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NEARBY



**Firefighter killed during rescue operation**  
NEW DELHI  
A firefighter was killed during a rescue operation at a battery warehouse in west Delhi's Peeragarhi industrial area where a fire broke out on Thursday morning, the police said. The structure collapsed following an explosion and 17 people sustained injuries in the incident. Amit Baliyan was inside the building when a part of it collapsed. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced an ex gratia of ₹1 crore to Amit's family.

CITY ► PAGE 3

**NCP leader Devi Prasad Tripathi passes away**

NEW DELHI  
Devi Prasad Tripathi, general secretary of the Nationalist Congress Party, passed away here on Thursday. Widely renowned for his erudition and oratory, Tripathi, 70, was the party Rajya Sabha member from 2012 to 2016. Tripathi had been ailing from cancer for the last three years.

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FRIDAY REVIEW ► 4 PAGES

# Modi asks CAA opponents to protest against Pak. 'atrocities'

Expose neighbour's treatment of its religious minorities, says Prime Minister

STAFF REPORTER  
TUMAKURU

Taking a dig at those protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said: "If they want to carry out agitations, let them carry out agitations against the oppressions of Pakistan against its minorities, including Dalits, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, for the past 70 years."

Addressing thousands of students and seers of various Muttas on the premises of the Siddaganga Mutt in Tumakuru, Mr. Modi said instead of carrying out agitations against Pakistan which was "oppressing" its minorities, the anti-CAA protesters were opposing the Union government for implementing the CAA and the NRC to safeguard the interests of the minorities in Pakistan and other nations.

He said that if the Congress wanted to carry out rallies "let them do these in support of the victims of atrocities of Pakistan" and not against the Union government. He alleged that Pakistan had destroyed the lives of lakhs of its minorities. He dared the Congress to carry out protests against Pakistan. "It is time to expose the atrocities carried out by Pakistan on its minor-



PM Narendra Modi watering a *Bilva patra* sapling he planted on the Siddaganga Mutt premises in Tumakuru district on Thursday. Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa looks on. • PTI

ities at the international level," he said.

He said people fled from Pakistan to India to save their lives and the lives of their daughters. He told the protesters to raise their voice against Pakistan, which is carrying out "religious atrocities" against its minorities.

Strongly defending the CAA, the Prime Minister asked what was wrong in giving shelter to minorities, including Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains of Pakistan who were being subjected to

atrocities because of their religion.

With no other alternative, oppressed minorities there were forced to come to India seeking shelter, and the Congress was not ready to say that what Pakistan was doing was not correct, he said.

Mr. Modi performed puja at Gadduge, where the 111-year-old seer of Siddaganga Mutt Dr. Shivakumara Swami was laid to rest.

PM DEDICATES FIVE NEW DRDO LABORATORIES ► PAGE 8

## 'Nations were briefed on CAA'

The External Affairs Ministry had reached out to "countries across regions, and wrote to all our missions asking them to share our perspectives [on the CAA and NRC] with host governments", its spokesperson Raveesh Kumar said. The Centre's brief said the CAA did not seek to strip anyone of citizenship. ► PAGE 13

# NCLAT decision is a recipe for disaster, Tatas tell SC

Group files plea against reinstatement of Cyrus Mistry

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The multi-billion salt-to-software conglomerate Tata Sons Private Limited on Thursday appealed to the Supreme Court saying the December 18 decision of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) to reinstate Cyrus Mistry as its chairman is a blow to corporate democracy and rights of the Board of Directors.

The 180-page appeal said the tribunal crossed its jurisdiction by terming the appointment of incumbent N. Chandrasekaran illegal while restoring Mr. Mistry as Chairman.

Mr. Mistry's tenure as chairman and director of Tata Sons expired in March 2017. The NCLAT decision to restore him to his "original position" for the "rest of his tenure" is contrary to company law, a recipe for disaster and sets a dangerous precedent in law, it said.

Besides, Mr. Mistry had never sought his reinstatement. The NCLAT had gone beyond its jurisdiction, the appeal by Tata Sons, filed through Karanjawala & Co, said.

### 'Against public interest'

To restore Mr. Mistry for his remaining term, without noticing that the term had come to an end is a recipe

## Grounds for appeal

The Tata Group's petition seeks to quash an order to restore **Cyrus Mistry** as chairman. Excerpts from the petition:

- Restoration of Cyrus Mistry "undermines corporate democracy". He was replaced after a majority in the Board voted against him

- Mistry never sought reinstatement after his tenure ended

- NCLAT's conclusions are based on an error that Tata Sons

continues to be a public company

- NCLAT imposed an "unwarranted and unsolicited consultative process" by asking the Tatas to consult minority stakeholder Shapoorji Pallonji Group before appointing the executive chairman



for disaster, for the reason that it would create unnecessary confusion in the working of companies and lead to more conflict, the appeal said.

The companies are large corporations having many subsidiaries and the Tata Group employs half a million people and contributes substantially to the economy of the country. Any shadow over the management of any of these companies puts public interest in jeopardy, the appeal said.

A majority of the Board of Directors at Tata Sons voted for Mr. Mistry's replacement as chairman on October 24, 2016, after losing confidence in him. He was again removed as the director of Tata Sons on February 6, 2017, following the procedure that

applies to corporate appointments. "Instead of bringing to bear an approach that would be consistent with corporate democracy and the right of the shareholders to exercise their votes in the manner they consider appropriate, the NCLAT took upon itself to go into various issues alien to such consideration... NCLAT imported principles from the realm of public law and eschewed relevant principles that apply to corporate democracy, which are based upon the right of the shareholder to cast a vote. No reasons were given on how the process of replacement and removal was wrong and illegal," the appeal argued.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

# AIADMK suffers a setback in rural local body polls

DMK racing ahead in panchayat unions and district panchayat wards

T.K. ROHIT  
CHENNAI

The ruling AIADMK suffered a setback in the rural local body polls held in 27 districts with the DMK racing ahead in panchayat unions and district panchayat wards as per results/trends available around 11.30 p.m. on Thursday.

Crowdsourced trends were available only for 350-odd of the 515 district panchayat member posts and 2,900-odd of the 5,090 panchayat union ward posts, while the State Election Com-



Agents of various parties outside a counting centre in Tiruvannamalai on Thursday. • C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

mission declared the results for much fewer posts. The complete tally of results is expected to be available only by

Friday evening.

The DMK had won in 727 of 1,632 seats the results of which were declared for the post of panchayat union ward members as of 11.30 p.m. The AIADMK was lagging by nearly 170 seats, as its candidates had won only in 556 seats.

The AIADMK's defeat at the hands of its arch rival DMK, that too in the rural areas, considered the ruling party's main vote bank from the time the party was founded nearly five decades ago, came as a shock to the esta-

blishment with Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami taking stock of and deliberating with senior leaders in the evening. The victory, even if not so huge, is likely to be a huge boost for the DMK ahead of next year's Assembly elections, as the party has remained out of power for the last two terms.

At the time of going to print, the DMK's gains in panchayat unions came largely from Tiruchi with 109 seats, Thanjavur (72), Pudukottai (48) and Dindigul (47).

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

## Protest at Shaheen Bagh to continue

SIDHARTH RAVI  
NEW DELHI

Protesters at Shaheen Bagh who have been on an indefinite sit-in over the amended Citizenship Act said on Thursday that they would continue their protest till the Supreme Court hearing on the Act scheduled for January 22.

While certain individuals put out a statement that the protest here had been called off, others dismissed it as rumour.

DETAILS ON ► PAGE 2

## 'Won't determine if poem hurt sentiments'

PRISCILLA JEBARAJ  
NEW DELHI

An investigating committee formed by IIT-Kanpur is not going to probe whether or not the recital of 'Hum Dekhenge', a poem by Pakistani revolutionary Faiz Ahmad Faiz, at a campus protest last month had hurt sentiments. It will only determine if there was any 'deliberate mischief'.

DETAILS ON ► PAGE 7



# Shaheen Bagh protesters resolve to continue sit-in till SC hearing

A few individuals had put out statements claiming that agitation was called off

SIDHARTH RAVI  
NEW DELHI

Anti-CAA protesters at Shaheen Bagh have resolved to continue their agitation at least until January 22, when the Supreme Court is scheduled to take up the matter. The have been on a sit-in protest for more than two weeks at the Noida-Kalindi Kunj Highway demanding withdrawal of the amended citizenship law.

While certain individuals, claiming to be organisers of the demonstration, had put out statements that the agitation was to be called off, those at the site of protest dismissed these as rumours being spread to break the demonstration.

“All our sisters here have promised to stay put until some action is taken,” said social activist Shaheen Kausar, who has been hosting the demonstrations from a stage here since the first day of protests.

Others such as Shah Nawaz (65) said that until a representative from the government come forward and speak to the protesters or clear assurances are given in Parliament or in writing, the demonstration would not be called off.

Nazia, a research scholar and a resident of the area, scoffed at the news that the demonstrations were to



(From top) Anti-CAA protesters singing songs of resistance at Shaheen Bagh on Thursday; a woman holding a poster during the protest. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

stop. “This will go on,” she said.

### Rubbishes claims

Meraj Khan, part of the Shaheen Bagh Coordination Committee, said that two people who had put out state-

ments claiming that the protest had been called off had been part of the demonstrations only for the last few days and were falsely portraying themselves as “chief organisers.” The individuals also attempted to commu-

nalise the demonstration through incendiary speeches and tried to scare protesters by claiming that “BJP goons” or the police would soon take action, he added.

However, conversations with the police representatives had revealed that no such order had been issued, Mr. Khan said.

Members of the coordination committee said that a dedicated media co-ordination representative would be fixed henceforth to ensure such rumours are not being spread.

On Sunday, protesters continued to gather in large numbers despite the cold weather and raised slogans against the amended Citizenship Act and sang songs of resistance.

## Two arrested for Seelampur violence get bail

There was nothing on record to show that they were a part of violent mob: judge

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has granted bail to two persons arrested for their involvement in Seelampur protests noting that there was nothing on record to show that they were a part of any violent mob.

The police had charged the two persons under various Sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including 307 (attempt to murder), and Sections 3 and 4 of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984.

Judge Gurdeep Singh, while granting bail to both

applicants, said, “Firstly, as regards to offence under Section 307 IPC, as per IO [Investigating Officer] injuries sustained by the police are simple in nature”.

### Self-made video

The judge noted that the accused Sajid Ali was seen in the video footage made by himself, marching along with other participants and not seen pelting stone or setting public toilet on fire.

“Further there is no eyewitness to the effect that he [Ali] is part of the violent mob who pelted stones, set

public toilet on fire and broke the window of the car,”.

In the case of accused Daniyal, the court said he is also not seen in the video pelting stone or setting public toilet on fire. Also, there is no eyewitness.

“Therefore in the totality of the facts and circumstances of the case and keeping in view the period of custody and his role, I am of the opinion that he is also entitled to bail,” the court said.

As a condition of bail, the court said the duo should make themselves available

for interrogation by a police officer as and when required and to report to the IO or Station House Officer (SHO) concerned on every 15 days for a period of six months regarding their activities.

### Police’s contention

According to the police, they arrested Daniyal from the spot where the protesting mob had turned violent. Accused Ali was apprehended based on a secret information. A mobile phone recovered from Ali shows him shooting self-video, they said.

## No student died due to injuries: Jamia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Jamia Millia Islamia on Thursday rejected reports that one of their students succumbed to injuries sustained during the protests against the amended citizenship law. There were reports doing the rounds that a student had died during the police action on the protesters on December 15.

However, the hospital, where he was admitted, said that the deceased was not a protester and had died due to chicken pox.

According to Ahmad Azeem, Public Relations Officer of the university, they have been informed by the Proctor’s office that the deceased was not a student of the university.

## Couple dies after heater causes fire

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A 73-year-old man and his wife died in the early hours of Thursday when a fire broke out at their house in south-east Delhi’s Jaitpur allegedly because of a coal heater kept in the room to warm themselves up.

DCP (South East) Chinmoy Biswal said that the deceased have been identified as Babu Lal and his wife Asarfi Devi (65). Their 13-year-old grandson also sustained injuries when he entered the room.



Wi-Fi service available in Airport Express Line trains

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on Thursday launched a free Wi-Fi service inside metro trains plying on the Airport Express Line that is touted as the first such facility in the country.

The service has been launched by DMRC Managing Director Mangu Singh. Addressing the media, Mr. Singh said, “Internet connectivity is extremely crucial in today’s age. Many of the DMRC stations already have Wi-Fi services, but it is for the first time that such services will be available inside the trains as well.”

