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Priyanka meets families of those who faced 'police excesses'
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Irfan Pathan announces retirement from all forms of cricket
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Kohli's India takes on Malinga's Sri Lanka in T20I series from today
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NEARBY



'What if Pak. sends spies as Hindus to India?'

NEW DELHI
AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, while addressing the fifth town hall meeting on Saturday, asked the people what guarantee is there that Pakistan would not send spies as Hindus to India under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.
CITY • PAGE 5

Semester exams at Jamia to resume on January 9

NEW DELHI
Jamia Millia Islamia on Saturday announced that semester exams will resume on January 9. The university had declared vacation till January 5 after violence erupted outside the campus following protests against the new citizenship law.
NEWS • PAGE 11

Need to fix accountability on infant deaths: Pilot

JAIPUR
Rajasthan Deputy CM Sachin Pilot on Saturday called for fixing accountability for the death of infants at the J.K. Lon Hospital in Kota. He said it would not help to blame the previous BJP government as the Congress had been in power for the past 13 months.
NATION • PAGE 9

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CLASSIFIEDS • PAGES 6 & 7

Amid fury over Nankana Sahib attack, BJP uses it to justify CAA

Opposition parties call for PM's intervention; SGPC to send team to Pakistan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Parties across political lines on Saturday condemned Friday's attack on Gurdwara Nankana Sahib in Pakistan.

While the ruling BJP said the incident justified its decision to bring in the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), Opposition leaders called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the government to take up the issue with Pakistan to ensure the safety of the shrine and pilgrims.

'Continuing persecution'

At a press conference held at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi, party leader Mee-nakshi Lekhi said the attack on the gurdwara at the birthplace of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak Devji, was symbolic of the continuing persecution of the minorities in Pakistan.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi urged the government "to immediately take up the issue with Pakistani authorities to ensure security for the pilgrims and for the holy shrine to prevent any future attacks".

"The government of India should also press for immediate registration of case, arrest and action against the

A holy site

Gurdwara Nankana Sahib, also known as the Gurdwara Janam Asthan, is the site where the first Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak, was born



culprits," she said.

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), which manages the affairs of all gurdwaras, has asked the Pakistan government to take stern action against those responsible for the attack.

It has decided to send a delegation to take stock of the situation.

'CAA timely'

"Pakistan has proved that the CAA is a timely and right decision," Ms. Lekhi said.

"The attack in Nankana Sahib should make those sit-

ting in Shaheen Bagh and in the Kerala Assembly" understand the "importance of the CAA," she said, referring to the anti-CAA protests in Delhi's Shaheen Bagh and the resolution passed by the Kerala Assembly not to implement the law.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee condemned the attack. She said, "We condemn the incident of violence at Gurdwara Nankana Sahib in Pakistan. This is unacceptable. Humanity comes above all else."

CONTINUED ON • PAGE 10

Gurdwara untouched, says Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan has rejected reports that Gurdwara Nankana Sahib in Lahore was desecrated in a mob attack. The birthplace of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak remains "untouched and undamaged" and the "claims of destruction" of one of the holiest Sikh shrines are "false," it said.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the authorities in the Punjab province informed it that there was a scuffle in the city of Nankana Sahib on Friday between two Muslim groups over a minor incident at a tea-stall. The district administration immediately arrested the accused.

"Attempts to paint this incident as a communal issue are patently motivated. Most importantly, the gurdwara remains untouched and undamaged. All insinuations to the contrary... are not only false but also mischievous," it said.

India caught in crossfire as Trump invokes Delhi

But Iran's Ambassador to India Ali Chegeni denies allegation that Soleimani was behind terror attacks

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

India got caught in the crossfire between the United States and Iran after President Donald Trump blamed assassinated Iranian General Qassem Soleimani for a spate of terror attacks, including one in Delhi, a charge Iran's Ambassador to India has denied.

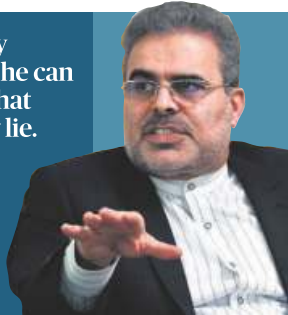
In a statement in Washington, Mr. Trump justified the killing of Soleimani in a missile attack on his convoy outside the Baghdad airport, saying the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) international operations or "Qods Force" was responsible for several terror attacks and was planning more.

"Soleimani made the death of innocent people his sick passion, contributing to terrorist plots as far away as New Delhi and London," Mr. Trump said.

Iran's Ambassador to India Ali Chegeni denied the allegations. "Mr. Trump can say anything he likes, he can give any list of attacks that he likes. But this is a big lie. General Soleima-

Mr. Trump can say anything he likes, he can give any list of attacks that he likes. But this is a big lie. General Soleimani was a soldier, he was not involved in the targeting of innocents anywhere

ALI CHEGENI,
IRAN'S AMBASSADOR TO INDIA



ni was a soldier, he was not involved in the targeting of innocents anywhere," he said in an interview to *The Hindu*.

SPECIAL

The Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment on Mr. Trump's statement, which brought New Delhi into the rising tensions between Washington and Tehran.

Mr. Trump is believed to have referred to the car bombing of an Israeli diplomat in Delhi in February 2012. The diplomat, who was also the wife of the Israeli defence attaché, was injured in the attack, along with three others. At the time, the Delhi police's special cell that investigated

the case believed it was connected with attacks on Israeli diplomats in Tbilisi, Georgia, as well as Bangkok, Thailand, and was reportedly carried out by IRGC agents in retaliation for attacks on Iranian nuclear scientists.

Delhi Police officials say the case has not moved since 2013, when one suspect, an Indian journalist with an Iranian news agency, was granted bail, a decision that was upheld by the Supreme Court. Two Iranian suspects were named in the FIR but they haven't been traced by the police, and no charges have been framed in the case.

CONTINUED ON • PAGE 10
THOUSANDS OF IRAQIS
MOURN SOLEIMANI • PAGE 12

Sena denies Minister's resignation

SHARAD VYAS
MUMBAI

Abdul Sattar, a Shiv Sena junior Minister, on Saturday reportedly offered to quit from the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, upset at being relegated to a Minister of State in the recent Cabinet expansion.

The first cracks in the ruling coalition surfaced following a prolonged delay in the allocation of portfolios to the new Ministers.

Mr. Sattar's reported resignation, which was later denied by senior Sena leaders, was not confirmed either by the Governor's Office or the Chief Minister's Office until the time of going to press. Sources said Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had deputed a team of leaders to negotiate with him.

CONTINUED ON • PAGE 10

UNREST IN CONGRESS • PAGE 10

It's tea time



Rush to serve: Buddhist monks running with kettles to serve tea to devotees attending the third day of a teaching session by Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama on Kalachakra Ground in Bodhgaya on Saturday. • PTI

Sadaf Jafar, Darapuri among 14 granted bail

They were booked for Lucknow violence

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

Congress worker Sadaf Jafar and retired IPS officer S.R. Darapuri were among 14 persons granted bail by a Lucknow court on Saturday in connection with violence in Lucknow on December 19 during protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

Additional Sessions Judge S.S. Pandey passed the bail order and asked the accused to furnish two bail bonds of ₹50,000 each and personal bonds of the same amount. The 12 others granted bail included Dalit lecturer Pavan Rao Ambedkar.

As per the FIR, 34 named persons were charged under 18 Sections of the IPC and the Public Property Act.

