Pacific policy. With China, he also cast domestic sentiments aside to welcome its President, Xi Jinping to India, following it up with a visit to China. Finally, with India's neighbours, he signalled a new start from his party, the Bharatiya Janata Party's traditionally hard-line policies on Pakistan, Bangladesh, even Sri Lanka, putting bilateral ties over domestic concerns.

The contrast between that period and the first year in his second tenure (2019-2020) could not be more pronounced; rather than dealing with bilateral ties, the Ministry of External Affairs and its missions abroad are now fully devoted to dealing with India's domestic concerns and their fallout. Among them, the decision to amend Article 370 of the Constitution on Jammu and Kashmir, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, or the CAA, 2019, and the proposal for the National Register of Citizens (NRC) have been called into question by several countries and international organisations.

State of U.S., European ties

The impact of these policies has been most keenly felt in ties with the U.S., where bipartisan support for India has been the norm for at least two decades. The whittling away of Democrat support was evident early on during the “Howdy Modi” event in September 2019,

where only three out of the two dozen lawmakers at the event were from the Democratic Party; the party, especially under Mr. Obama, had been very supportive of the Modi government. While the ostensible reason was that they did not wish to share a stage with U.S. President Donald Trump, it was significant that even among the five Indian-American lawmakers, only one was present. Nor has the discomfort in Washington been limited to the Opposition party alone. In the weeks that followed “Howdy Modi”, the State Department and several bipartisan committees have issued statements of concern over continued detentions in Kashmir and the CAA, held hearings in the U.S. Congress, and even inserted language on Kashmir into the annual Foreign Appropriations Act for 2020. A resolution urging India to lift restrictions in Kashmir, sponsored by Indian-American lawmaker Pramila Jayapal, now has 29 co-sponsors, including two Republicans, and a lawmaker who had earlier attended “Howdy Modi”.

The same issues found voice in the U.K. Parliament. In the European Parliament, last September, there were also discussions on Kashmir. It also led to heated battles within their polities, as Kashmir became a campaign talking point between Labour and Conservative candidates in the U.K. elections. The Modi government's invitation to far-right Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to visit Kashmir (last October) has riled European diplomats from various countries – they have been denied similar access.

Denting Bangladesh relations

In the neighbourhood, the government has upset both friend and foe with its wording of the CAA. Pakistan is predictably angry, while Afghanistan is more muted. But the real damage has been done to ties with Bangladesh. In the past decade, and especially after completing the Land Boundary Agreement, Dhaka and New Delhi had worked hard on building con-



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nectivity, opening energy routes, trade and developing travel links. The relationship was seen as a “win-win” in contrast to the preceding years when terror safe-havens and border killings dominated the India-Bangladesh narrative. By clubbing Bangladesh with Pakistan and Afghanistan on treatment of minorities, India has introduced a note of bitterness that is hard to mistake in the bilateral engagement. Some in Sheikh Hasina's government have pointed out that the Modi government's desire to naturalise only one group of immigrants from Bangladesh but castigate the others as “illegal immigrants” and “termites” cannot but be seen in a communal light. If India's motivation was compassion for the religiously persecuted, they ask, then why was the Modi government so impervious to Ms. Hasina's repeated requests for help in the Rohingya refugee issue?

Regardless of the reasoning, India's diplomats, including new Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla, who had earlier served in Dhaka, will have their work cut out in repairing the damage. If close friend Bangladesh that defends India at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation feels that India's actions are religiously discriminatory, it is only a matter of time before others in the Islamic world, most notably the Arab countries, who have been muted so far, will become more vocal. The OIC's plans for a special meet on Kashmir and the CAA in April 2020, possibly in Islamabad, is one such indicator.

It would be easy to dismiss all of the above with the simple line that they constitute interference in India's internal affairs. Even if countries issue statements and world

bodies pass resolutions on the detentions and the Internet ban in Kashmir, the crackdown in Uttar Pradesh and protests across the country, does New Delhi really need to worry? There are, in fact, a number of reasons why the government must weigh its diplomatic posture on these issues carefully, as all of them are likely to dominate its time in 2020.

Steps that could pack a punch

First, not all statements and resolutions are empty rhetoric, and could lead to worrisome measures against India. The U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has already recommended sanctions be considered for Home Minister Amit Shah and other officials. While this may be considered an extreme step, even laughable, it must be remembered that it was the USCIRF that first recommended a visa ban against Mr. Modi, as Gujarat Chief Minister, in 2005. To date, he remains the only individual worldwide sanctioned thus under the U.S.'s International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. In the U.S. Congress too, lawmakers can effectively block defence sales to India, or pursue sanctions on the S-400 missile system purchase from Russia, for example, regardless of support in the Trump administration for India.