Mr. Singh added that by December 2020, Wi-Fi services inside trains will be extended to the Blue, Yellow, Red, Green and Violet lines of the Delhi Metro network. “Based on the performance, we will see how it can be extended to the Pink, Magenta and Grey Lines,” he said.

Commuters will be able to access the Wi-Fi services by logging onto the “METROWIFI FREE” network and feed in the one-time password received on the mobile. Once logged onto the network, commuters will get automatically connected to the services on subsequent journeys made on the corridor.

Firefighter killed during rescue operation at battery warehouse

A total of 17 people sustained injuries in the incident, say police

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

A firefighter was killed during a rescue operation at a battery warehouse in west Delhi’s Peeragarhi industrial area where a fire broke out on Thursday morning, the police said. The structure collapsed following an explosion and 17 people sustained injuries in the incident, they said.

The victim, Amit Baliyan, was inside the building carrying out a rescue operation when a part of the building collapsed following a loud sound resembling a cylinder explosion. Amit, along with 13 other firefighters, got trapped in the rubble. All except Amit were safely rescued by other firefighters. Amit remained untraceable for around four hours, said a Delhi Fire Service (DFS) officer.

“Amit was later located and oxygen was supplied to him. He was immediately rescued and rushed to Balaji Hospital in Paschim Vihar where he succumbed to injuries. A total of 40 fire engines and hydraulic fire-fighting vehicles were pressed into service,” said DFS Director Atul Garg.

The police said they received a call around 4.15 a.m. at Paschim Vihar (West) police station regarding fire at a



The fire broke out at a unit at Peeragarhi in west Delhi on Thursday. ■SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

battery warehouse. A police team reached the outlet-cum-godown of batteries and inverters at Peeragarhi’s Udyog Nagar. It was found that the fire started in the basement of the building that was used for storing batteries.

“We immediately informed the DFS, DDMA, NDRF and CATS for the rescue operation. A total of 17 people, including three workers of the warehouse and 14 firefighters sustained injuries and were shifted to a hospital,” said a senior police officer.

Around 7 a.m., when the firefighters were inside the building carrying out the operation, the ceiling of the building collapsed following an explosion. “We are trying to remove all combustible materials from the building and other materials used in

the manufacturing of battery,” said a firefighter.

The firefighters faced difficulties inside building due to the toxic smoke from the burned batteries. “One can see thick black smoke emerging out of the building for the last ten hours. It is highly toxic and we used oxygen cylinders during the operation. Batteries were blasting and acid was spilling all over. It was not a usual fire call,” said another firefighter.

Till the filing of this report, the cooling operation was under way.

Rajinder Singh Sagar, ADCP (Outer) said that an FIR has been registered under IPC Sections 285 (negligent conduct with respect to fire or combustible matter), 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others) and 304 A (causing

death by negligence) at Paschim Vihar (West) police station.

₹1 crore compensation

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced an ex gratia of ₹1 crore to Amit’s family. “Amit Baliyan laid down his life while serving the people of Delhi. Nothing can bring back a loved one lost, but Delhi government will give ₹1 crore as financial assistance to his family. It is the least we can do as a society...” Mr. Kejriwal said in a tweet.

“Deeply anguished over news of death of fire operator Amit Balyan Amit along with his team members fought bravely to save lives of many people. I salute his bravery. My sincere condolences to his family members. All possible assistance to be extended to the injured and bereaved family [sic],” L-G Anil Bajjal said in a tweet.

Delhi BJP president Manoj Tiwari alleged that the Delhi government was not taking required steps to prevent such incidents. “This incident of fire is not a natural one and hence our duty should be to find out the reasons and take measures. The death of a fireman is an irreparable loss to his family. However, many lives have been saved due to the bravery of the firemen,” Mr. Tiwari said.



A man being taken to hospital after being rescued from the warehouse in Peeragarhi on Thursday. ■SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

‘It’s a big loss, but I am proud of my son’

28-year-old victim had got married in February last year

SAURABH TRIVEDI  
NEW DELHI

A fortnight before his birthday, the first one after his wedding in February last year, firefighter Amit Kumar Balyan lost his life during a rescue operation in Peeragarhi. His family in Meetnagar of Loni is still to come to terms with the loss.

Amit Kumar Balyan (28) died when he, along with other firefighters, got trapped in the rubble following a blast at the operation site.

“It’s a big loss for the family, but I am proud of my son. He sacrificed his life while saving others,” said Babu Ram, Amit’s father.

“He had completed basic fire training at Fire Safety Management Academy. He was posted at Kirti Nagar fire station as a fire opera-

tor,” said Atul Garg, DFS Director.

Amit is survived by his wife, father, mother, a younger brother and two younger sisters. His wife Shivani is a constable with the U.P. police.

“The couple had got married in February 2019. He left the house on Tuesday for work and was supposed to return on Thursday night. We did not inform his wife about the incident till she returned from work,” said a relative.

Trapped for 6 hours

“Amit was the last fireman to be taken out of the debris. He remained trapped for almost six hours. He was on the ground floor of the building when it collapsed,” added Mr. Garg.

His father, a Delhi Police

ASI, is posted in Anand Vihar. He was seen mourning outside Sanjay Gandhi Hospital mortuary where Amit’s body was kept for a post-mortem. The family said they will take Amit’s body from the hospital on Friday morning, said a DFS officer.

“We will take his body to the Fire Safety Management Academy in Rohini to pay tribute and then will hand it over to the family,” the officer added.

His neighbours also rushed to the spot soon after they received the news of his demise. “We were informed around 10 a.m. We rushed to the spot and waited for the officials to rescue him. He had got married recently and it [demise] is very unfortunate,” one of his neighbours said.

City’s AQI ‘severe’ on 5 of last 6 days

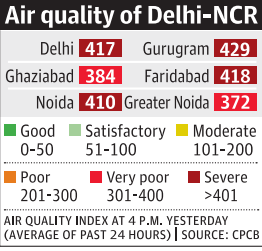
Emissions from vehicles stuck in jams one of the reasons

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The air quality of the city continued to be in the ‘severe’ category on Thursday and is likely to improve to ‘very poor’ category on Friday, said government-run monitoring agency System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR).

The air pollution has been in the ‘severe’ category for five out of the past six days, according to Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

On Thursday, the average level of PM2.5 – deadly respirable particles, which is a



chief pollutant – was 282.3 ug/m3, more than four times the safe limit of 60ug/m3, as per Indian standards, in Delhi and NCR at 7 p.m., the CPCB said. The level is, however, more than 11 times the safe limit of 25 ug/m3, as set by the World Health

Organization.

“Very calm conditions are persisting during stable night time with a sign of clustered emission hot spots, probably due to slow and congested traffic, leading to the accumulation of pollutants near the ground under very cool temperature,” SAFAR said. “We have been getting ground reports of a lot of traffic congestion. This accumulates and causes pollution,” a SAFAR official explained.

The city’s air quality index (AQI) on Thursday was 417, slightly down from Wednesday’s 437, according to the 4 p.m. bulletin of the CPCB.

Services on Pink Line hit by ‘minor signalling issue’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Services on a section of the Delhi Metro’s Pink Line were briefly affected on Thursday due to a signalling issue, a DMRC official said. The Pink Line runs between

Majlis Park and Shiv Vihar.

“There was a delay in services between Majlis Park and Durgabai Deshmukh South Campus stations due to a minor signalling issue,” the official said. Services resumed after a brief delay.



☀️ <b>Timings</b>			
<b>DELHI</b>			
<b>FRIDAY, JAN. 03</b>			
☀️	RISE 07:15	SET 17:37	
🌙	RISE 12:29	SET 00:04	
<b>SATURDAY, JAN. 04</b>			
☀️	RISE 07:15	SET 17:38	
🌙	RISE 13:00	SET 00:56	
<b>SUNDAY, JAN. 05</b>			
☀️	RISE 07:15	SET 17:39	
🌙	RISE 13:32	SET 01:48	

<b>Delhi Weather</b>	max	min
Delhi City	23	05
Safdarjang	23	05
Palam	21	06

**Delhi Palam Today**  
**20°C** Moderate fog will prevail. A comfortable day lies ahead.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
**19°C** Dense fog is expected in morning parts. A pleasant day is likely.

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IN BRIEF



■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

**Cong. demands rollback in price of cooking gas**

NEW DELHI  
The Delhi Congress on Thursday held a dharna outside Shastri Bhawan to protest against the hike in cooking gas cylinder price and also demanded its immediate rollback. On September 1, 2019, the price of a cooking gas cylinder was ₹574 which has now risen to ₹714, said Delhi Congress Chief Subhash Chopra.

**AAP sends greetings to '7 BJP CM candidates'**

NEW DELHI  
The Aam Aadmi Party on Thursday wished a happy New Year to all seven Chief Ministerial candidates of the BJP for the upcoming Assembly polls. The party tweeted a photo that read: "Happy New Year to all seven chief minister candidates of BJP". It also mentioned Manoj Tiwari, Gautam Gambhir, Vijay Goel, Harsh Vardhan, Vijender Gupta, and Parvesh Singh, and Hardeep Singh Puri.

**First fully automated tower car parking in city**

NEW DELHI  
Delhi's first fully automated tower car parking facility near Green Park metro station was inaugurated by Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Thursday, the South Delhi Municipal Corporation said. Terming it "the most feasible new age parking system" to overcome the issue of congestion, Mr. Puri said the project would help contain pollution in the area.

**LIC claims to have registered increase in market share**

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI  
Life Insurance Corporation of India said it has registered a significant increase in market share in the current financial year and that its market share during November 2019 is 84.82% in the number of policies and 71.59% in first-year premium income. Anoop Kumar, zonal manager, North Zone said that during November, LIC has registered a growth of 138% in the number of policies sold as against the industry growth of 102% and private players' growth at 9%. He added that LIC has the best claim settlement

## LIC claims to have registered increase in market share

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:** A solo photography exhibition by Sandeep Gupta at Delhi 'o' Delhi Foyer, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.  
**Exhibition:** "Katha", a solo painting show by Chandar Panjre at Triveni Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. (Mail your listings for this column at [cityeditor@thehindu.co.in](mailto:cityeditor@thehindu.co.in))

performance in the industry. During the year, LIC has settled 1,24,87,215 number of Maturity Claims amounting to ₹71,304.29 crore and under Death Claims, the number of claims settled is 51,7536 with a payout of ₹8,547.22 crore.

### DELHI TODAY

**Talk:** Constitutional Conduct Group and Karwan-e-Mohabbat has jointly organised a press conference and public briefing today. Speakers including Shiv Shankar Menon, Harsh Mander, Zoya Hasan and Nitin Desai will talk on CAA, NRC and NPR at Press Club of India, 1, Raisina Road, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.  
**Dance:** Khoj (The Search), a contemporary Kathak dance performance by Usha Gupta Dance Entourage at The Stein Auditorium, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 7 p.m.  
**Exhibition:** "Ahsaas", a group

# Polling officials to stay overnight at city booths

Move will ensure a hassle-free voting procedure, says CEO

**HEMANI BHANDARI**  
NEW DELHI  
In a first for the Capital, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has decided to deploy polling officials at booths the night before the Delhi Assembly election. Confirming the development on Thursday, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Delhi Ranbir Singh said the reason behind the move is to ensure a hassle-free polling process. "This is to make sure that officials are more at ease on the day of polling. Usually, they have to reach the booths early morning and some of them take trains from far-off places. Necessary provisions will also be made for them," he said, adding that this system is practiced in other States but it is a first for the Capital. Several meetings

**The officials have to reach the booths early morning and some of them take trains from far-off places. Necessary provisions will be made for them at the centres**

**RANBIR SINGH**  
Chief Electoral Officer

have been held between the police and the ECI officials regarding arrangements for the upcoming elections. A senior officer said one policeman will be present in each polling team from the time they enter the centres at night. "This move will make the polling party more comfortable. They can check if any machine is out of order in case it falls while carrying and if the infrastructure is in place," said an official.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Election Cell) Sharat Sinha said the preparations for the election are under way. "The policemen are prepared to make an assessment. Meetings and briefings are being conducted with officials at all levels. Inter-State border meetings will also take place. Necessary preventive measures are being taken," he said. Over 60,000 security personnel, including Home Guards and paramilitary forces, were deployed across the city a day before the Lok Sabha elections in May 2019. The police had kept vigil to ensure malpractices like liquor peddling and movement of anti-social elements to influence voters did not happen especially from border areas. (With inputs from Sidharth Ravi)

## Education Minister inaugurates govt. school building

Delhi only State where new schools are being set up and old ones revamped: Sisodia

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI  
Education Minister Manish Sisodia on Thursday inaugurated a newly constructed building of Government Girls Senior Secondary School in Shahbad Dairy.