While granting bail, the court considered the admission of the prosecution that there was no clear evidence

so far against the accused regarding their involvement in the violence and the police were trying to collect more evidence. However, the charges have been questioned by the Congress and families of Ms. Jafar and Mr Darapuri.

In a memorandum signed by party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and submitted to the U.P. Governor, the Congress said Ms. Jafar was arrested "without cause or reason" while she was recording a video when the protests turned violent. The party and Ms. Jafar's family also alleged that she was "brutally assaulted" in custody.

The family of Mr. Darapuri also questioned his arrest. The 76-year-old retired IPS officer and Ambedkarite activist, was under house arrest on December 19 when the violence took place.

1 dead, 8 hurt in Uttam Nagar roof collapse

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 47-year-old woman died and eight other members of her family, including five minors, suffered injuries when the roof of their house collapsed in west Delhi's Uttam Nagar on Saturday.

The deceased has been identified as Dulari Devi.

Delhi Fire Service Director Atul Garg said that a call was received regarding the collapse at 3.01 p.m. after which fire personnel and local police reached the spot. "Three fire tenders were pressed into service. Nine persons were rushed to Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital by the locals," Mr. Garg said. Dulari was declared dead in the hospital. The other eight sustained minor injuries and were discharged after treatment.

DETAILS ON • PAGE 3

BJP's pro-CAA number heats up Twitter

Several accounts try to lure users posing as women and offering fake Netflix discount

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

From free Netflix subscriptions to chats and dates with 'lonely women', a variety of "services" were advertised by Twitter handles by Saturday, inviting people to call 88662-88662. The only catch was that the number was the one announced by the BJP two days earlier, seeking calls from members of the public supportive of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

By Saturday evening, the number of Tweets with the alluring offers had snowballed. One handle even claimed that the

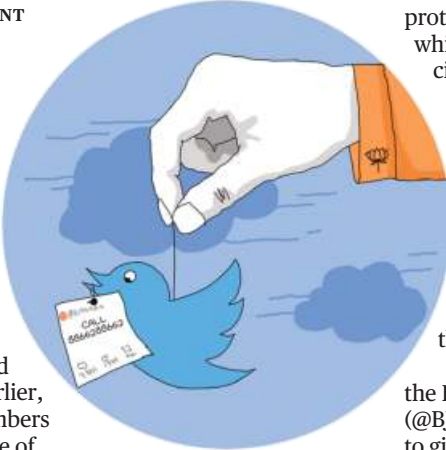


ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

number belonged to Bollywood actor Alia Bhatt and that those who were "free" could "talk to a celebrity." Amid the ongoing

protests against the CAA, which fast-tracks citizenship for Sikhs, Hindus, Jains, Parsis, Christians and Buddhists who fled persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh or Afghanistan, the BJP had launched the dial-in campaign to mobilise support for the law.

In a tweet on Thursday, the BJP's official handle (@BJP4India) asked people to give a missed call on 88662-88662 to register their support for the CAA. While many BJP leaders also shared the number, other users on Twitter used it for different purposes. "This is absolutely fake,"

U.S.-based online streaming provider Netflix tweeted on Saturday, reacting to the tweets about free subscriptions to its service. "If you want free Netflix please use someone else's account like the rest of us," the Netflix India account replied to a tweet that promised a 6-month free subscription. A few Twitter users tried to dissuade people from calling the number, raising the spectre of a data breach, and theft of bank details, Aadhaar and PAN numbers.

Asked to comment about the use of the number for other purposes, BJP national secretary Tarun Chugh told *The Hindu* that the "IT cell will have to look into it".

'Foreigner' lodged in detention centre dies

Naresh Koch was marked a foreigner in 2018 by a tribunal in Goalpara, Assam

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

Naresh Koch became the first "declared foreigner" to die in captivity in the New Year. He belonged to the Koch-Raj-bongshi community that has been demanding the Scheduled Tribe status along with five other indigenous communities in Assam.

Doctors at the Guwahati Medical College Hospital said Koch, who was in his mid-50s, died on Friday night from health complications. He was brought in a critical condition from the Goalpara detention centre, about 140 km west of Guwahati, 10 days ago. Goalpara is one of the six detention centres functioning from central jails in Assam. Together, they house some 1,000 people declared foreigners by 100 Foreigners'



Tribunals in the State.

Koch, officials at the detention centre said, was lodged in March 2018 after a tribunal in Goalpara district marked him a foreigner.

"The man suffered a stroke and died in the hospital. He was from the Mornoi area [near Sainik School, Goalpara]," Superintendent of Police, Goalpara, Sushanta Biswa Sarma told *The Hindu*.

Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, who represents the Kalia-

It is invariably the poor and the marginalised who suffer when forced to show documents to the satisfaction of the administration

GAURAV GOGOI
Congress MP

bor constituency in central Assam, said the death was another example of how the poor bear the brunt of the politics around citizenship. "It is invariably the poor and the marginalised who suffer when forced to show documents to the satisfaction of the administration. And it does not matter which religion you belong to," he said.

Data provided by the government in the Assembly in November 2019 said 25 de-

clared foreigners died in the detention camps since 2009, when they were established. The government also said 335 such people having served three years in detention were set to be released conditionally, in deference to a Supreme Court order on May 10, 2019.

Most of the declared foreigners were Bengali speakers, both Hindus and Muslims. A few like Koch have been victims of the system too, activists said.

One such person was Amila Shah, whose father Keshav Prasad Gupta had come from Bihar and settled down in Sonitpur district during the British rule. Another is Puna Munda, a tea plantation worker, whose family traced its roots to Sekai village in Jharkhand.

BJP MP sits on dharna against violence

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

BJP MP Vijay Goel sat on a dharna against “violence being spread by the Congress and AAP” in relation to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, at Ajmeri Gate on Saturday.

The former Delhi BJP chief said that the Congress and AAP were “continuously misleading Muslims”. He said he would counter he “lies” with a “detailed explanation” during a padyatra from Sadar Bazar to Jama Masjid on January 7.

“People from all religions and groups will take part in this padyatra and we will inform the people that the Act does not take away anyone’s citizenship. It is to provide citizenship... out of desperation, the Congress is inciting violence countrywide. In Delhi, Congress leaders are leading protests against CAA and spreading misinformation and lies,” Mr. Goel said.

Air quality of Delhi-NCR			
Delhi	386	Gurgaon	337
Ghaziabad	418	Faridabad	380
Noida	385	Greater Noida	408
Good Satisfactory Moderate			
0-50	51-100	101-200	
Poor	Very poor	Severe	
201-300	301-400	>401	
AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) [SOURCE: CPCB]			

Air quality stays ‘very poor’ in city

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The air quality of the city continued to be in the ‘very poor’ category on Saturday and may slightly improve over the next few days, said forecasting agency SAFAR.

The Air Quality Index (AQI) on Saturday was 334, slightly down from Friday’s 352, as per Central Pollution Control Board bulletin. The average level of PM2.5 was 197.4 ug/m3, over three times the safe limit of 60 ug/m3, in Delhi-NCR at 6 p.m.

“AQI may improve to the lower end of ‘very poor’ category by Sunday,” SAFAR said, adding that air quality may reach the ‘poor’ category by January 6.

“Surface winds have picked up and direction has become westerly... The minimum temperature may increase by 2-3 degrees Celsius over the next two days. The increase in ventilation is improving air quality,” SAFAR said.