On the international stage, the United Nations and its affiliated bodies, which often seem toothless, could provide a platform for India to be targeted. In December 2019, a suit by a relatively remote player, the Gambia, ensured that Myanmar's top leadership was made to appear for a public hearing at the International Court of Justice at The Hague in connection with the Rohingya issue. New Delhi's break in ties with Turkey and Malaysia for their comments at the UN on Kashmir could also lead to them vetoing India's legitimate position at the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), where it hopes to blacklist Pakistan for terror financing this year.

At the very least, the unrest that

has emerged from the policies will lead to a lower number of foreign visitors, and visit cancellations/postponements by leaders, recent examples being Japan's Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, or Bangladesh's Foreign and Home Ministers.

Getting bogged down

The government must also evaluate the toll on its diplomatic resources that have been diverted for much of the year in firefighting negative international opinion. The skills of the Minister of External Affairs, himself a trained diplomat, for example, could be better used than they have been; he has had to give a barrage of interviews to the European and U.S. media and the “think-tank blitz” in Washington and New York to deal with questions about Kashmir and the NRC. Missions everywhere, including in friendly countries, have been overworked, disseminating FAQs and lobbying with lawmakers on Article 370, the Ayodhya verdict and the CAA. Many are occupied martialling their strengths to prevent resolutions with objectionable wording from being drafted, and UN Security Council meetings from being held.

Finally, the government must consider the impact of its domestic actions on India's diplomatic capital. This capital is a complex combination of the goodwill the country has banked on over decades as a democratic, secular, stable power, bilateral transactions it can conduct in the present, and the potential it holds for future ties, particularly in terms of its economic and geopolitical strengths. At a time when the western world is in flux, the economy under stress and the rules-based order in recess, India's diplomatic capital is being depleted at a rate unseen in the last few decades. And to paraphrase Cassius in Shakespeare's “Julius Caesar”, the fault may not lie in our diplomatic stars, but in ourselves, and the problematic message the government is now trying to convey.

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The need for a single energy ministry

A sole point of reference in the sector is necessary to ensure energy security, sustainability and accessibility



BANSIDHAR BANDI

Five different ministries along with a multitude of regulators govern India's energy sector. Petroleum and natural gas, coal, renewable energy and nuclear energy have separate ministries or departments. We also have a Ministry of Power, along with State-level bodies that regulate electricity distribution companies, or DISCOMS. Add to this, the presence of different regulators for each type of fuel and energy source which makes it cumbersome for businesses operating in this sector. Further, the petroleum and natural gas sector has two regulators – Directorate General of Hydrocarbons for upstream activities and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board for downstream activities.

Data constraints

There are also issues with data collection. No single agency collects energy data in a wholesome and integrated manner. Data pertaining to consumption are barely available while supply side data collected by agencies of respective ministries are riddled with gaps. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation collates data available from various ministries and conducts surveys at sporadic intervals. On the energy effi-

ciency front, the Bureau of Energy Efficiency is the sole statutory authority with the mandate to regulate energy efficiency on the consumption side. There is no agency or body for the same purpose on the supply side.

This stands in stark contrast to most other nations with their varied energy governance models. Developed and efficient countries such as the United States, Germany, France and the United Kingdom have their vibrant, diverse and prolific energy sectors administered by a single ministry or department. There are also instances where the energy ministry is in conjunction with other portfolios such as environment, climate change, mines and industry. For example, the U.K. has the “Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy”. France has the “Ministry of the Environment, Energy and Marine Affairs”, Brazil has the “Ministry of Mines and Energy” and Australia has the “Ministry of Environment and Energy”. The predominance of unified energy ministries is evident.

The Kelkar Committee in its report “Roadmap for Reduction in Import Dependency in the Hydrocarbon Sector by 2030” (2013) stated that “Multiple ministries and agencies are currently involved in managing energy-related issues, presenting challenges of coordination and optimal resource utilization, hence undermining efforts to increase energy security”.

In the Draft National Energy Policy (NEP), the NITI Aayog has advocated that a Unified Ministry



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of Energy be created by merging the Ministries of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG), Coal (MoC), New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) and Power (MoP). The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) has been left out since it has implications beyond the scope of energy and involves national security issues. The proposed ministry would have six agencies under it to handle various aspects of the energy sector – Energy Regulatory Agency, Energy Data Agency, Energy Efficiency Agency, Energy Planning and Technical Agency, Energy Schemes Implementation Agency and Energy R&D Agency.