**10 years down the line**  
"A building can only be transformed into a school by its teachers and students.

With a well-furnished building, we also need quality education to be imparted here and then only the purpose will be served. It is a brand new building today, 5-10 years down the line, the colours of the walls will turn dull and the only way to maintain the shine is by delivering brilliant students," he said. Mr. Sisodia added that

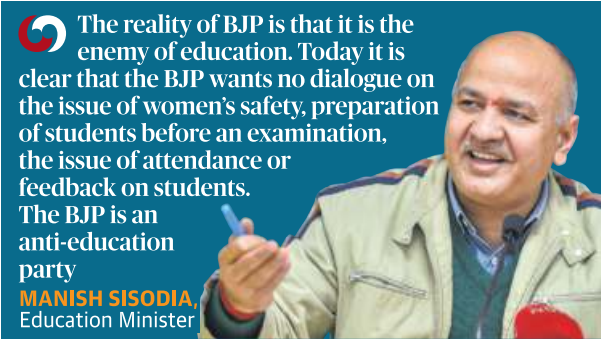
the government schools are being shut down in Maharashtra and Uttarakhand, and privatised in Uttar Pradesh as the government is unable to run the institutes. "Delhi is the only State where new government schools are being set up and old ones being revamped. The parents are taking their children out of the private schools to enrol them in go-

# Harsh Vardhan tried to cancel PTM: Sisodia

Teachers sought postponement as students may fall ill due to cold, says Union Minister

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI

Calling the BJP an 'anti-education party', the Aam Aadmi Party on Thursday blamed it for allegedly opposing a parent-teacher meeting (PTM), which is proposed to be held in government schools on January 4. "Today I read in media reports that Union Minister Harsh Vardhanji has written to the Lieutenant-Governor, requesting him to cancel the PTM. How did you get the courage to do this? You should be ashamed. It is unfortunate that we have such leaders and Ministers who can stoop to such levels," said AAP leader Manish Sisodia. He added that the BJP should work on developing the educational infrastructure all over India and in the Municipal Corporation-run schools of Delhi which are under them, instead of stopping the development.



"The reality of BJP is it is the enemy of education, therefore, they are trying to stop the PTM. Today it is clear that the BJP wants no dialogue on the issue of women's safety, preparation of students before an examination, the issue of attendance or feedback on students. BJP is an anti-education party. The BJP should realise that such an anti-education mindset is also harming the families and the children of their volunteers because the children of many BJP volunteers also study in govern-

ment schools," he added. Mr. Sisodia said the mega PTM initiative has been one of the key aspects of the revolutionary change in government schools. "In the last 5 years, we have worked very hard to develop the school education system in Delhi. Now, the Delhi model of education is being discussed all over," added Mr. Sisodia. Responding to this, Mr. Vardhan said: "Don't need a certificate from Sisodia." He clarified that the teachers' associations of the govern-

ment schools had met him at his residence on Wednesday and gave him a copy of a representation which they had submitted to the L-G expressing concern over the PTM when schools in most northern States have been closed due to the cold weather. They are seeking postponement of the meeting in view of the health hazards that the children are likely to suffer due to severe cold weather, Mr. Vardhan added. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal too took to Twitter to express his dismay over the issue. "Why do these people want to cancel PTM? In PTM, parents get an opportunity to discuss their children's progress with teachers. Many parents wait for PTM eagerly. PTM will be on time. I will also go to one of the schools tomorrow to get parents' feedback," he tweeted in Hindi. (With PTI inputs)

## Foundation stone laid for expansion of Forensic Science Laboratory

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI  
Home Minister Satyendar Jain on Thursday laid the foundation stone of a building in the premise of the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL), which will have a DNA lab for crimes against women and children among other facilities. The Minister also inaugurated the 'Brain Fingerprint-

ing Facilities' for forensic psychological examination of suspects and criminals. "Mr. Jain said the expansion of forensic facility would indirectly create fear among the criminals and also help in bringing down crimes," an official statement said. The new building will have ultra-modern facilities for testing of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, ad-

vanced narco analysis and brain mapping facilities for psychological examination, and advanced crime scene examination and investigation services (24X7). "A dedicated site for the examination of vehicles (VEE-RAJ) that were earlier involved in any crime has come up at Rohini Sector 21 and 23 and would become operational soon," the statement read.

## DSGMC opposes Pak.'s decision to close visit to gurdwara

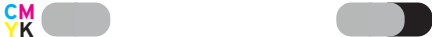
'Non-Sikhs not allowed from Jan. 3-5'

**STAFF REPORTER**  
NEW DELHI:  
The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) on Thursday opposed the decision of the Pakistan government to close *darshan* of Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur for non-Sikh visitors for three days between January 3 and January 5 in connection with the birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Gobind Singh.

**'Against basic tenets'**  
The DSGMC said the decision is against the basic tenets of Sikhism. Manjinder Singh Sirsa

president of DSGMC said, according to Sikh religion, the doors of Sikh gurdwaras are open to every human being irrespective of religion, class, caste, gender etc. and closing doors of gurdwara to non-Sikhs violates the religion's principle of equality.

**'Illegal decision'**  
"DSGMC will take up the matter with the Pakistan government through External Affairs Ministry and will also organise protest march and rallies to oppose this illegal decision of the country," Mr. Sirsa said.



# AAP seeks special session of Punjab Assembly on CAA, NRC

‘CM should raise his concern against the Centre’s orders’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHANDIGARH

The Aam Aadmi Party has urged Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to convene an all-party meeting and a special session of the State Assembly to discuss issues, including the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the National Population Register (NPR).

AAP leader and Leader of Opposition in Punjab Assembly Harpal Singh Cheema on Thursday said that Capt. Amarinder should raise his concern against the Centre government’s orders to implement the CAA,

NCR and NPR in all States.

### ‘All-party meeting’

“Punjab should also take its final call on these issues after holding deliberations with all parties inside and outside the Vidhan Sabha. The Chief Minister should immediately convene an all-party meeting. And then call a special session of the Vidhan Sabha and adopt a resolution on the lines of the Kerala government, which may be passed on to the Union government,” he said.

Mr. Cheema demanded that the proceedings of the State Assembly over the

sensitive issues be telecast live so that the people of Punjab could hear the stand of all parties over the controversial issues.

### ‘Controversial laws’

Mr. Cheema alleged that the Narendra Modi government at the Centre was imposing the controversial laws in the States, which was aimed at dividing the country and spreading bitterness among diverse communities.

He added that a delegation of AAP would soon meet Assembly Speaker Rana K.P. Singh over the demand for a special session of the House.

## Allahabad HC reserves order on police action at AMU

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
ALLAHABAD

The Allahabad High Court on Thursday reserved order on a PIL against police action during an anti-CAA protest at Aligarh Muslim University on December 15.

The Bench comprising Chief Justice Govind Mathur and Justice Vivek Varma will pronounce its judgment on January 7.

In the petition filed by Mohd. Aman Khan of Allahabad, it was stated that students were protesting peacefully against the legislation since December 13.

On December 15, students gathered at Maulana Azad Library and marched up to the university gate, where police tried to provoke them, the petitioner said.

“After some time, the police started firing tear-gas shells at students and also hit them with lathis,” the petitioner alleged, adding that around 100 students were injured in the police action. The petitioner sought the formation of a panel by the court to inquire into the police action.

He also sought the release of the students detained by the police and compensation for those injured in the violence.

Appearing for the State government, Additional Advocate General Manish Goyal argued that the university gate was damaged by the students and police entered the campus on the request of the AMU administration to control the students who indulged in violence. He said no excessive force was used by police.

## 7 killed, 24 hurt in bus accident



The mangled remains of a bus after it fell into a gorge in Rajouri on Thursday. ■PTI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
JAMMU

Seven persons were killed and 24 injured, some of them critically, when a bus skidded off the road and rolled down into a deep gorge in Jammu and Kashmir’s Rajouri district on Thursday, police said.

The ill-fated bus was on its way from Surankote to Jammu when the accident happened at Siot-Lambari area in Rajouri district, they said.

Some of the injured passengers have been shifted to the GMC hospital in Jammu for specialised treatment, the police said, adding relief and rescue operations are under way.



Haryana  
sisters to get  
passports

**VIKAS VASUDEVA**  
CHANDIGARH

Amid a controversy over denial of passports to two sisters Santosh and Heena in Haryana's Ambala by the regional passport authority here on the grounds of "their appearance," the duo has been granted the documents and a probe will be initiated to find out who mentioned the noting on the file about the "Nepali appearance" of the applicants, a senior official told *The Hindu* on Thursday.

Sibash Kabiraj, regional passport chief in Chandigarh, said that passports had been granted to both the girls and the documents will be issued after pre-verification from the police.

"I completely disapprove of the language of the comment on the official document, which mentions 'applicant seems to be Nepali'. An inquiry into the matter will be initiated to find out who wrote the noting," said Mr. Kabiraj.

Akali leader shot dead,  
party blames Congress

Gurdeep Singh was a close aide of Bikram Singh Majithia

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
CHANDIGARH

A Shiromani Akali Dal leader, said to be a close aide of former Minister Bikram Singh Majithia, was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Amritsar's Umapura village.

Gurdeep Singh's killing on Wednesday is a second such instance of fatal attacks on SAD leaders in the State since November, when Dalbir Singh Dhillwan was killed in Gurdaspur.

Terming the murder "politically-motivated", carried out at the behest of the ruling Congress, SAD has demanded an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation in the case.

Police said 50-year-old Gurdeep was killed on January 1 by motorcycle-borne assailants when he was coming out of a local gurdwara after offering prayers. The



Ex-Minister Bikram Singh Majithia • FILE PHOTO

police said the assailants managed to flee after pumping five bullets into Gurdeep's body, who died on the spot.

**Wife a sarpanch**  
Gurdeep's wife is the village head (sarpanch) of Umapura village.

Station House Officer Tarsem Singh told reporters

that five persons have been booked in connection with the murder and police teams were conducted raids in search of the assailants, who fled the spot after the incident.

Hitting out at the ruling Congress, Mr. Majithia said the killing of Gurdeep was a "political murder".

"The political assassination of Baba Gurdeep Singh was a direct result of threats being issued to him of dangerous consequences if he did not stop speaking against the 'minister-gangster' nexus. A message had been sent to me that my close political associates will be targeted if I do not stop speaking for justice for former Akali Sarpanch Dalbir Dhillwan, who was also murdered in the same way like Baba Gurdeep Singh," said Mr. Majithia.

(With PTI inputs)

‘Won’t determine if poem hurt sentiments’

IIT panel head says it would investigate if there was any ‘deliberate mischief’

**PRISCILLA JEBARAJ**  
NEW DELHI

An investigating committee formed by IIT-Kanpur is not going to probe whether the recital of *Hum Dekhenge*, a poem by Pakistani revolutionary Faiz Ahmad Faiz, during a campus protest last month had hurt sentiments or not.

"One of the complaints was regarding the poem, that it hurt sentiments," IIT's Deputy Director Manindra Agrawal told *The Hindu*. He said multiple complaints had been received from two groups of students and faculty, those who supported the protest and those against it.

"Of course, we are not going to determine whether sentiments were hurt or not," he clarified when asked what exactly the panel was investigating. Instead, the six-member panel would investigate if there was any "deliberate mischief", he said.

His comments come in the wake of widespread outrage spurred by reports that the panel would determine if the



**Each perspective has some truth to it. Someone who has no background in literature, who has not studied Faiz in depth, may not understand the allusions when he encounters those words, may take them at face value**

temples," said Dr. Agrawal. "But there is another aspect to this. Faiz did not mean this literally. He was alluding to something else."

**‘Protest anthem’**  
Commentators have pointed to the allegorical nature of the poem, through which the Communist Faiz spoke out against a dictator using conservative Islam as a tool of repression. The poem became a popular protest anthem following its 1986 rendition by Pakistani ghazal singer Iqbal Bano.

Victims’ kin yet to get autopsy reports

Six persons were shot dead during anti-CAA protests in Firozabad on Dec. 20

**HEMANI BHANDARI**  
NEW DELHI

It's been more than 12 days since at least six persons were shot dead in Uttar Pradesh's Firozabad during protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act but the families have not yet been given post-mortem reports despite running from pillar to post, they said.