Increase in temperature and faster winds help disperse pollutants. Vinobapuri, GT Road and Bawana may be the top three pollution hotspots on Sunday.



Going strong: People protest against the amended citizenship law at Shaheen Bagh. ■PTI

‘We will not move an inch till citizenship law is rolled back’

Protest at Shaheen Bagh enters 22nd day as support continues to pour in

ELISHA VERMANI
NEW DELHI

Demonstration at Shaheen Bagh against the amended citizenship law entered the 22nd day on Saturday with scores of people speaking out against the Act, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the National Population Register (NPR).

Mehrun Isha (50), who has been on a hunger strike for the past five days, said: “We demand the revocation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, NRC and NPR. Most of us who are protest-

ing are very poor, we have lost our sources of livelihoods in the aftermath of demonetisation and now the government has come up with a new way of troubling us.”

Yogesh Swami, who has been organising plays against the CAA and NRC in several parts of the city, said: “Cultural resistance is also a form of peaceful protest. So we sing songs and read out poems that embody these values. The government will not succeed in portraying this solely as

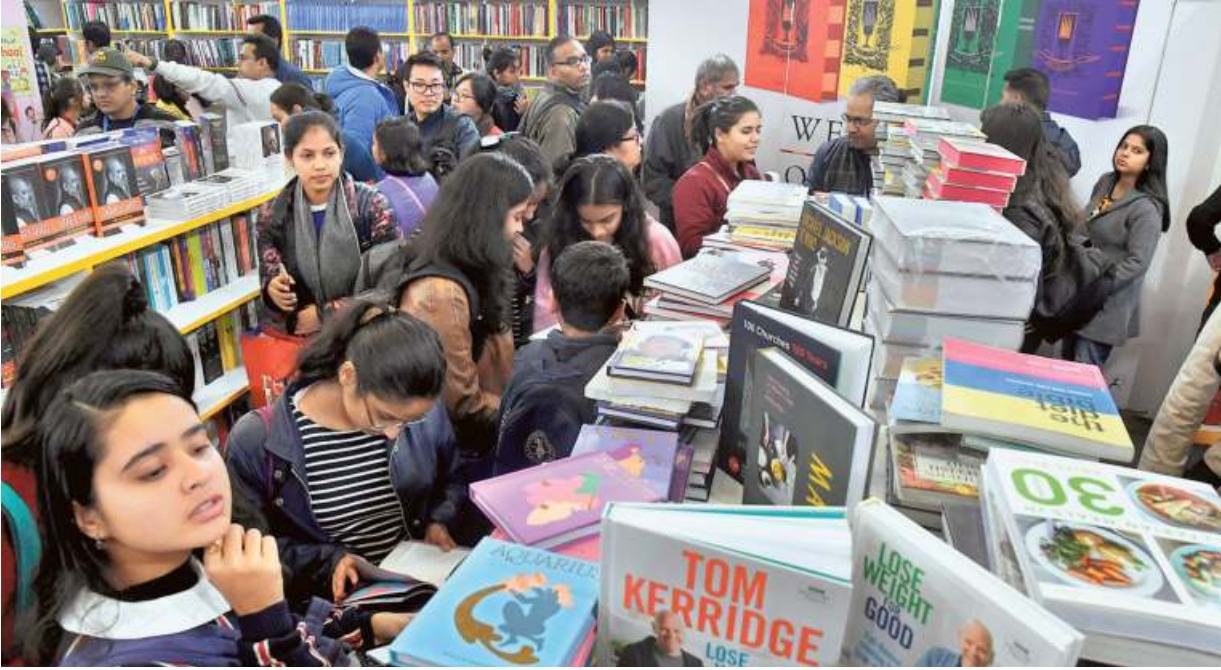
an issue about Muslims.”

Commenting on Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s statement that “the government would not go back an inch to revoke the legislation”, Shabina, who came to Delhi from Rajasthan to show solidarity with the movement, said: “If the government will not move then even we will not move an inch. This is a crowd of angry mothers that has received support from students, locals and others. We will continue to stand against police brutality,

CAA and NRC.”

Amid loud chants of “Inquilab Zindabad” women protesters continued to occupy the stage as more people joined. Refuting rumours pertaining that the protest may be called off, Shahin Kausar (44), a homemaker, said: “People have come here from across the country and will continue to do so till the amended citizenship law is rolled back. Those who spread these rumours are upset that a non-violent protest has continued for so long.”

Growing minds



Bookworms: The 28th edition of the New Delhi World Book Fair was inaugurated at Pragati Maidan on Saturday. Marking the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the fair has been themed ‘Gandhi: The Writers’ Writer’. ■SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Nankana Sahib attack: protests near Pakistan High Commission

Delhi Sikh panel, Congress, BJP hold separate agitations

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Scores of people gathered on the road leading to the Pakistan High Commission in central Delhi on Saturday to protest against the attack on Nankana Sahib Gurdwara near Lahore, Pakistan.

Separate protests by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), Indian Youth Congress (IYC), and Delhi BJP Sikh Cell were held throughout the day.

The protest by the DSGMC started at 1 p.m. while the demonstration by the IYC began at 3.30 p.m. at the same place. The BJP protest started later. The protesters raised slogans against Pakistan. One placard read: “Double standard of Imran Khan, Sikhs are being tortured in Pakistan”.

Sikh community members also submitted a memorandum at the Pakistan High



DSGMC members protest at Teen Murti Marg on Saturday. ■R.V. MOORTHY

Commission asking the Pakistan government to explain the failure of law-enforcement agencies, the DSGMC said. The protest was led by DSGMC chief Manjinder Singh Sirsa. Shiv Charan Singh Lamba, DSGMC member, said the gurdwara was the birth place of Guru Nanak Dev and that the vandalism was highly condemnable.

Mohan Singh, a driver and resident of Kalyanpuri who was at the protest, said: “70%

of our places of worship are in Pakistan. PM Imran Khan is vocal about everything and has spoken out against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in India as he believes that Muslims are being cornered... Why hasn’t he spoken about what has happened at Nankana Sahib?”.

The protesters said they expect the Indian government to pressure Pakistan into probing the incident.

BJP national secretary R.P. Singh said: “People opposing the amended citizenship law should learn a lesson from this incident... this law is for the minorities who are tortured in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and to protect their religion.”

IYC president Srinivas BV said: “Pakistan is playing with our emotions and the time has come when we need to teach them a lesson.”

Officials summoned over 3 malfunctioning STPs

Sewage flowing into Hindon, Yamuna

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has summoned senior officials of the Uttar Pradesh Jal Nigam, Ghaziabad Development Authority and Ghaziabad Nagar Nigam after a report furnished by the Central Pollution Control Board and the Uttar Pradesh pollution control board indicated that three sewage treatment plants in Indirapuram were malfunctioning and leading to pollution in Hindon and Yamuna rivers.

A Bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel observed: “The very purpose of the STPs is defeated. Encroachments have not been removed and dumping of solid waste is taking place.” While noting that the “overflowing sewage” was discharged directly into the Hindon, which leads to pollution in the Yamuna, the Bench said that “apathy

of authorities” was reflected by the lack of remedial action. “Coercive measures must be taken by authorities, and remedial action is needed for preventing untreated sewage from being discharged directly into the river system,” the Bench said.

The green panel also directed the U.P. Chief Secretary to monitor the situation and ensure that appropriate action plans are prepared within a month.