Enabling optimisation

A single unified ministry of energy would help India to have an integrated outlook on energy that would enable us optimise our limited resources to meet the goals of energy security, sustainability and accessibility. In the fast-changing energy landscape of our country, having a single energy ministry would be beneficial as it would allow for a quicker policy response. Formulating an integrated and wholesome energy policy in the current governance structure is a complex and challenging task not only due to lack of coordina-

tion among ministries but also due to the absence of good quality consumption data and an inadvertent promotion of their own fuels over other choices, which may not always be the best option.

The present government has already taken some steps towards unifying the governance structure of the energy sector such as appointing a single minister for both MNRE and MoP. This move has been lauded across sections of society as both those sectors are heavily interlinked. Having the same person heading both of these ministries will help resolve longstanding issues faced by both conventional and renewable power generators such as power balancing and transmission infrastructure planning.

The hotly debated issue of non-payment of dues by DISCOMS to the generators might also be resolved with such synergy in administration. In the past too, this government has had the same minister for MNRE, MoP and MoC with great results in village electrification, LED bulb distribution (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All, or UJALA), power sector reforms (Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana, or UDAY), coal block e-auctions and alleviation of coal shortages. This demonstrates the intention of the political leadership to reform the energy governance structure.

The ‘Jal Shakti’ example

They have already shown a disposition towards unifying critical ministries. A pertinent example is the newly created Ministry of Jal

Shakti which was formed by merging the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation and the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation. The objective of this action is to unify water management functions, treat the issues of water management holistically and ensure better coordination of efforts. This was a crucial decision at a time when nearly 600 million Indians faced “high to extreme water stress”, while 75% households did not have drinking water on their premises.

Though the actions by this government are a step in the right direction, there is a long road ahead. Accepting and implementing the recommendations of the NEP on reforming energy governance, which is to be placed for the approval of the Cabinet soon, would need to be carefully traversed given their hard-hitting implications on the existing bureaucratic structure. But nothing is more important than ensuring energy security, sustainability and accessibility. In this age of energy transition, this can only happen with quick and holistic decision-making as well as providing a level playing field for various fuels, all of which can happen if a single ministry handles the entire sector. Such a Unified Ministry of Energy will not only enable India to keep up with the global energy transition but also to continue to be a leader in adopting cleaner energy sources.

Bansidhar Bandi is a former energy economist with the NITI Aayog. The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Constitution's essence
It is ‘everybody's Constitution’; it is indeed the Constitution of (We) the people of India. The Constitution of India is ‘common sense’ codified, which is superior to any ideology, trumps fanaticism and bigotry in a jiffy, and with which the ordinary citizens of India are perfectly at home with, thanks to the principle of equality enshrined in Article 14. The Constitution not only represents the collective wisdom of the

people of India but also the doubly-distilled wisdom of the finest legal minds and jurisprudential experts comprising the great Constituent Assembly of India. It is timeless (Editorial page, “It is everybody's Constitution”, January 1).
M. JAMEEL AHMED, Mysuru

■ The CAA's plain meaning is that non-Muslims of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan can become Indian citizens provided they

are religiously persecuted. The secular fabric of our Constitution is more in favour of permitting such an eventuality than denying it. Setting aside the Constitution and the Supreme Court of India for a moment, such a gesture cannot be faulted because the whole intention is to ensure that there are no illegal immigrants in India who may be a national threat and to underline the fact that India does not become a refugees' den. It is a fallacious argument that the present dispensation is

trying to divide our country on religious lines. The Supreme Court's likely verdict will hopefully silence many protesters.
V. LAKSHMANAN, Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

Test for diplomacy
The recent “declaration” by Pakistan of an OIC meeting to discuss India's domestic agenda indicates another strategy to “bleed India through a thousand cuts”. Despite India's various attempts to strengthen ties with West Asian countries,

this baffling manoeuvre, if true, calls into question the reach of Indian diplomacy. There needs to be a calibrated approach in diplomacy to counter these moves (Editorial, January 1).
JIT SARKAR, Kolkata

On-screen abuse
It is refreshing to find that someone is calling out our ‘masala’ films for what they are: an attempt to mainstream patriarchal and regressive cultural conceptions of what gender

relations should look like (OpEd, “Standing up to on-screen abuse”, January 1). Films are not just for entertainment. They serve as a backdrop for public discourse, have substance to impress upon young minds and can be powerfully self-reflective. It is time that people associated with a project take ownership of the message they send out to society.
TANVI SONI, Jalandhar, Punjab



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