On December 20, Navi Jaan, 22, Rashid, 26, Mohammed Shafeeq, 40, Mohammed Haroon, 30, Mukeem, 20, and Arman alias Kallu, 24, were shot dead. The deceased were labourers working in different factories in Firozabad and were returning home from work when the incident happened, their families said.

While Navi Jaan, Rashid and Arman's post-mortems were conducted in a government hospital in Firozabad, Mukeem, Haroon and Shafeeq's post-mortems were conducted in Delhi hospitals where they were referred to from an Agra hospital.

Arman's paternal uncle



Parents of Navi Jaan. • HEMANI BHANDARI

Mohammed Taufeeq told *The Hindu* on Thursday that he has visited the government hospital thrice asking for the post-mortem report but has been turned away. "I visited two days ago as well but the official at the mortuary told me that I should ask the police for it. Then I went to the Rasulpur police station but the official sitting there shunned me away and told me that the officer concerned is not present," he said, adding that they need the report for their record and to proceed further.

Mr. Taufeeq and Arman's

father Mohammed Yameen have not been visited by any police officer since the protest to investigate his killing, they said. A First Information Report under section 304 (punishment for culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the Indian Penal Code was registered.

Rashid, who was shot, dead was differently abled; his right hand didn't function. His father Noor Mohammed, 59, has gone twice to the government for his post-mortem report but to no avail. "Unhone bola hum na hi denge... kisi ko nahin mili

hai... hum wapas chale aaye (They said that they won't give... none of the victim's families have been given... I returned)," he said. Mr. Mohammed said he is illiterate and his other sons are not interested in the proceedings due to which he has not been able to visit the police station.

Navi Jaan's father Mohammed Ayyub had a similar experience as Mr. Taufeeq. He said he had visited the mortuary on Tuesday and was asked by the official that they should get to the police station.

**‘No police visit’**  
"When we went to the police station on Wednesday, they asked us to come after two days," he said, adding that no police officer has visited them for probe.

Mukeem, Haroon and Shafeeq whose post-mortems were conducted in Delhi were allegedly told by the hospitals that they'll receive the report after 10 days. The families are yet to visit Delhi, they said.

For a prize catch



Fishermen covered in blankets wait to catch fish in partially frozen Anchar Lake near Srinagar on Thursday. • NISSAR AHMAD

Dalits prevented from cremating body

People belonging to dominant Jat community destroy funeral pyre in Tonk

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
JAIPUR

Dalits at Gata village in Rajasthan's Tonk district were prevented from cremating the body of an old woman at the public crematorium, as the people belonging to the dominant Jat community destroyed the funeral pyre and allegedly threatened the family of the deceased. The small Dalit community has cited it as an instance of the continuing caste-based discrimination in the village.



Members of CDR's fact-finding team interacting with Dalits in Tonk district's Gata village. • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**Police intervention**  
When the police intervened after Dalits staged a protest, Phula Devi's body was cremated on the ground instead of the platform with tin shed where the funeral rites are usually performed. Police registered a first information report on December 23, four days after the incident, following a rally taken out by Dalits at Tonk district

headquarters.

The FIR has named Tonk District Congress Bairwa president Laxman Chaudhary as the main accused and included several of his relatives, including four women, among the 14 other accused.

The case was registered at Peeplu police station under Sections 143 (unlawful assembly) and 297 (trespassing of funeral ground) of Indian Penal Code and various sections of SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

A fact-finding team of Jaipur-based Centre for Dalit Rights (CDR), which visited Gata earlier this week, has expressed concern over the atmosphere of fear prevailing in the village and alleged that the police were under pressure not to take action in the case. "Despite the FIR specifically naming 15 accused persons, none of them has been

arrested so far," CDR Director Satish Kumar said.

Mr. Kumar said the police had not invoked Sections 4 and 7 of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, which dealt exclusively with the offences arising out of untouchability. He said though Dalits were facing discrimination as a routine affair, including not being allowed to ride a mare in wedding processions, they were earlier cremating the bodies at the common funeral ground.

**‘Law will take its course’**  
Niwai MLA Prashant Bairwa, in whose constituency the Gata village is situated, told *The Hindu* on Thursday that some dominant castes were intimidating Dalits to retain their "influence in the social hierarchy". "The law will take its course in connection with Mr. Chaudhary, who has been named in the FIR," he said.

Leader from  
coastal Odisha  
likely to be  
BJP State chief

**PRAFULLA DAS**  
BHUBANESWAR

Hectic lobbying is going on ahead of the appointment of the next president of the BJP's Odisha unit.

The criterion for selection is said to be a new face from the State's coastal region since the last four State unit presidents of the BJP hailed from the western region.

According to sources, the BJP is looking for a leader from the coastal belt since it is lagging behind the Congress in many areas in the region. The party had succeeded in strengthening its base in the State's western region over the years.

Although the party's aggressive behaviour in the State has decreased in the aftermath of the simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections held last year, the new president has to work hard to keep the party workers engaged and active to fight the urban body polls this year and panchayat polls in 2022.

Sources in the party said that the party's State unit vice-president Samir Mohanty is among the many leaders who are being considered for the president's post. He had unsuccessfully contested the 2009 Assembly polls, and is said to be close to Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan who continues to play a dominant role in the party in the State.

Aadhaar must for welfare pension in Odisha

Teams to help NSAP and MBPY beneficiaries without UID card

**STAFF REPORTER**  
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government has announced that from April 1 only beneficiaries with Aadhaar card will be given pension under the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) and the Madhubabu Pension Yojana (MBPY).

The warning came after Aadhaar seeding of all beneficiaries under the NSAP and

the MBPY could not be completed by October last year.

Aadhaar seeding is about 91% in case of NSAP and about 73% for MBPY in Odisha. Under the NSAP, elderly, widows and persons with disabilities get pension.

The MBPY beneficiaries, who include elderly, widows, persons with disabilities and HIV/AIDS-affected patients, get ₹500 to ₹700 per month.

But they must not be part of any Central schemes.

In a letter addressed to all collectors, Bhaskar Sarma, secretary, Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Department, said: "Aadhaar seeding needs to be enhanced to 100% immediately for ensuring complete transparency in respect of these two schemes."

"Beneficiaries whose Aad-

haar verification or seeding is pending will be asked to mandatorily bring a copy of their Aadhaar card when they come to receive their pension on January 15," Mr. Sarma said.

Beneficiaries without Aadhaar card will be taken to block office on January 15, where a team will collect their particulars for issue of Aadhaar card.



CM  
YK





**'Nellai' Kannan in judicial custody till January 13**  
TIRUNELVELI  
Tamil orator 'Nellai' Kannan, who was arrested on Monday for his alleged 'hate speech' against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah in a public meeting, was remanded in judicial custody till Jan. 13.

**AIIMS professor appointed head of NMC**  
AHMEDABAD  
The Centre on Thursday appointed Suresh Chandra Sharma, head of the ENT department at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), as Chairman of the National Medical Commission (NMC). His tenure is for three years.

**U.P. policemen asked to deposit salary as fine**  
SONBHADRA  
Almost six months after 11 tribals were killed in a clash over a land dispute, the Uttar Pradesh police held five policemen responsible for laxity and asked them to deposit their 30 days' salary as a fine.

**CBI files case against Navin Kumar Tayal**  
NEW DELHI  
The CBI has booked businessman Navin Kumar Tayal and directors of his company Krishna Knitwear Technology Limited, in connection with an alleged bank fraud of ₹104 crore. The agency had registered another case against the company last year for an alleged fraud involving over ₹27 crore of the Canara Bank.

**MEA nod sought to prosecute Medha Patkar**  
NEW DELHI  
The Mumbai Regional Passport Office has sought the External Affairs Ministry's nod to prosecute Narmada Bachao Andolan activist Medha Patkar for not disclosing criminal cases against her in her passport application.

# India records less than 100 tiger deaths for the first time in three years

84 cases of deaths and 11 cases of seizures were recorded in 2019

SHIV SAHAY SINGH KOLKATA  
For the first time in the past three years, the number of tiger deaths in a year in the country has been less than 100. According to data from the Ministry of Forest Environment and Climate Change (MoEFCC), there were 84 cases of tiger deaths in the country and 11 cases of seizures (in which a tiger is presumed dead on the basis of body parts seized by authorities). Both put together, the number of tiger deaths in 2019 was 95.

In 2018, the number of tig-

er deaths recorded was 100 (93 mortalities and seven seizures). The number was 115 (98 mortalities and 17 seizures) in 2017, and 122 (101 mortalities and 21 seizures) in 2016.

**Growing numbers**  
Speaking to *The Hindu*, Anup Nayak, Member Secretary of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), said that these figures should be seen in the context that tiger numbers in the country were growing.

The last tiger census re-

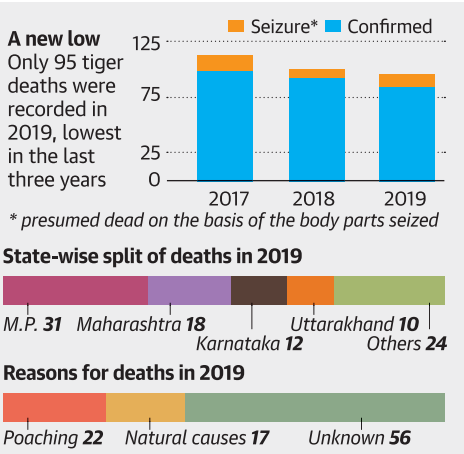


Tiger cubs at the Tadoba Andhari Reserve near Nagpur. ■ K.R. DEEPAK

port, released in July 2019, had placed the number of tigers in India at 2,967, up by a third when compared with

## The lost big cats

Madhya Pradesh recorded 31 tiger deaths in 2019 — the highest in the country, data from the Ministry of Forest, Environment and Climate Change shows. A look at the year-wise trend, location and reason for the deaths



the numbers reported in 2014.

“This is encouraging to us. The reduced numbers of

tiger mortalities are because of surveillance, good management of Tiger Reserves and a lot of awareness and

# Science Congress takes ‘extra care’ to avoid pseudo science

107<sup>th</sup> edition to commence today in Bengaluru

JACOB KOSHY NEW DELHI  
On the eve of the 107<sup>th</sup> Indian Science Congress (ISC), set to commence in Bengaluru, organisers said they had taken “special care” to ensure that ‘pseudo-scientific’ articles or talks did not creep in.

At last year’s ISC at Lovely University, Jalandhar, G. Nageswara Rao, the then vice-chancellor of Andhra University, asserted that the *Kauravas* of the *Mahabharata* were born of the stem-cell technology and test-tube baby science, and that Rama and Ravana had fought with ‘guided missiles.’

While pseudo-scientific remarks at the congress are not unprecedented — in 2015, at the event in Mumbai, there was an entire session dedicated to ‘aircraft



**Preparations on:** The GKVK campus in Bengaluru, where the Indian Science Congress will be held. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

from the Vedic age’ — Mr. Rao’s remarks stood out, as it was the first time a senior scientist from a well-regarded institution had made such comments.

“Only those who have sent their entire papers will have a chance to speak, irrespective of the seniority of the speaker,” Anoop Kumar Jain, General Secretary (Scientific Activities), Indian Science Congress Associa-

tion (ISCA), told *The Hindu*.

As part of the standard process, the ISCA constitutes sectional committees — 14 this year — to evaluate the scientific merit of papers submitted by its members.

The solicitations for papers, which span across fields like agricultural sciences to archaeology, are sent to prominent colleges, universities and research institutes.

The Kolkata-based ISCA

has been the organiser of the congress since 1914, and is funded by the Union Department of Science and Technology.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is slated to inaugurate the congress, which is scheduled to take place between January 3-7, at the Gandhi Krishi Vignana Kendra (University of Agricultural Sciences) in Bengaluru on Friday.

The theme for the congress this year is ‘science and technology: rural development’. To emphasise it, the function, which draws young scholars in droves, will include a Farmer’s Science Congress, providing a platform for innovative farmers.

The farmer’s congress will also discuss agrarian distress and strategies to mitigate and navigate the impact of climate change on agriculture, among other pressing issues.

## West Bengal's tableau out of R-Day parade

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT KOLKATA  
For the second time in a row, the tableau of the West Bengal government has not been shortlisted for the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi, triggering a political slugfest, with the Trinamool Congress accusing the Centre of being “vindictive” towards the State for organising protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

“Since the West Bengal government is opposing the anti-people policies of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) government, a step-motherly treatment is meted out to the State,” said Tapas Roy, West Bengal Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs.