The directions came on a plea moved by Hindon Resorts Pvt. Ltd. and others, which alleged that three STPs in Indirapuram were malfunctioning. “The sewage is overflowing due to obstruction and dumping of garbage by scrap dealers on the side lines of the open drains and due to encroachment by high-rise complexes and shops,” the Bench observed while noting the allegations made in the plea.

One dead, eight hurt in roof collapse in Uttam Nagar

Families of two brothers lived on the ground and first floors

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

A 47-year-old woman died and eight other members of her family, including five minors, suffered injuries when the roof of their house collapsed in Dwarka’s Uttam Nagar on Saturday.

The deceased has been identified as Dulari Devi; the injured have been identified as Rakhi (30), Rani (30), Dharminder (30), Akhil (3), Sonam (12), Kannu (8), Akansh (6), and Sanjeev (11).

Delhi Fire Service Director Atul Garg said that a call was received regarding the collapse around 3 p.m. after which fire personnel and local police reached the spot.

“Three fire tenders were pressed into service. The officials found nine persons had been rescued and rushed to Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital by the locals,” Mr Garg said. Dulari was declared dead in the hospital. The other eight sustained minor injuries and were discharged after treatment.

A senior police officer said



The roof collapsed around 3 p.m. on Saturday.

■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



that families of two brothers Musafir and Vijay, both workers at a petrol pump, lived on the ground and first floor, respectively. They were constructing their own house in the area and had shifted to this house 10 months ago.

“On Saturday, Vijay’s brother-in-law was visiting with his son and two children of his brother. The family is suspected to have gathered on the ground floor when its roof collapsed. The deceased is Vijay’s wife,” the officer said.

The police said that the

house is spread over 50 square yards and that the ground floor’s roof was constructed using stone slabs with a false ceiling. There were two rooms on the first floor; the roof of one of them collapsed.

The police said that the owner of the house has been identified as Girdhari Kataria, a resident of Mohan Garden who retired from BSES in 2012 as assistant security officer. “A case is being registered under relevant sections... an investigation is under way,” the officer added.

Do not be misled by agitators, JNU appeals to students

Administration says some students ransacked server room

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

With Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) students continuing their agitation demanding a complete rollback of the fee hike, the university administration on Saturday appealed to the “student community” to not be “misled by agitators and derail the normal functioning of the university”.

In a statement, the JNU administration said: “The university shall make every attempt to help students register for the winter semes-

ter and continue their academic pursuits. The university has also announced an alternative way of registering for the semester. Those who are disrupting the bonafide students from registering are committing a grave mistake.”

‘Faces covered’

It claimed that on January 3, “student agitators with their faces covered” entered the premises of the Communication and Information Services (CIS) and “forcibly evicted technical staff and turned off

servers”.

Meanwhile, the JNU Students’ Union (JNUSU) said that students, including JNUSU president Aishe Ghosh, were manhandled by security guards on Saturday. The JNUSU also claimed that members of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad (ABVP) “vandalised CIS IT”.

The ABVP, however, claimed that members of the Left unity “resorted to violence” when members affiliated to the ABVP “protested against the forced lock down of the university”.

DELHI TODAY

Dance: “Tumne Uss Roz Mujhe Kyun Chuna?”, a thematic Kathak dance performance by Kartika Singh at Triveni Kala Sangam, 205 Tansen Marg, 6 p.m. onwards

Health: ‘Breathe, You are alive’ a seminar and experiential mindfulness practices of breathing, walking eating and deep relaxation with teachers from Thich Nhat Hanh’s tradition from Plum Village Monastery, France and India at Multipurpose Hall, India International Centre (IIC), 2 p.m.

Exhibition: “Sarvasutra 2.0”, a group paintings and photography exhibition at Open Palm Court Gallery, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Exhibition: Rita Jhunjhunwala and Shreekanth Somany collaborate for a two-person show of paintings and photographs titled “Shunya - A Journey”, at Bikaner House, 10.30 a.m. - 6.30 p.m.

Exhibition: Solo show of paintings by Akshita Wason, curated by Jitendra Padam Jain at Galerie Romain Rolland, Alliance Française De Delhi, 72, Lodhi Estate, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. (Mail your listings for this column at cityeditor@thehindu.co.in)

Poster war takes over Delhi roads, barbs reach crescendo

Ahead of Assembly polls, AAP, BJP put up hoardings questioning each other’s claims

JATIN ANAND
NEW DELHI

The poster war between the Aam Aadmi Party and the BJP— aimed at questioning everything from each other’s claim to form the next government in the Capital to the capability of their respective leaderships – went up a notch here on Saturday.

A few days ago, the AAP had installed hoardings, bearing New Year greetings for seven BJP Chief Ministerial candidates. Now, BJP West Delhi MP Parvesh Verma sought to offer New Year’s greetings to the AAP on hoardings, naming 11 of its founding members as potential Delhi Chief Ministers who were “chucked out” from the party.

Sunil Yadav, president of the Delhi BJP’s youth wing – Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BYJM) – installed hoardings, attacking Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, at 25 prominent flyovers in the city. This is a “symbolic protest” seeking to “expose” Kejriwal’s “lies” on several is-

If one speaks from the heart, there is no denying that Kejriwal has done a lot of good work for the city. However, that may not be the official line of the party one is associated with

DEEPAK MADAN
Member of Bajrang Dal

sues, Mr. Yadav said.

Hoarding grabs eyeballs
One of the dozen hoardings across the city, bearing both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Kejriwal’s faces, garnered much interest. The hoarding, supposedly installed by an individual – Deepak Madan – who is associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), the Bajrang Dal and the BJP, sought to argue that while the “country wants Modi”, the people of the Capital “want Kejriwal.” A picture of the hoarding was first put out by Abhish-

ek Gupta from AAP’s national social media team on Twitter on Friday evening following which it was shared by the party’s spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj.

AAP takes to Twitter
Mr. Gupta’s post was captioned as: “When those from the RSS and the BJP’s own workers start saying ‘*Dilli Mein to Kejriwal*’ you can gauge which way the wind is blowing [sic].” “Yes, I have put up the hoarding. Thirteen of them have been installed at several locations in Delhi till now and one more will be put up by tomorrow. If one speaks from the heart, there is no denying that Kejriwal has done a lot of good work for the city. However, that may not be the official line of the party one is associated with,” Mr. Madan told *The Hindu*. He also said: “I have been with the RSS since I childhood and then got associated with the Bajrang Dal of which I am a member.

I am now the Paschim Vihar Mandal president of the BJP. But let me clarify, the hoardings say what I feel in a personal capacity.”

Whodunnit
Meanwhile, the BJP claimed Mr. Madan had “nothing to do with it and was certainly not an office-bearer” of its State unit. This, even as an AAP insider said similar hoardings, claiming that outfits associated with the BJP were in support of Mr. Kejriwal, had emerged prior to the Delhi Assembly Elections in 2015. A BJP source said: “This is clearly an attempt by AAP to try and confuse voters with elections around the corner, to portray that the BJP has no confidence in its leadership. It is a ploy which is both sad and desperate.” In response to this, an AAP insider said: “The onus of proving whether the person who installed the hoardings belongs to the RSS or the BJP is on them; it is not our prerogative.”

Kejriwal addresses Mega PTM, interacts with parents, students

Principals are learning practices adopted by IIMs: Sisodia

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal addressed a “Mega Parent-Teacher Meeting” on Saturday during which he interacted with the parents and guardians of those studying in the government schools at the Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya in Rouse Avenue.

The government said the meeting was aimed at discussing the students’ progress as well as the level of education being provided in the schools.

‘Not just in papers’
“The PTM procedures in the government schools were only on the papers. We now hold regular PTMs. Parents and teachers are satisfied because they get to discuss the progress of the students. This way, parents take a keen interest in the studies of their ward,” Mr. Kejriwal said. He interacted with the parents about whether “reforms” in the schools had improved their wards’ performances. He also spoke to the students about the changes in



Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal interacts with parents and students during the Mega PTM in the city on Saturday.

■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

their school infrastructure and teaching patterns. Launched in 2016, the Mega PTMs open up a communication platform for teachers and the parents of children, said the government. It also provides an opportunity to the parents to open up about issues at home which could possibly be coming in the way of their child’s studies, the statement added. “Earlier, people had an inferiority complex regarding their children studying in government schools because of lack of financial resources. The teachers and principals have played a significant role

in the transformation of government schools in the last five years,” Mr. Kejriwal added. Meanwhile, Education Minister Manish Sisodia also met with parents, teachers and students at Govt. Co-ed Senior Secondary school in Sector 2, Dwarka. “I am proud to mention that our teachers and principals are learning about best teaching practices adopted by world-class institutions like Cambridge University and IIMs. Don’t be a dishonest doctor, engineer, officer or lawyer, etc. Strive to stick to the ethics,” he said.

Shah to lay foundation stone for Delhi Cycle Walk on Jan. 6

Project proposed at ₹550 crore: DDA

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) on Saturday said Home Minister Amit Shah will lay the foundation stone for the Delhi Cycle Walk, which is proposed to be a ₹550-crore project, at Tughlakabad on January 6.

The project, likely to be completed in four years, will make mobility economical for Delhiites, fight pollution and also transform the city into “the most walkable and cycle-friendly city,” the DDA said.

Under the project, cycling tracks called “On Grade Tracks” will connect business districts, offices, schools, colleges and metro stations, said officials.

“The Delhi Cycle Walk will be a controlled track with defined and secure entrance points near residential areas and exit points near places of work, schools and so on. These points of entry will be called origin-destination plazas and will have facilities like washrooms, cycle parking and repairs points among other facilities,” a senior official said. While the entire network is projected to span over a 200km area, the first phase, including three corridors will cover an

The project, likely to be completed in four years, will make mobility economical for Delhiites, fight pollution and also transform the city into the most walkable and cycle-friendly city

DELHI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

area of 36km, the urban body said.

A ride through forests
The project will have universal accessibility, rainwater harvesting chambers, parking spaces and CCTV cameras every 100 metres with a centralised monitoring system. An official said: “The forests which have been cut by roads will now be joined by building acre sunken lawns on both sides of the roads and then create a connection like an under a bridge. Cycle Walk tracks shall move seamlessly from one forest to another.” “The Cycle Walk has been conceived with the objective to take a few million car rides out of Delhi roads and allow people to walk and cycle safely,” the land-owning agency said.

What if Pak. sends spies as Hindus to India, asks CM at town hall meet

‘40 roads to be redesigned on the lines of roads abroad by Nov.’

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

While addressing the fifth town hall meeting, AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal asked the people what guarantee is there that Pakistan would not send spies as Hindus to India under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. The meeting, a part of the party’s election campaign, was anchored by ABP News. “What guarantee is there that Pakistan would not send spies as Hindus over here? This can also happen. These are valid questions,” he said.

Full statehood
Mr. Kejriwal said full statehood for Delhi will be part of AAP’s election manifesto. It was the main poll plank of

AAP in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in Delhi. Speaking about the multiple fire incidents that claimed the lives of many people, he said the government was trying to find solutions. “We have ordered inquiries into all these fire incidents. If we find a trend on the reasons behind these fires and we can solve them by taking a particular action, then we will implement it.” He added that the government has started about 300 Mohalla Clinics in Delhi and 150 such clinics will be opened on Sunday. Talking about beautification, he said: “We are redesigning 40 roads and they will be done by November. We will make Delhi’s roads like that of London, Tokyo, and France. If

they are good, then we will redesign all roads like this.” Speaking about the CAA, he launched an attack on Home Minister Amit Shah, saying: “*Aap chronology samjne ki koshish kijiye* [please try and understand the chronology]. Each one of you will be told to prove citizenship. They will not allow Aadhaar or PAN card. They will only allow government birth certificates. If you can’t produce them, then if you are Muslim, then you will be asked to leave the country. If you are a Hindu, then you will be asked ‘are you from Pakistan’, if you say yes, then you will be given citizenship. If you are Hindu and not from Pakistan, then you will be asked to leave the country.”

Akali threat to launch agitation a ‘political stunt’: Amarinder

SAD covering up their misdeeds, misgovernance of 10 years, says Punjab CM

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Saturday hit out at the Akalis, saying their threat of launching an agitation over power tariff hike in the State and their ultimatum in the murder cases of two former sarpanches (village heads) was a “political stunt”.



CM Amarinder Singh.
■ FILE PHOTO

‘Police doing better job’
The Shiromani Akali Dal has threatened to take to the streets over the two issues. The Chief Minister dubbed it as mere theatrics, aimed at covering up their own “trail of misdeeds and misgovernance of 10 years during their regime”.

Hitting out at the Akali leadership over their threat of agitation if the killers of former Akali sarpanches – Baba Gurdeep Singh and Dalbir Singh Dhillwan – are not

arrested within two weeks, Capt. Amarinder said the Punjab police, under the present regime, was doing a much better job at solving crime cases than it ever had under the erstwhile SAD-BJP rule. “These kind of ultimatums might have worked under the Akali government, when many innocent people were thrown behind bars after being charged in false cases, but under my regime, no innocent person would be victimised for crimes they did not commit,” said the Chief Minister.

Capt. Amarinder also gave data to counter the hue and cry raised by the Akalis on

the issue of the power tariff hike.

Power tariff data
“Why don’t you check out your own track record before lashing out at us?” he said, citing figures to show that the percentage increase during their regime, from 2007 to 2017, was much more than what his government had implemented. “The total hike under their [SAD-BJP] rule was 22.51% in 2006-07 over 2001-02, 42.13% in 2011-12 over 2006-07, 24.77% 2016-17 over 2011-12, as against a mere 13.69% in 2019-20 over 2016-17,” the Chief Minister pointed out.

Monitoring unit for skill development centres

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

In a novel initiative to ensure good quality of training to the unemployed youths, a monitoring unit has been established here for the 215 skill development centres functioning in all the 33 districts of Rajasthan. The centres are working on several programmes to improve

employability of youngsters to match their qualifications.

The Rajasthan Skill & Livelihoods Development Corporation (RSLDC), which operates the skill development centres, will manage the monitoring unit to control their activities, check negligence and keep a watch on the presence of teachers, trainers and students.

Naveen Jain, Secretary (Skill and Livelihoods Development), who inaugurated the monitoring unit at the RSLDC headquarters here on Friday, said the Internet Protocol cameras installed in the skill development centres would enable the officials in Jaipur to manage their affairs in a better way and maintain discipline.

“There is always a doubt about attendance and utility of training courses at some centres. The monitoring cell will take action to ensure quality of work, streamline skill development and check negligence in the delivery of services,” Mr. Jain said.

RSLDC Bharatpur manager said that about 4,500 youths had been trained.