State BJP president Dilip Ghosh said the Centre was “following a laid down procedure where a committee takes a final decision on whether a tableau will make it to the Republic Day Parade or not.”

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

**Forecast for Friday:** Cold day conditions likely in isolated pockets over Uttarakhand. Thunderstorm accompanied with hail & lightning likely at isolated places over Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim, Odisha, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Coastal Andhra Pradesh.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	.....	26.0	15.0	Kozhikode	.....	34.0	25.0
Ahmedabad	.....	26.0	15.0	Kurnool	.....	31.0	20.0
Aizawl	.....	00.0	00.0	Lucknow	.....	23.0	8.0
Allahabad	.....	24.0	11.0	Madurai	.....	33.0	23.0
Bengaluru	.....	26.0	18.0	Mangaluru	.....	35.0	22.0
Bhopal	.....	20.0	13.0	Mumbai	.....	30.0	16.0
Bhubaneswar	.....	25.0	16.0	Mysuru	.....	30.0	19.0
Chandigarh	.....	17.0	8.0	New Delhi	.....	23.0	5.0
Chennai	28.3	31.0	23.0	Patna	.....	21.0	11.0
Coimbatore	.....	31.0	23.0	Port Blair	.....	31.0	26.0
Dehradun	.....	18.0	7.0	Puducherry	9.6	32.0	21.0
Gangtok	.....	13.0	6.0	Pune	.....	31.0	13.0
Goa	.....	31.0	20.0	Raipur	.....	25.0	15.0
Guwahati	.....	00.0	00.0	Ranchi	.....	1.8	19.0
Hubballi	.....	29.0	18.0	Shillong	.....	.....	.....
Hyderabad	.....	27.0	19.0	Shimla	.....	10.0	1.0
Imphal	.....	.....	.....	Srinagar	.....	.....	.....
Jaipur	.....	19.0	10.0	Thiruvananthapuram	.....	33.0	24.0
Kochi	.....	32.0	25.0	Tiruchi	.....	31.0	23.0
Kohima	.....	.....	.....	Vijayawada	.....	29.0	21.0
Kolkata	.....	25.0	15.0	Visakhapatnam	.....	27.0	21.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>2</sub>	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE	Yesterday
Ahmedabad	26	16	37	142	119	■	In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Muzaffarpur, Bihar recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 450 indicating a severe level of pollution. In contrast, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 24.
Bengaluru	13	50	98	.....	87	■	
Chennai	7	36	88	54	.....	■	
Delhi	48	81	76	452	.....	■	
Hyderabad	2	54	41	83	77	■	
Kolkata	16	90	46	314	236	■	
Lucknow	65	33	94	418	.....	■	
Mumbai	10	77	53	282	194	■	
Pune	86	34	76	114	95	■	
Visakhapatnam	12	32	57	84	86	■	

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

**SO<sub>2</sub>:** Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

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

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

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

# Architects question land use change for Central Vista revamp

Reduction in recreational, public spaces and lack of scientific study flagged

DAMINI NATH NEW DELHI  
Several architects have raised concerns over the Centre’s proposed change of land-use of plots in the heart of Lutyens’ Delhi to make way for a new Parliament House, residences and office buildings, flagging the potential reduction in land for general public use as well as the lack of a scientific study to justify the amendment of the Master Plan for Delhi-2021 (MPD).

As part of the project, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on December 21, 2019 issued a notification inviting suggestions and objections to its proposed land-



**Big changes:** Over 115 people have sent in their objections to the proposed changes in land use for the project. ■ FILE PHOTO

use change in the Master Plan. A 9.5-acre-plot opposite the existing Parliament House, currently earmarked for recreational use, was proposed to be changed to “Parliament House”, and a

15-acre plot near South Block to “residential”. Comments were invited for a period of 30 days.

Earlier this week, a citizens’ and architects’ collective, Let India Breathe, start-

ed a campaign to encourage people to send in their objections to the DDA, said Yash Marwah, founder of the collective.

By Thursday evening, over 115 people, including architects, designers and citizens, had sent in their objections, which say: “there is a loss of at least 80 acres of land currently earmarked...directly or indirectly for the general public.”

Madhav Raman, one of the architects, said the DDA was proposing to amend the zonal development plan of the area without specifying how it would compensate for the loss of land for public use.

## Police file chargesheet in Unnao rape case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA UNNAO  
The Uttar Pradesh police on Wednesday submitted a chargesheet in a court here in connection with the death of the 23-year-old Unnao rape victim, who was allegedly set ablaze by five men.

Additional Superintendent of Police Vinod Kumar Pandey, who is heading a Special Investigation Team in the case, said: “There is ample proof against the five accused persons, and the chargesheet was prepared based on those evidences.”

The woman was airlifted to Delhi and admitted to Safdarjung Hospital with 90% burns, where she succumbed to her injuries on December 6, 2019.

The woman was set afire by five men, including two of her alleged rapists, on December 5, when she was going to Rae Bareilly to attend a court hearing in the rape case filed by her.

She had named Harishankar Trivedi, Ram Kishore Trivedi, Umesh Bajpai, Shivam Trivedi and Shubham Trivedi as the persons who set her on fire.

## Vacancy date no ground for seniority: SC

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI  
Seniority of an employee in public service is not to be calculated from the date when vacancy arose, but from the date of actual appointment, the Supreme Court held.

A three-judge Bench led by Justice R. Banumathi reiterated the law in a case of inter-se seniority dispute in the Manipur police service. “A person is disentitled to claim seniority from a date he was not borne in service,” the court said.

“A person cannot be said to have been recruited to the service only on the basis of initiation of the process of recruitment, but he is borne in the post only when formal appointment order is issued,” the court said.





## Berth pangs

In Maharashtra, disaffection within the coalition unduly delayed portfolio allocation

With its expansion on Monday, the Maharashtra Council of Ministers is now 43 strong: the three key partners of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA), the Shiv Sena, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and the Congress got 15, 16 and 12 berths in the Ministry, respectively. Ajit Pawar, the nephew of NCP chief Sharad Pawar who vaulted to the BJP camp to briefly become the Deputy CM, now holds the same post in the government, almost as if his act of defiance of the party leadership did not happen at all. The sharing of portfolios remains a bone of contention among partners and within each party. Chief Minister Udhav Thackeray could not meet the deadline he had himself set for announcing the portfolios, which was a day after the expansion. He will be able to arrive at an agreement with leaders of allies and party colleagues, but that will not necessarily end bad blood and resentment in the camp. The MVA is an unlikely alliance as the Sena does not share a common ideological platform with the other two parties. Sena, the oldest ally of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), turned against the latter not on any question of ideology but on disagreements over power-sharing. The three parties are now bound by a shared rivalry with the BJP, and they also have a limited shared agenda. The endurance of that agenda and their bonding will be constantly tested and the bickering over portfolio allocation is one such occasion. Home, Revenue and Finance portfolios lend Ministers considerable sway and there are always multiple claimants for them.

The MVA consolidated several social and economic interest groups that perceived a threat from the BJP, and has good reasons to stay together till it gets closer to the next election. The opportunism in this alliance apart, the peaceful mobilisation of protesters against the Citizenship Amendment Act in recent weeks without any hostility from the police was indicative of the significance of the MVA as a bulwark against the BJP. Hunger for power could be a potent adhesive, but also the source of disarray for the alliance. The birth pangs of the Thackeray government, which took oath on November 28 and took until December 12 for the first round of portfolio allocation, then until December 31 for the expansion of the council, must act as an alert for all leaders. The populous cohort of dynasts in the council, which includes the CM and his son, also points to an inherent contradiction of most non-BJP parties. The Congress has eight, the NCP seven and the Sena has three members including the CM, in the council, who have acquired power as inheritance at least in part. The BJP too had its share of dynasts when it was in power. However, in the absence of a strong ideological orientation, dynastic politics becomes more jarring in non-BJP parties even as it remains essential for their sustenance.

## A weak test

Swachh Survekshan should go beyond symbolism and adopt sustainability

The NDA government's Swachh Survekshan, the ranking system for clean cities, was rolled out four years ago as the answer to a problem that municipal law failed to solve. Sanitation and public health are responsibilities of State governments, and it is no secret that they have spectacularly failed at managing growing volumes of municipal and hazardous waste. The problem has only been compounded by the absence of plans that take a holistic view of housing, sanitation, water supply, waste management and transport. Ahead of the launch of Swachh Survekshan 2020, the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs is once again trying to stir up competition among cities, by pre-ranking them for their performance during 2019 and assigning points to be added this year. As an idea, unleashing the competitive spirit among States may seem appealing, but in reality, the problems confronting urban India require large-scale infrastructure creation, full adherence to legal requirements on waste management, and transparent technical audits. Many cities remain clueless on handling their waste, one shocking example being the rising mountain of garbage at the Ghazipur landfill in Delhi. Ironically, Bhopal, which figures among the top five cleanest cities under the just-released list, continues to live with the effects of the gas disaster of 1984. Ranks and prizes clearly cannot solve the national waste management crisis.

Looking ahead to the next edition of the Survekshan, the Urban Affairs Ministry has identified ambitious targets: "100% processing and safe disposal of waste, complete faecal sludge and septage management, and wastewater treatment and reuse." These are major tasks. The Ministry has also sanctioned funds under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) to help States set up facilities necessary to manage waste. States should ask for extended funding under such schemes to create the infrastructure for a future-focused clean-up and, simultaneously, institute measures to reduce waste. The emphasis worldwide is on creating a circular economy centred at the principle of material recovery from all kinds of waste, reuse, recycling and reduced pressure on natural resources. A sound ranking of cities and towns would naturally give the highest weightage to this dimension of sustainable management, replacing symbolism with an environmentally sound approach. Such rigour in policy formulation can make the Centre's goal of eliminating single-use plastic by 2022 seem more realistic, and industry would find a compelling reason to switch to alternatives. Retooling Swachh Survekshan 2020 to go beyond perception management and adopt sustainability is essential to make it a genuine contest.

# In the ruins of unilateralism

Developments in 2019 suggest that the U.S.'s ability to shape global politics is clearly receding



STANLY JOHNY

If one looks for an overarching theme that defined global politics in 2019, one might settle for protests. Angry crowds, especially the youth, revolted against the establishment in several parts of the world – from Santiago to Hong Kong, Beirut and New Delhi. But the year also saw some defining trends in geopolitics as well such as China's growing assertiveness both in trade and foreign policy, Iran's dangerously aggressive, yet calculated, behaviour, and the rise of Turkey as a new power pole in West Asia. The most important of them all, however, was the relative decline in America's power, which was manifested through a number of crises during the year.

The U.S. is the world's mightiest military power and arguably the centre of the post-Soviet world order. In the 1990s, the U.S.'s dominance was at its peak with international and multilateral organisations getting overshadowed by its pre-eminence. In 2001, after the September 11 terrorist attacks, it got international support for its war in Afghanistan. In 2003, the U.S. went ahead with the plan to bomb Iraq despite the UN opposition, reminding the world of imperial invasions. But the global situation is different, and more complex today.

### The Afghan experience

Changes under way over the past decade picked up pace in 2019, showing cracks in the post-Soviet order. At least three developments in 2019 suggested that the U.S.'s

ability to shape global politics is clearly receding.

The U.S. went to Afghanistan in October 2001, with a vow to destroy al-Qaeda and topple the Taliban regime. Seventeen years later, the U.S., desperate to get out of a stalemated conflict, started direct negotiations with the Taliban. The talks almost led to a settlement last year, with both sides agreeing to a draft agreement under which the U.S. would pull out most of its troops from Afghanistan in return for assurances from the Taliban that it would not allow Afghan soil to be used by transnational terrorists. The agreement, however, was not signed as President Donald Trump cancelled the peace process in September after an American soldier was killed in a Taliban attack. A few weeks later, Mr. Trump resumed the talks.

The whole Afghan experience shows how the U.S. botched up the war. The U.S. has a superior hand in conventional warfare. But winning a war abroad is not just about toppling a hostile regime, but also about stabilising the country after the regime is toppled. The U.S., history shows, is good at the former but fares poorly in the latter. It is now left with no other option but to reach an agreement with the Taliban for a face-saving exit. That would leave Kabul's fragile, faction-ridden government exposed to the Taliban insurgency, just like the Mohammed Najibullah government was left to the Afghan Mujahideen in 1989 after the Soviet withdrawal. The Soviet Union disintegrated in two years, and Najibullah's government collapsed after a few months.

### The Iran stand-off

The latest spell in the U.S.-Iran tensions was triggered by President Trump's unilateral decision to pull



the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018. Mr. Trump's plan was to put "maximum pressure" on Iran through sanctions and force Tehran to renegotiate the nuclear deal. But Iran countered it through "maximum resistance", instead of giving in.

The year 2019 saw Iran repeatedly provoking the U.S. and its allies. It shot down an American drone over the Gulf in June, captured a British tanker in July and is believed to have either carried out or orchestrated multiple attacks on oil tankers that pass through the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway that connects the oil-rich Gulf with the Arabian Sea through the Gulf of Oman. In September, two Saudi oil facilities came under attack, which temporarily cut the kingdom's oil output by half. Iran was blamed for the attacks.

The attacks on Saudi facilities challenged the post-war partnership between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia that guaranteed American protection to the kingdom. Still, the only counter-measure the U.S. took in response to Iran's growing provocations was imposing more sanctions. One can argue that the U.S.'s subdued response doesn't have anything to do with a decline in its power but is rather due to the reluctance of the sitting President to launch new wars. Even if one

# When defection is a mere detour for an MLA

It is possible to avoid Karnataka-like incidents if MLAs jumping ship are completely disqualified for six years



S.Y. QURAISHI

They defected, re-contested, and became members again, all in six months. Some are even likely to become Ministers soon.

The Karnataka byelection results have widely put to display the ineffectiveness of the Anti-Defection Law. Of the 17 defecting Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) MLAs, 11 were re-elected on a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ticket. Not only did this set of events lay down a well-structured framework to sidestep the law, it even set a dangerous precedent for neutralising the consequences of the law altogether.

The phenomenon of defections is not new to Indian politics. It has been plaguing the political landscape for over five decades. The most prominent case was that of Haryana's Gaya Lal, originally an independent MLA who, in 1967, juggled between the Congress and

Janata Party for two weeks, during which he switched his loyalty thrice. The recurrence of this evil phenomenon led to the 1985 Anti-Defection Law, which defined three grounds of disqualification of MLAs – giving up party membership; going against party whip; and abstaining from voting.

### Resignation not a condition

Resignation as MLA was not one of the conditions. Exploiting this loophole, the 17 rebel MLAs in Karnataka resigned, their act aimed at ending the majority of the ruling coalition and, at the same time, avoiding disqualification. However, the Speaker refused to accept the resignations and declared them disqualified. This was possible as the legislation empowers the presiding officer of the House (i.e. the Speaker) to decide on complaints of defection under no time constraint.

The law originally protected the Speaker's decision from judicial review. However, this safeguard was struck down in *Kihoto Hollohan v. Zachillhu and Others* (1992). While the SC upheld the Speaker's discretionary power, it underscored that the Speaker functioned as a tribunal under the anti-



defection law, thereby making her/his decisions subject to judicial review. This judgment enabled judiciary to become the watchdog of the anti-defection law, instead of the Speaker, who increasingly had become a political character contrary to the expected neutral constitutional role. The same could be witnessed in *Shrimanth Balasaheb Patel & Ors vs Speaker Karnataka Legislative Assembly & Ors* (2019), where the three-judge SC bench upheld the then Karnataka Speaker's decision of disqualification of the 17 rebel MLAs. Ho-

wever, it struck down his ban on the MLAs from contesting elections till 2023, negating the only possible permanent solution to the problem. The Supreme Court played the role of a neutral umpire in this political slugfest. But, the spectacle of MLAs hoarded in a bus, and being sent to a resort, openly exposed not just the absence of ideological ties between a leader and his party, but also her/his weak moral character. It was also upsetting to see public acceptance of such malpractices as part of politics, with some even calling it *Chanakya niti*!

### Exit, and swift return

The Anti-Defection Law provided a safeguard for defections made on genuine ideological differences. It accepted "split" within a party if at least one-third of the members of the legislative party defect, and allowed the formation of a new party or "merger" with other political party if not less than two-thirds of the party's members commit to it. The 91st Constitutional Amendment introduced in 2003 deleted the provision allowing split.

The 91st Amendment also barred the appointment of defe-

military in NATO, purchased S-400 missile defence system from Russia, NATO's primary enemy and the main geopolitical rival of the U.S., despite protests from the West. The U.S. expelled Turkey from the F-35 stealth fighter programme and has threatened to impose sanctions for the deal. It says Russia could use the system radars to spy on the F-35 jets. Turkey didn't give in. It now says it could buy Su-57 jets from Russia if the U.S. does not lift the ban on F-35 sales. Moreover, in response to sanctions threats, Turkey has vowed to shut two U.S. bases in the country, which would mean a split within NATO.

These incidents do not mean that the U.S.'s dominance over global politics is over. But they do show that America's long wars and its inability to shape post-war outcomes are impacting its stature in an international system that centres around it. If one translates Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory into geopolitics, the U.S., the core of the strategic world system, is facing revolts in the periphery. If in the 1990s and early 2000s, the periphery continued to be dependent on the core and thereby sustained what Wallerstein called the "unequal exchange" between the two, the sands are shifting now. And this is happening at a time when new economic powers (China, for example) are on the rise and an old military power (Russia) is making a comeback. The relative decline in America's power coupled with the rise of new and old powers point to a structural churning in the post-Cold War order. In the world system, the core has never been static. Hegemony of a single power is temporary.

stanly.johny@thehindu.co.in

## 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.

### Lander in a hurry?

Chandrayaan-2 cost a whopping ₹978 crore and, with the crash landing of Vikram, the entire project turned out to be a waste of not only the hard-earned money of the taxpayers but also the efforts of the space scientists ("Vikram was not designed to handle large spike in speed," Jan. 02). Now, when ISRO is planning another moon mission, it is shocking to learn from the organisation's chairman K. Sivan that Vikram lander 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 and that they have now corrected this problem in the new modules of Chandrayaan-3. Does this mean that the earlier mission was undertaken on

a trial and error basis and that the ISRO team had not done their homework properly before the launch? While admitting that they have learnt their lessons from the failure, Mr. Sivan has contradicted his own statement by denying that Chandrayaan-2 was launched without doing thorough tests. One also wants to know the reasons why ISRO had to launch such a huge and prestigious lunar mission at an astronomical cost in such a great hurry, even before conducting thorough tests. SHALINI GERALD, Chennai

### Right to protest

Protests are an 'essential dimension' of mankind. In fact, they are intrinsic to human existence. To put it in a familiar idiom, the history of mankind is a history of protests. Humans protest not just as individuals but as groups, communities and nations.

They usually protest against something they perceive or believe to be harmful to them. The ongoing protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act seem to be the most significant in post-independent India. They have come as a bolt from the blue to the government that mistook its election victories as a licence to reshape the country to its will. The rightness of the cause – India's continued existence as a secular and pluralist democracy – has thwarted the attempts by some to give the protests a communal colour, lamentably with the aid of sections of the media. Humanitarianism underlies these animated protests ("An anatomy of anti-CAA protests," Jan. 1). G. DAVID MILTON, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

■ The CAA was introduced as if it wasn't going to adversely affect the Muslim

community. Concurrently, the BJP government kept insisting that CAA should be linked to NRC. Perhaps, the Centre wouldn't have anticipated that the protests would quickly escalate and fire up across India. These rallies only underline the anti-Constitution attitude of the Narendra Modi government. There is little doubt that the CAA has been intentionally introduced to sidetrack people from real issues, particularly the severe economic slowdown. The civil society, rightly so, is posing fundamental questions about India's political existence as a constitutional democracy. Indeed, this assertion of the civil society is going to determine the political fate of India in the near future. R. SIVAKUMAR, Chennai

The CAA was drafted with the good intention of helping helpless minorities in the neighbouring nations where

they were ill-treated. The media, which has been extremely critical of the Act, should recognise that there is a huge section of India's silent majority getting disappointed by these rallies and the undue coverage given to them. V.S. GANESAN, Bengaluru

### Diplomatic capital

One of the prime achievements of Indian democracy is its friendly and peaceful relations with other nations despite the hostility of some of them towards India. In this regard, the contributions of first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >>The report headlined "CBI books cases against Rayapati for 'cheating' bank" (Jan. 1, 2020) erroneously said Transstroy India (Ltd.) had been accused of cheating, criminal breach of trust involving an amount of ₹ 264.31 plus interest. It should have been ₹ 264.31 crore plus interest.

>>An OPED page article titled "The abiding power of protest" (Jan. 2, 2020) made a reference to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assertion that the economy is poised to attain the \$5 billion mark. It should have been \$5 trillion.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in



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cannot be ignored. It is really intriguing that Mr. Modi, who initially invested so much efforts in reaching out to world leaders, is prepared to antagonise them all with highly regressive laws like the CAA which his government later justifies as 'internal affairs'. (Editorial page, "The new worry of depleting diplomatic capital," Jan. 2). India's earlier policies of 'panchsheel' and non-alignment, though framed for the Cold War era, are as important now as before. P.J. THOMAS, Kottayam, Kerala



Should the FM tweak direct taxes to spur the economy?

PARLEY

A small reduction will not impact slowdown, but may provide some relief to the salaried class

With the Union Budget due in February, the focus is on tax measures that the Finance Minister may take to address the slowdown, especially in consumption. In a discussion moderated by Suresh Seshadri, D.K. Srivastava and Surajit Mazumdar look at the possibility of changes in the income tax framework in the wake of recommendations submitted in August by a committee to review the direct tax regime. Edited excerpts:

What is the likelihood of changes to the direct taxes regime, including in income tax? And what would the rationale be?

D.K. Srivastava: We have to evaluate options available to the government, in terms of the overall situation of government finances as well as in terms of the challenges to economic growth. So far, no fiscal stimulus [measures] that have been announced from time to time have delivered any result. The monetary stimulus, which has been going on since the beginning of 2019, has also not delivered any result. So, the momentum of slowdown appears to be continuing. And the impact of that is on government revenues, particularly Central government tax revenues, which will also impact the State governments.

So, in some sense, we now have a conflict. The conflict is that if we tend to reduce the income tax rates and bring them, at least the highest rate, in alignment with the lower CIT (corporate income tax) rate, then there would be a revenue loss. At the same time, there would be some additional disposable income in the hands of middle-income groups, who may increase their consumption, which would be a benefit. So, lower capacity for the government to make direct increases in expenditure, but it has an indirect capacity, which it can put in the hands of the personal income tax assesseees. So, we have to now evaluate this balance.

My assessment is that the impact on government revenues, particularly the Central government's gross tax revenues, is going to be very

huge because of the under-performance of indirect taxes and because of the revenue impact of CIT. As such, the options available for the government may be very limited and in that sense, whatever income tax reforms may have to be undertaken will have to be modulated to recognise the constraints that are operating on the Indian economy.

The task force on the direct tax code is reported to have recommended an increase in the number of income tax slabs including some rationalisation in the rates and an increase in the peak rate for the highest earners. Does this move the income tax regime to a more progressive one?

Surajit Mazumdar: I think there's always a case for changing our slab structure to make it a little bit more progressive than it actually happens to be at the moment because there's a very large range of incomes which happen to be taxed at the same rate. However, if the idea is to reduce the revenues that the state is going to get from income taxes because of concessions, then I think that hardly solves the problem that we are facing in the economy today, for several reasons: First, if you reduce the income tax, and correspondingly cover for the revenue loss by reducing spending by the government, then it really has no effect ultimately on the total expenditure in the economy because you're replacing one expenditure with another - a certain expenditure with a more uncertain expenditure. Second, how many people pay income tax in this country? Roughly about 6 crore people file income tax returns. Within that 6 crore almost 5 crore pay practically no tax. So it's a very small proportion of your population which is going to be affected by any reduction in income tax. And the problem for the economy today is that its demand base is too narrow. So if you try and expand demand only in that narrow base, that's not necessarily a resolution of the problem of the slowdown that you're facing.

Overall personal income taxes ac-



count for less than 2.5% of the GDP. So even if you make a small reduction in that, it's really not going to have any significant impact on the slowdown. In the longer term, however, I think we are in an economy in which we have a tax structure that is too heavily weighted in favour of indirect taxes as well as a low tax-to-GDP ratio. So, in the longer run, we should be moving towards a larger proportion of direct taxes. And, therefore, a reduction in direct taxes is not the way to go either in the short term or in the long term.

There have been attempts in the past as well to usher in reforms on the direct taxes front. Now, given the current fiscal constraints, again there is a problem. But then there would also be a school of opinion which would say: 'The fiscal pressure can't get worse than this. So probably bite the bullet now'.