Chilika may host over 1 million birds

The area saw such numbers for the first time in 2019

SATYASUNDAR BARIK
BHUBANESWAR

The Chilika Development Authority (CDA) said it expects the number of migratory birds flocking to Chilika to cross the one-million mark for the second consecutive year in 2020.

“The total bird population of Chilika lagoon will be around 10.5 lakh-10.7 lakh. The exact number, along with different species, will be provided by the wildlife wing after a detailed census being planned by the Chilika Wildlife Division in the near future,” the CDA said earlier this week.

The migratory bird popu-



The Nalabana Bird Sanctuary was notified in 1987. ■ FILE PHOTO

lation in Chilika had crossed the one-million mark for the first time in 2019.

“Due to inclement weather, we could sight 20-30% of birds, which usually flock to the lake during this time. We hope it will cross

the one-million mark for the second consecutive year,” said Susanta Nanda, Chief Executive of the CDA.

The Nalabana Bird Sanctuary was notified in 1987. It has one of the largest congregations with 3,74,752 birds of 114 species.

Firecracker unit owner arrested in blasts case

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

One person was arrested on Saturday in connection with the explosions in a firecracker factory at Naihati in West Bengal’s North 24 Parganas. Factory owner Sheikh Noor Hussain was arrested from Amdanga. Charges under Section 304 of the IPC (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) have been pressed against the accused.

Four persons had died in

the blasts inside the illegal firecracker factory on Friday at Naihati. Locals said they heard three explosions and the factory was razed to the ground due to the impact. Two men, Mansur Piya and Ram Besra, and two women, Kalpana Halder and Brinda Sanpui – all workers at the factory – died in the explosions.

Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar demanded a probe into the incident.

☀️ Timings			
DELHI			
SUNDAY, JAN. 05			
☀️ RISE	07:15	🌃 SET	17:39
🌙 RISE	13:32	🌃 SET	01:48
MONDAY, JAN. 06			
☀️ RISE	07:15	🌃 SET	17:39
🌙 RISE	14:06	🌃 SET	02:42
TUESDAY, JAN. 07			
☀️ RISE	07:15	🌃 SET	17:40
🌙 RISE	14:45	🌃 SET	03:40

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	22	08
Safdarjang	22	08
Palam	20	09

Delhi Palam Today
22°C Moderate fog in the morning is likely. A partly cloudy sky with comfortable day is expected.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
20°C Dense fog likely in many areas. A warm day with partly cloudy sky is likely. Thundry activity likely towards night.

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IN BRIEF
Court rejects actor Dileep's discharge plea

KOCHI
A trial court in Kochi on Saturday dismissed Malayalam actor Dileep's discharge petition in the rape case against him. He had filed the petition before the judge on Tuesday. The special court accepted the prosecution's stance that there was sufficient evidence against the actor. Dileep was arraigned as an accused in the rape case, which was reportedly committed in Kochi in February, 2017.

CBI court directs A.P. CM Jagan to appear before it

HYDERABAD
A Special CBI court here has directed Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy to appear before it on January 10 in connection with alleged 'quid pro quo' investments into his firms. The court gave the direction on Friday while hearing a petition by him seeking exemption from personal appearance. Mr. Reddy was released on bail from the Chanchalguda jail here in September 2013 after being in prison for 15 months following his arrest in May 2012 in related cases. PTI

Kerala film producers rule out talks with Shane

KOCHI
The Kerala Film Producers' Association has upped the ante against actor Shane Nigam, stating that there is no scope for any conciliatory talks unless he completes the dubbing of the movie *Ullasam*. The association and the actor have been on a warpath since October last year. The differences of opinion peaked after the association banned him in November when he stirred up a controversy by shaving off his hair and beard.

Anti-CAA protest engulfs Hyderabad

Modi, Shah thanked for 'uniting' India, KCR assailed for silence on Citizenship Amendment Act

STAFF REPORTER
HYDERABAD

All roads led to Dharna Chowk on Saturday, where tens of thousands converged waving the Tricolour to protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the National Register of Citizens and the National Population Register. A call to boycott these measures was issued at the event.

The Joint Action Committee Against the CAA, the NRC and the NPR — an umbrella body of around 40 religious, socio-religious and political organisations — had given the protest call. While the protest was called for 2 p.m., the venue was bursting at its seams even by 12.30 p.m., as waves of protesters from all walks of life and cutting across faiths poured in.

JAC Convener Mushtaq Mallik called for a boycott of the NRC and the NPR as he urged protesters not to show



In one voice: Indira Park was jam-packed with people protesting against the CAA, the NRC and the NPR during the 'Million March' on Saturday. • G. RAMAKRISHNA

'papers'. He claimed that several forces had tried to stall the protest call, but the people had prevailed. He also said that the fact that young and old had 'come to

gether for a cause' speaks volumes that the people refused to be cowed down. He thanked the thousands of women who 'played an important role' to make the

protest successful.

Justice B. Chandra Kumar, member of the JAC, said the legislation was illegal and unconstitutional.

Speakers, including MBT

leader Amjed Ullah Khan, criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and proceeded to question Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's 'silence' on the issue of implementation of the NRC and the NPR in the State. They said that the public had come voluntarily. They also 'thanked' both Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah for uniting Indians for a single cause, to protect the Constitution.

Jamaat-e-Islami Telangana-Odisha chief Hamed Mohammed Khan said that the 'fight' against the CAA, the NRC and the NPR would continue till the BJP leadership 'bowed' before the demands of the people.

As the crowd swelled, they moved into the NTR Stadium where slogans against the BJP government, the Home Minister and the Prime Minister were raised.

Capital row: agitation set to intensify in Amaravati

Residents allege that police entered houses in Velagapudi at night and picked up a resident



Loud and clear: Women staging a protest against the proposed three capitals, at Mandadam in A.P. on Saturday.

STAFF REPORTER
GUNTUR/VIJAYAWADA

The agitation by land owners in Thullur and other villages of Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh entered the 18th day on Saturday and was set to intensify. The residents alleged that the police barged into some houses at Velagapudi on Friday night and picked up a man, Kancharla Jagan Mohan, from his residence. The police, however, denied the charges.

The protesters continued to force banks to down their shutters and blocked roads, in spite of warnings from the police. "We plead with Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to reconsider the decision to relocate the capital.

We have given our precious lands to the then government," one of the protesters said.

Former MLA from Prakasham M. Ugra Narasimha Reddy also extended his support to the farmers.

BCG report

Meanwhile, former A.P. Chief Minister and Telugu Desam president N. Chandrababu Naidu termed the report of the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) on the 'Strategy for balanced and inclusive growth of Andhra Pradesh' as rubbish. He said it was an exercise to suit the interests of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy.

"The BCG has no credibil-

ity. As a consultant, it merely delivered what its client required," he said on Saturday while claiming that the panel headed by the then Municipal Administration Minister P. Narayana was mandated to draw up plans on the basis of the Sivaramakrishnan Committee recommendations.

Mr. Naidu objected to the comparison drawn between the countries which have multiple capitals and A.P. which has no capital city at all since bifurcation. He said the government was obliged to honour the agreements entered with farmers and it also owed an explanation on the terms of reference given to the BCG.

Karnataka sees threat of stir for quota hike

Valmiki community seer wants demand fulfilled before February 9

NAGESH PRABHU
BENGALURU

The demand for increasing the Scheduled Tribe reservation quota — from 3.3% to 7.5% — is back in the lime-light in Karnataka at a time when two prominent BJP leaders from the Valmiki (ST) community, Minister for Health and Family Welfare B. Sriramulu and five-time MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi, are clamouring for the posts of Deputy Chief Minister.