DKS: A good framework would be to put in perspective what is the long-term reform that we want in the case of direct taxes. Now, as far as CIT is concerned, already the major step has been taken. And there has been a significant reduction in the CIT rates in order to attract foreign investors, foreign companies to set up their operations in India. So far, there has been a very lukewarm response. But nevertheless, I think we have to give this entire in-

To increase both demand and investment, the government could reduce its revenue deficit, reduce its dissaving, but spend on creating assets, particularly infrastructure assets

D.K. SRIVASTAVA

itiative some time. Now, having already considered that for CIT rates the norm is going to be 25%, with a conditionality for new manufacturing companies at 15%, we may not be able to keep, in the long run, our personal income tax rates, particularly the highest slab rate, much out of alignment with the CIT rate.

So, in some sense what the Ministry of Finance needs to do is at least indicate to us what is the desired long-term framework that the government is looking at, even if the present constraints may not allow us to go all the way towards that framework. In my view, the CIT rate predetermines, in some sense, the options that are available for the personal income tax (PIT) rates.

We should not actually increase our exemption limit because of the whole issue of how many people are our tax assesseees. If we keep increasing the exemption limit, then obviously our tax base would become narrower. So while keeping the exemption limit where it is, maybe allow a small inflation adjustment. But other than that, I think the options are going to be very limited as far as PIT is concerned.

There are also suggestions that you need to try and move towards a more flat rate on income taxes.

SM: If you look at taxes as a whole, the base is a lot wider than it is for personal income tax directly. Because a substantial part of our taxes, two-thirds of our tax revenues - Central and State governments' - come from indirect taxes, which are paid by sections of the population which may not be covered under personal income tax. So, if you have this kind of a structure where you have a flat rate of personal income tax and a substantial dependence on indirect taxes, then that is something that makes the tax structure pretty regressive. And that's not a desirable result from an equity perspective or even from a growth perspective. If you look at the trajectory of the Indian economy, even in periods of relatively better growth, the reason you're not able to sustain that high growth is that the kind of distribution of income resulting from that growth is too skewed in favour of a relatively small section of the population. And if that is the outcome, you have a dependence on a very narrow demand base, which is what is leading to the problem that you're facing today. So, if you are going to address that problem, then your tax structure has to become more progressive rather than regressive. So, I would not be in favour of a flat income tax structure. I would think that there is much greater scope to improve compliance, not necessarily by a reduction in rates or having a flat rate, but by having a proper tax administration and improving the efficiency of the tax administration.

With respect to direct taxes, is the Budget going to be more one of making policy statements and less of actual measures that would make a difference to people's pockets?

DKS: Yes, I think in the case of direct taxes, the Budget will only spell out incremental changes in the PIT structure; CIT there may not be much because already most of the action has taken place. And I think the constraint on stimulating demand is very, very severe. And the policy options available for the Cen-

tral government are also, therefore, very limited. I see one method, which is also both short term and long term, that may deliver the Indian economy closer to its potential growth, and that is to start looking at the structure of government expenditure. Now, if you look at the entire saving-investment decline, which actually began from 2007-08, you will find that there are two major sectors where this has happened. One is the household sector and the other is the public sector or government sector proper. Overall savings rate erosion has been about six to seven percentage points. Half of that is due to the household sector fall in saving, and the other half is in the public sector, particularly government savings. And within the government, it is erosion in the Central government saving or increase in Central government dissaving.

Now, one way in which we can both increase demand and increase investment is for the government to really reduce its revenue deficit, reduce its dissaving, but spend on creating assets, particularly infrastructure assets.

In order to reinvigorate social sector spending, whether it's in skills training, education or healthcare, what do you think can be done using the framework of taxation to move the needle?

SM: My view is rather contrary to the dominant view that governs policymaking. I think we need to move in the direction of greater government expenditure on all these sectors and therefore, greater revenue mobilisation also, which is also consistent with the objective of reducing the inequalities that exist in our society. So, to redress that inequality as well as to allow the government to spend more on sectors that need expenditures, one has to at least use fiscal policy. We are not having any radical programme of asset redistribution in the economy. At least, fiscal policy has to be used in a redistributive sense: in the sense of taxing those who are taking a large part of the cake and spending it on activities which bring benefits to others, but more importantly, create assets and circumstances in which sustainable long-term growth and development can happen.



D.K. Srivastava is chief policy advisor of EY India. He was a member of the Twelfth Finance Commission



Surajit Mazumdar is professor of Economics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi



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Minimising the housing divide

India requires an integrated housing development strategy for the rural context

M. MAHADEVA

Notwithstanding growing disparities of material status in India, there is a framework to mitigate the country's socioeconomic problems and create a common development platform for rural and urban areas. This is called the Provision of Urban Amenities to Rural Areas (PURA). The realisation of PURA's transformative potential depends on public policies that recognise that its design goes beyond the mere creation of economic infrastructure and employment opportunities in rural areas. It also aims to develop social infrastructure.

Market interventions

To further this paradigm, access to good housing, including housing amenities, should become a priority. Unfortunately, housing in rural areas is one sector that has consistently suffered from the lack of meaningful market interventions, including supply of developed land and financing for housing. This is not to say that India never pursued effective poverty alleviation measures, but that the interventions it carried out have hardly worked in minimising urban-rural divides. Due to incompatibilities in supply and demand, millions of Indians dwell in unsecured housing. This was largely driven by shortages in the supply of housing and a lack of redevelopment of collapsible or dilapidated units.

Officially, the incidence of this form of housing-related poverty is in the order of 25.85 million (82% in rural areas and 18% in urban). Menial occupation workers and low-income earners have been facing these forms of poverty the most. Thus, development interventions must focus on rural and urban areas with due consideration for new construction and redevelopment of existing, life-threatening units.

Dilapidated units have contributed towards a high level of housing amenities deprivation, especially because they cannot safely be connected with electricity or solar energy, latrines, and drinking water, owing to associated structural risks. This scenario has resulted in multiple deprivations of 45% of rural families without electricity, biogas and LPG; over 69%

without household latrines; and over 82% of families without treated water for drinking at household levels. Thus, the composite deprivation is in the order of over 58%. However, the regional picture depicts two contrasting scenarios of lower and higher levels, respectively, in 19 and nine independent States. The lower range of deprivations is at 20.68-52.65% and higher range at 60.19-74.81%. These results only speak to the priority in the political agenda, the exhibition of political will, and the economics of resource allocation in the administration of anti-poverty policies. In such a scenario there have been higher rates of internal migration both due to dissatisfaction with housing arrangements and the prospect of better housing elsewhere.

The way forward

If India is to have a real chance to minimise the housing development divide, it requires an integrated housing development strategy for the rural context, to be implemented in "mission mode". Such a mission should have, first, a definite time frame. Second, it requires political will as expressed in party election manifestos. There must also be accountability in terms of implementing such a mission agenda on a continuous basis, with social audits at multiple levels of governance. Third, a realistic resource allocation is required given the cost of redevelopment and new housing units besides other development costs of drinking water supply, household latrines, energy, and drainage connectivity. Fourth, penetration of the market, including the cooperative sector for the supply of critical inputs such as land and finances, is the need of the hour. Public-private-partnership projects should be encouraged on public or government-owned lands, with fiscal and other incentives. Land owners should be encouraged to develop incentive-based affordable housing projects. Last, the people facing housing poverty must be made partners. Micro finance and self-help groups could be roped in to this end.

M. Mahadeva was with the Research Faculty of Economics at the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bengaluru



NOTEBOOK

Piggybacking on open source and open data

How the learning curve for political and data journalists got flattened

SRINIVASAN RAMANI

Elections and electoral results occupy a key slot among the events that animate our regular coverage. From ground reportage to data-based analyses, The Hindu strives to bring to its readers all the features of what is probably the most vibrant aspect of India's electoral democracy.

Today, thanks to the Election Commission's website, finding out the rural-urban difference in voter choice and the regional break-up of the mandate and obtaining minute-by-minute coverage of the electoral results is possible due to advanced data visualisation tools. Most TV channels depend on third-party agencies to provide them regular updates from polling booths for their live coverage of election results, but newspaper websites rely extensively on EC data. This method is slower than the updates given by

agencies, but it is more thorough and accurate.

The print edition is the best place to provide context and analyses of electoral results. For example, geographical analyses of the recent Jharkhand results using Census data showed that it was not just traditional weakness in rural areas or lack of adequate tribal support that put paid to the ruling BJP's hope of retaining power, but an urban backlash too.

The creation of both live and static electoral maps is not an altogether difficult exercise for a software coder, but it is a steep learning curve for a political journalist, whose job is to interpret the data and present conclusions. When I first wanted to present electoral data in a readable constituency map format nearly eight years ago, there were many technical hurdles. Downloading live electoral data from the EC website required knowledge of web

scraping tools. Visualising this information in the form of both static and live electoral maps required a familiarity with web GIS tools. There was also the additional and seemingly insurmountable problem of having no shapefiles (map contours) for newly delimited constituencies. The EC had provided shapefiles for seats before the delimitation exercise in 2009, but there was no non-proprietary shapefile available for the post-2009 constituency boundaries.

However, thanks to an open source data community, DataMeet, this problem was sorted out. Somewhere around 2013, a hackathon involving geocoders and GIS specialists managed to recreate Assembly and parliamentary shapefiles that were released with a creative commons licence for public use. Once shapefiles were available, the job of visualising data became much easier thanks to the

availability of free tools such as Google Fusion Tables. I also managed to write a web scraper for the ECI website using my rudimentary programming skills, besides taking recourse to the availability of similar code in repositories such as GitHub. It was a web programmer from Iceland who helped me refine the code.

Today, The Hindu provides live data in maps on the website besides deep and structured analyses of electoral results on print after every election. Comparisons with past data are also readily done using EC data that are also in easily reusable forms in repositories such as the Ashoka University's Trivedi Centre for Political Data. The presence and the work of the open source data and coding communities who provided the stepping stones for us is the key reason why the process is now seamless and relatively easy.

The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 3, 1970

'Arabs preparing for war with Israel'

President Nasser said here [Khartoum] yesterday [January 1] the Arabs were preparing for a showdown war against Israel, with 500,000 men already at the front and a force of one million in the making. Addressing a wildly cheering rally of 60,000 people in the course of a 36-hour visit to the Sudanese capital, he said he was here "almost three years after the black days of June 1967 to tell you that the entire Arab nation is determined to launch the struggle until victory is achieved." In the course of his 60-minute speech, Mr. Nasser condemned the U.S. for supporting Israel, but praised both the Soviet Union and France for their backing. If it were not for Soviet help, he said, Egypt would have been reduced to nothing. "We would have been at the mercy of our enemies. We thank the Soviet Union for all its support, not only in the form of arms, but also political support." Mr. Nasser paid tribute to France which, he said, supported the Arabs by demanding complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Arab lands.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 3, 1920.

Congress and Conference.

(From an Editorial)

Mr. Bonar Law's big "meeting", if the Congress of inconsiderables, extremists, and others of that ilk could arrogate to itself that title, has now finished. That the occasion was a momentous one was emphasised by Mr. Bonar Law's phrase indicative of the apprehension of the Government at home. It is possible that the school of administrators whose official life is one long-drawn thrill of panic, who see rebellion in the brawl and revolution in a hot word, expected the Congress to add fuel to the fire, drive to the verge of exasperation a people who have enjoyed the blessings of five years of O'Dwyerism with the crowning mercy of a short, if satisfying, spell of Dyerism. The event has shown that even the Punjab authorities can gauge a situation approximately and the wise courage of Sir Edward Maclagan in allowing the Congress to be held at the Calvary of the Punjab was amply justified. Chastened Punjab has found its soul. General Dyer with his thousand odd rounds of hall cartridge has done more for Indian nationalism than have two decades of political propaganda. The impartiality with which he shot down men of all creeds and communities has served in the common suffering to make them realise their brother-hood as perhaps never before.



FROM PAGE ONE

## NCLAT decision is a recipe for disaster: Tatas

The NCLAT’s conclusions are based on an error that the Tata Sons continued to be a public company. The areas of the tribunal’s enquiries were clearly beyond its realm, the appeal said.

Besides, it said the NCLAT imposed an “unwarranted and unsolicited consultative process” upon the Tata Group by requiring it to consult minority stakeholder Shapoorji Pallonji Group before appointing anyone as Executive Chairman. Mr. Mistry is a scion of the Shapoorji Pallonji Group.