Community members have threatened to relaunch their agitation if the State government does not concede their decade-long demand for an increase in the quota.

Lobbying for post

Mr. Sriramulu, who was projected as the leader of the Valmiki community by the BJP during the Assembly elections, has been sulking since he was denied the Deputy Chief Minister's post in the B.S. Yediyurappa-led go-



Members of the Valmiki community participating in a rally for ST quota increase in Bengaluru recently. • FILE PHOTO

vernment. The Minister has been camping in the national capital for the last two days and making every attempt to meet BJP national president and Home Minister Amit Shah apparently in the hope of getting back the post in the next round of Cabinet rejig.

Mr. Jarkiholi, who defected from the Congress to the BJP and was re-elected in the

bypoll, has also been doing all he can to get the Deputy Chief Minister's post. He has been meeting community seers and lobbying hard. Cabinet expansion is expected to take place this month.

Meanwhile, leaders of the Valmiki community, the fourth largest group in the State, have been stepping up pressure on the government to increase the quota. The

government has set up a committee headed by retired High Court judge H.N. Nagamohan Das to look into the demand. The panel is expected to submit its report by this month-end.

Seer's threat

Prasannananda Puri Swami of Valmiki Gurupeetha recently threatened that Mr. Yediyurappa's tenure would be cut short if the demand to increase the ST quota was not fulfilled by February 9, the day the annual jatra of Maharshi Valmiki is held at Rajanahalli in Harihar, Davangere district. If the committee recommends an increase in the quota, the BJP government should make an official announcement by February 9, the seer said.

The community wants the hike in the quantum of reservation, which exists as far as political representation is concerned, extended to jobs and the education sector.

It's the berries



Nature's bounty: Strawberry cultivation is becoming increasingly popular at Lammasingi, a popular tourism spot in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. Majority of the fruits grown here are consumed by tourists. • K.R. DEEPAK

At Kerala's stations, safety comes wrapped in a tune

Railway Protection Force's Life is Precious campaign plans to use popular tunes to reach out to passengers

M.P. PRAVEEN
KOCHI

Taking a cue from the adage of a spoonful of sugar making medicine palatable, the Kerala Railway Protection Force (RPF) has decided to sing out safety messages to reach train passengers, who tend to tune out from the monotonous announcements over the public address systems at stations.

As part of the 'Life is Precious' campaign, the RPF, in a novel initiative, will release an album titled 'Rail Suraksha', comprising of nine songs set to the tunes of popular Malayalam chart busters including a well-known song set to a boat

race, and sung by noted playback singers to drive home messages for passenger safety.

The 'Life is Precious' campaign was launched last July after the avoidable deaths on tracks shot up from 264 between January and July in 2018 to around 364 during the same period last year.

"The songs to be released shortly in CD format will be given to all railway stations under the Thiruvananthapuram Railway Division to be



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R KUMAR

played through the public address system. This is being done purely on public interest, especially for the security of women and children," said

Commissioner RPF (Thiruvananthapuram Division) S. Ramakrishnan.

The songs penned by lyricist Baburaj Kanampur will have a combined length of 12 minutes. Four of them have already been recorded.

The RPF also plans to use the songs as part of its awareness campaigns in schools and colleges. They will also be uploaded over multiple social media platforms, including Facebook and WhatsApp, to maximise the reach of the messages.

The messages being conveyed through these

songs include never to board a moving train or board from off-side, not to jaywalk across railway tracks, not to pull the chain without a valid reason, not to usurp the facilities dedicated to differently abled passengers, and to reach out to the RPF for help through its helpline number 182.

"We limited the campaign to awareness in the initial months before moving to prosecuting offenders. We have prosecuted nearly 500 people since then. It seems to have worked as we have been able to arrest the increasing trend of incidents in the six-month period ending December 31," the RPF official said.

Kerala to take more cover under Miyawaki forests

Concept helps to increase green cover in urban areas

S. ANIL RADHAKRISHNAN
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Miyawaki method of afforestation, which has revolutionised the concept of urban afforestation by turning backyards into mini-forests, is to add green cover on government office premises, residential complexes, school premises, and *pu-ramboke* land in Kerala.

The government intervention comes in the wake of the highly successful technique, pioneered by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki, and adopted in the State by individuals to increase the green cover in urban and semi-urban areas.

The Forest Department is

Former T.N. Speaker P.H. Pandian no more

He sparked controversy with rulings

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI/TIRUNELVELI

Former Assembly Speaker and the AIADMK's legal advisor P.H. Pandian died of cardiac failure at a private hospital in Porur in Chennai on Saturday morning. He was 74. He had been under medical treatment for cardiac-related problems.

He is survived by a daughter and four sons.

The funeral will be held on Sunday evening in Chennai.

Best known for his statement during his term as Speaker that the presiding officer had "sky high powers", Mr. Pandian hailed from Cheranmahadevi in Tirunelveli. A product of the Pachaiyappa's College and Law College in Chennai, he enrolled at the Madras Bar in April 1968.

After M.G. Ramachandran formed the AIADMK in October 1972, Mr. Pandian joined his party and was elected to the Assembly for the first time from the Cheranmahadevi constituency (now abolished) in 1977. He went on to win in 1980, 1984 and 1989. In the 1989 Assembly polls, he was the only nominee of the AIADMK (Janaki faction) to win.

11th Assembly Speaker

Mr. Pandian became the 11th Assembly Speaker in February 1985, a post he held for four years.

Five months later, the Assembly awarded S. Balasubramanian, then editor of the Tamil weekly *Ananda Vikatan*, three months' rigorous imprisonment for publishing a cartoon. For the next couple of days, when the State was rocked by the controversy, it was left to Mr. Pandian to defend the House's decision. The row was resolved a few days



P.H. Pandian

later with the Speaker ordering the release of the journalist in deference to the Chief Minister's wishes.

There were other controversies associated with Mr. Pandian's innings. In a first of its kind, the Assembly, in December 1986, expelled 10 MLAs of the DMK for taking part in an agitation to burn the Constitution. In January 1988 when the Janaki Ramachandran Ministry sought a vote of confidence in the House, Mr. Pandian, in a single day, disqualified 33 MLAs belonging to the rival faction of the AIADMK led by Jayalalithaa.

When the AIADMK factions led by Janaki Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa merged in February 1989, Mr. Pandian opted out.

In August 1993, he returned to the AIADMK. In 1999, he was elected to the Lok Sabha from Tirunelveli and headed the AIADMK's parliamentary party in the Lok Sabha.

After Jayalalithaa's death, Mr. Pandian refused to accept the leadership of V.K. Sasikala and aligned with O. Panneerselvam who had led the AIADMK's revolt against Sasikala in February 2017.

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami described Mr. Pandian's passing as a "huge loss" to the AIADMK.

171 hospitals de-listed from PM's health scheme after fraud

Private institutions found conducting procedures reserved for govt. units

BINDU SHAJAN PERAPPADAN
NEW DELHI

The Centre's ambitious healthcare insurance scheme – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) – under the National Health Authority (NHA) has noted that as per details provided by the States, more than 390 hospitals of the over 19,000 empanelled across nine States have been either served show cause notices, suspended, or de-empanelled, for alleged fraud. Of these, 171 hospitals have been de-empanelled

and FIRs have been lodged against six hospitals in Uttarakhand and Jharkhand. The quantum of penalties levied on the listed hospitals is more than ₹4.6 crore.