“The judgment has rewritten the Articles of Tata Sons, where the majority

shareholders are subject to the minority, capsizing the fundamental rule of corporate democracy,” the appeal said.

Further, it challenged the restraint imposed by NCLAT on Ratan N. Tata and the nominee of the “Tata Trusts” “from taking any decision in advance which requires majority decision of the Board of Directors or in the Annual General Meeting”. It said such a direction was “wholly nebulous and seeks to stifle the exercise of rights of the shareholders and board members, resulting in their disenfranchisement which cripples corporate democracy”.

## AIADMK suffers a setback in rural polls

The largest tally for the AIADMK was from Thoothukudi with 43 seats, Thanjavur (40) and Theni (38).

The DMK’s allies, the Congress and the CPI, won 39 and 24 seats respectively in panchayat unions. The AIADMK’s allies, the DMDK and the BJP, won in 33 and 24 seats.

There are a total of 5,090 seats for the post of panchayat union ward members across the 27 districts where

polls were held.

The DMK also won 15 seats for the post of district panchayat ward members, while the AIADMK won 6. The BJP, the CPI and the CPI (M) won one seat each out of the total tally of 24 for which results were announced. There are a total of 515 seats in this category. Except a few districts, the two parties were neck and neck with the counting continuing well past midnight.

## Saryu to pursue charges against Raghubar Das

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Former Jharkhand Minister and Independent lawmaker Saryu Rai, who had defeated former chief minister Raghubar Das in the recent Assembly elections, on Thursday said he is going to follow up with the Hemant Soren-led government on

his allegation that important government files were being destroyed by the previous government before the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-led alliance government took charge. “The Chief Secretary assured me that an investigation committee has been constituted,” Mr. Rai told *The Hindu*.



## Devi Prasad Tripathi passes away

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Devi Prasad Tripathi, general secretary of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), passed away here on Thursday. Widely renowned for his erudition and oratory, Tripathi, 70, was the party Rajya Sabha member from 2012 to 2016.

Tripathi had been ailing from cancer for the last three years. He is survived by his wife and three sons.

“He was a guide and mentor to all of us. We will miss his wise counsel and guidance which he had given us from the day NCP was established,” said Supriya Sule, Lok Sabha MP for Baramati.

Also known as DPT by his friends and colleagues, Tripathi was born in Sultanpur, Uttar Pradesh, and grew up in Howrah and was educated at the Allahabad University and the Jawaharlal Nehru University where he became the president of the JNU Students Union (JNUSU) during the Emergency.

Despite his congenital near-blind condition, Tripathi overcame his physical limitations and achieved academic excellence. He began his political career as an adviser to Rajiv Gandhi in 1983.

He became a founding member of the NCP alongside Sharad Pawar and P.A. Sangma because of differences with the Congress leadership in 1999.

## Mehbooba’s daughter claims she was detained

Iltija Mufti says she was not allowed to leave her Srinagar residence to visit grandfather’s grave

**PEERZADA ASHIQ**  
SRINAGAR

Iltija Mufti, daughter of the former Chief Minister and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti, on Thursday alleged that she had been detained in her Srinagar residence and barred from visiting the graveyard where her grandfather Mufti Mohammad Sayeed is buried. The police, however, said she had not followed the protocol laid down for Special Security Group (SSG) protectees.

“I informed the SSG around 11.30 a.m. about my intention to visit the graveyard of my grandfather in south Kashmir’s Bijbehara,” Ms. Mufti said. “I was told I



**On alert:** Policemen checking vehicles in Srinagar amid a row over the detaining of Iltija Mufti on Thursday. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

cannot as the Director, SSG had passed such orders. I was thereafter detained and not allowed to step out of my home. I offered to drive in a private vehicle, which was also declined,” Ms. Mufti,

who has been a vocal face for the detained PDP leader since the revocation of J&K’s special status and who also runs her mother’s Twitter handle, told *The Hindu*.

Ms. Mufti, who has been

## Government rejigs team handling Ayodhya issue

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs reorganised its departments, delegating the charge of the Ayodhya desk to the Jammu-Kashmir and Ladakh (JKL) Affairs Division, according to an internal order of the Ministry.

Earlier, all matters relating to the Ayodhya dispute and the litigation in the Supreme Court were handled by the Internal Security Division-II. The order says the Internal Security Division-II has been merged with the Internal Security Division-I.

The JKL Division is headed by Additional Secretary Gyanesh Kumar, who played a key role in the decision to withdraw the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and split the erstwhile State into two UTs.

“The Ayodhya matters

and the related court judgments will be put up by the Deputy Secretary to the Additional Secretary (JKL) through the Joint Secretary (JKL),” the order reads.

Joint Secretary (Women Safety) Punya Salila Srivastava has been given the additional charge of the merged Internal Security Division-I.

The Ministry is working on the modalities for establishing a trust for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya, as mandated by the Supreme Court in its November 9, 2019 ruling in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case.

The trust must be set up within three months of the order.

The court asked the government to formulate a scheme for setting up a trust.

## India, Nepal to hold talks on Kalapani

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Nepal and India will resolve the Kalapani border issue through dialogue, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday.

At the weekly press interaction, the official spokesperson of the Ministry said the latest political map of India reflects the sovereign territory of India.

“Our map depicts the sovereign territory of India. The new map in no manner revised our boundary with Nepal. The boundary delineation exercise with Nepal is ongoing under the existing mechanism,” said Raveesh Kumar highlighting India’s position on the Kalapani region of Uttarakhand. The issue was raised after India published a new political map.

## 19 CBI officials transferred or given additional charge

Abhay Singh moved to Delhi

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

In a reshuffle, 19 officials of the CBI have been transferred or given additional charge.

Abhay Singh, DIG, who is supervising the investigation in the Muzaffarpur shelter-home sexual assault cases, has been sent to the Economic Offences Wing (Delhi) from the Special Crime Branch (Kolkata).

Nitin Deep Baggan, DGP, who heads the Anti-Corruption unit, has been given the additional charge of Anti-Corruption-V unit.

Assistant Inspector-General (Policy) Vivek Priyadarshi has been transferred to Jaipur. Partha Mukherjee, SP of the Economic Offences-IV unit in Kolkata, will replace him.

Vijayendra Bidari, SP in Economic Offences-III, has been shifted to the Interpol Coordination unit. He has also been given the charge of systems wing.

**Anti-corruption unit**

Kiran S., SP, part of the team pursuing the Augusta-Westland and the Vijay Malaya cases, has been posted in the Anti-Corruption-V unit.

Among the others transferred or allocated additional charge are Jayadevan A, Sudhanshu Dhar Mishra, P.K. Manjhi, Jay Narayan Rana, Santanu Kar, P.K. Pandey, Abhishek Dular, Anoop T. Mathew, Rajpal Meena and Shiyas A, SPs.

At the Addl. SP level, Sanjay Kumar Sinha, Gajanan Bairwa and S.D. Mishra have been transferred.

## RSS-affiliated trade union calls for protests

BMS to fight Modi govt. policies

**VARGHESE K GEORGE**  
NEW DELHI

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-affiliated trade union Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) has called for protests at all district headquarters on Friday against several policy measures of the Narendra Modi government.

“There are many people in the Sangh Parivar and the BJP who think that there must be an alternative approach to growth and development. We are trying to persuade the government to see our side,” Saji Narayanan, national president of the BMS, told *The Hindu*.

“An acute form of capitalism has achieved the status of religion and there is no compassion or consideration for the workers in this approach,” he said, calling

for a change. The BMS has demanded that the Modi government must stop “privatisation, corporatisation, strategic sale and disinvestment of public sector enterprises”.

A charter of demands released by the BMS said its concerns included the “proposed corporatisation of Railways, Defence and Postal and privatisation of State transport sector and electricity boards”.

The union wants an end to the Foreign Direct Investment and has called for the removal of provisions of the Industrial Relations Code and “other codes that discriminate against the workers in favour of industries”.

“When work and wages are protected, there will be more demand and growth,” Mr. Narayanan said.

## Gehlot asks Harsh Vardhan to visit Kota hospital

Ensure no more infants die, Sonia tells Rajasthan govt.

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday conveyed to the Rajasthan government that no State-run hospital should report any infant death because of poor facilities or negligence, said State party incharge Avinash Pande after briefing her on the recent deaths in a government hospital in Kota.

“Soniji is sensitive to these infant deaths. She has directed the State

government and Chief Minister [Ashok Gehlot] that there should not be a single infant death in the future because of medical negligence or lack of facilities,” Mr. Pande told *The Hindu*.

“The BJP is trying to distract the attention of the people from burning issues like the CAA and the NRC. As I said we don’t justify a single death but the numbers are far lower than during the BJP government.”



**Ward in focus:** Patients at the J.K. Lon hospital in Kota district on Thursday. ■ PTI

Mr. Gehlot said his government was sensitive to the situation in Kota, and claimed that some “mischievous elements” were highlighting the issue to divert attention from other important subjects.

He asked the Opposition

parties not to indulge in politics, while pointing out that infant mortality in the hospital was steadily declining.

“We will try to reduce it further. It is our top priority to keep mothers and children healthy... An expert

team of the Centre is welcome to visit and help improve health services. We are ready to consult them and work with their cooperation,” Mr. Gehlot tweeted.

Mr. Gehlot said: “Harsh Vardhanji is himself a doctor

and if he visits the hospital in Kota, it will also clarify the situation for people, who are giving [their] reactions mischievously, knowingly, unknowingly and also innocently.”

The Centre has decided to

send a high-level team comprising experts from AIIMS, Jodhpur, and health economists to the hospital to assess the infrastructure gaps and decide on the measures to be taken to prevent further deaths.

## Giriraj Singh’s remark on ‘sanskriti’ sparks row

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
PATNA

Union Minister Giriraj Singh stoked a fresh controversy on Thursday with his statement that “most of the missionary school students qualify for IIT, become engineers but eat beef in foreign countries.”

Opposition parties slammed Mr. Singh for his “uncalled-for statement”.

“Students who go to missionary schools qualify for IIT and become engineers, but when they go abroad most of them start eating beef because they do not know about our *sanskriti* and *sanskriti* (traditional values and culture),” Mr. Singh said at a gathering in Begusarai on Thursday.

“I would say a *sloka* (hymn) of the Bhagavad Gita must be taught in every

school,” said the Union Minister for Animal Husbandry, Dairy and Fisheries.

Opposition party leaders in Bihar were quick to slam him for “uncalled-for statements”. “Mr. Singh is known for giving such controversial statements to remain in the news... I urge media people not to give him space for such uncalled-for statements and he will stop shooting his mouth off,” Rashtriya Janata Dal leader and MLA Bhai Virendra said.

“I wonder how such a senior leader like Giriraj Singh can say such things... it is a ridiculous statement,” said senior State Congress leader Akhilesh Singh.

Rashtriya Lok Samta Party spokesman Anand Mahav too condemned Mr. Singh for his “unnecessary statement”.

## In Goa, four pro-CAA Congress leaders quit

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
PANAJI

Four Goa Congress leaders resigned from the party on Thursday to protest against its stand on the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and three of them later joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), ahead of the saffron party’s rally here on Friday.

Former Panaji Congress block committee president Prasad Amonkar, former block committee secretary Dinesh Kubal, former youth leader Shivraj Tarkar and north Goa minority cell chief Javed Sheikh quit the party in the morning, saying they were in favour of the amended citizenship law.



### APPEAL

Name of Patient: **Pavithra, 17 years.**  
Hospital Name: Christian Medical College,  
Diagnosis: Thalassemia Major, A type of Blood Disorder. The estimated cost of further treatment with blood & blood product support, supportive care, other supportive therapy, Antibiotics, Investigations, Hospitalization and Nursing Care will be approximately **Rs. 25,53,217/-**.

We request kind hearted Philanthropists to save her. Kindly send donation by Cheque / D.D / M.O favouring Save Poor Lives and on the back of cheque write A/c Pavithra SIB Account No. 20000913487, State Bank of India, Raja Annamalapuram Branch, IFSC CODE: SBIN001855, which is exempted under 80G of I.T. Act.

Contact: SAVE POOR LIVES REGISTERED PUBLIC CHARITABLE TRUST, (ADMIN DIVISION) Flat No. A1, Geobros Garden, Ground Floor, Old No. 76, Kamarajar Salai, Raja Annamalapuram, Chennai-600028, Ph: 944-42044165, Mobile: 9884607377, Email: savepoorlives@gmail.com Our website: www.savepoorlives.com

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