Fake beneficiaries
“Close watch is also maintained on wrongful enrolment of beneficiaries; 3,785 Village Level Entrepreneurs (positioned at Common Service Centres) / Pradhan Mantri Arogya Mitras (positioned at PM-JAY empanelled hospitals) have been deactivated so far,” a senior NHA official

Case sheets

A look at some States where frauds were detected at various stages of implementation of the PM-JAY

Gujarat: Cases were detected in Aug. 2019 and shared with Gujarat State Health agency, which has disabled the cards. An FIR was lodged by State on Nov. 8, 2019

Madhya Pradesh: The cases were detected in August 2019 and shared with State, which has disabled the cards. The concerned hospital has been issued show-cause notice and penalty levied

Chhattisgarh: The initial cases were detected in May 2019 and shared with State, which has disabled the cards



Punjab: The cases were detected in Oct. 2019 and shared with State, which has disabled the cards

said on Saturday. The official confirmed that the National Anti-Fraud Unit (NAFU) at the NHA has de-

tected that the frauds, committed using e-cards on the basis of algorithms, developed internally.

The cover provided under the PM-JAY health insurance scheme is ₹5 lakh per family.

Abuse-prone packages
“There are certain packages which are reserved for government hospitals by the State authorities, and these are especially abuse prone. It was detected that private hospitals were performing these government-reserved procedures and blocking/submitting the same under a different package name or as a unspecified package. There is no package under the PM-JAY scheme which is free for government hospitals,” added the official. However, the NHA main-

tained that responsibility for the closure action lies with the State health agencies. Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab were among the States where frauds were detected at different stages of implementation of the PM-JAY. “We have issued comprehensive set of anti-fraud guidelines from the time of launch of the scheme and as a safeguard, pre-authorisation is required for most packages ... All claims require mandatory supporting documents before approval and payment ... Almost all States have dedicated anti-fraud units now” the NHA official said.

WEATHER WATCH

RAINFALL, TEMPERATURE & AIR QUALITY IN SELECT METROS YESTERDAY



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning likely at isolated places over west Rajasthan. Dense fog likely at some parts over Uttar Pradesh, north Madhya Pradesh, east Rajasthan, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura during night/morning hours.

Table with 4 columns: CITY, RAIN, MAX, MIN. Lists weather data for various cities including Agartala, Ahmedabad, Aizawl, Allahabad, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh, Chennai, Coimbatore, Dehradun, Gangtok, Goa, Guwahati, Hubballi, Hyderabad, Imphal, Jaipur, Kochi, Kohima, Lucknow, Mumbai, Pune, Raipur, Ranchi, Shillong, Shimla, Srinagar, Thiruvananthapuram, Tiruchir, Vijayawada, and Visakhapatnam.

Table with 2 columns: Pollutants in the air you are breathing and Yesterday. Includes AQI scores and air quality index for various cities.

Air Quality Code: Poor Moderate Good (Readings indicate average AQI)
SO2: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.
NO2: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.
CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.
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

Research in India inadequate: C.N.R. Rao

Neither the quality nor quantity is enough, he says

JACOB KOSHY
BENGALURU

Neither the quality nor quantity of publications that come out of India is adequate, said C.N.R. Rao, one of the foremost chemists in India.

The 2013 Bharat Ratna awardee was the chief guest at the Indian Science Congress held in Bengaluru and was speaking at the Children's Science Congress, a satellite-event meant to exhibit science projects by school children and have them engage with Nobel Laureates and eminent scientists.

Mr. Rao, 86, who was a former science advisor to the Prime Minister, said on Saturday that China had made major strides in science, and as of today, it nearly equalled the research publication output of the U.S. – the leading producer of scientific publications in the world.

PM's remarks

Mr. Rao's comments come a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at the congress, lauded India for being in the “3rd position globally,” in terms of peer-reviewed science-engineering-publications. “I have been told that India has climbed to third position globally in the number



Exploring ideas: Students at an exhibition at the Indian Science Congress on Saturday.

• V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

of peer reviewed science and engineering publications. It is also growing at a rate of about 10% as compared to global average of 4%,” he said on Friday.

Low citation rate

“I'm not worried about the quantity [of Indian publications], but quality is important. However in India we are doing well in neither the quantity nor the quality of science in what we should be doing,” said Mr. Rao.

Several studies of publication trends have shown that India's share in the world research output hovers around 5%. But the rate of citations – the number of times these articles are cited and used as proxy for quality – is much lower at 2-3%.

Mr. Rao stressed that science didn't require degrees but dedication and doggedness, and its future

lay with young people.

“Indian tradition worships Lakshmi and Saraswati. Praying to Lakshmi yielded money and was easy ... But Saraswati – or the Goddess of knowledge – is hard to please and required sincere dedication,” he said.

On Friday, Mr. Modi exhorted students to “innovate, patent, produce and prosper”.

The Children's Science Congress saw students of several thousand schools converge at the University of Agricultural Science here to hear Nobel Laureates speak and watch science projects prepared by their peers. They were also shown projects by the Defence Research and Development Organisation, several labs of the Department of Science and Technology and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research.

Nobel winner calls for pathogen-specific drugs

‘Will help combat spread of resistance’

AFSHAN YASMEEN
BENGALURU

Concerns surrounding antibiotic use, including environmental hazards and the appearance of multi-drug resistant bacteria, can be minimised by designing antibiotics that are specific to each species of pathogen, instead of using the broad-range antibiotics that are currently favoured, Ada E. Yonath, winner of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 2009, said here on Saturday. She was delivering a talk on eco-friendly antibiotics at the 107th Indian Science Congress.

“I have started work on degradable antibiotics that are effective only for the target pathogen. This will reduce environmental hazards and combat the spread of resistance,” Prof. Yonath, who is with the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel.

“The increasing appearance of multi-drug resistant strains, together with the negligible number of new antibiotic drugs that are presently undergoing development, is a big problem. We may soon revert back to the pre-antibiotic era, when



Ada E. Yonath

simple pathogens could cause very severe infections. This may result in a 3.8% loss in global economy by 2050. Something has to be done,” she said.

Later, speaking to The Hindu, Prof. Yonath said that the danger of antibiotics is the potential damage that they cause to the microbiome. Changes to the composition of the human microbiome can cause disease, she said. Most antibiotics are made up of small, toxic, organic molecules that cannot be digested and are expelled into the environment, she said.

“They are so small that most purification facilities cannot catch them, so they penetrate irrigation systems and eventually come back to us,” she said.



Red signal: The collapsed portion of the Bardhaman Railway Station, about 90 km from Kolkata, on Saturday.

Portion of Bardhaman railway station collapses

Two injured; area around building evacuated

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA

A portion of the Bardhaman railway station building collapsed at around 8.10 p.m. on Saturday. Senior officers of the Eastern Railway said preliminary reports did not indicate that anyone was buried under the debris.

Two persons were injured in the collapse and were taken to Bardhaman Medical College and Hospital.

“So far there are no reports of any one trapped under the debris. We

are trying to assess the situation,” said Ishaq Khan, Divisional Railway Manager, Howrah.

Mr. Khan said since the railway platform was not affected, services would not be disturbed.

The entire area around the building was evacuated as authorities fear that the remaining structure could also come down.

Bardhaman is a junction on the Howrah-Delhi main line of the Eastern Railway, about 90 km from Kolkata, and is usually very crowded.

Need to fix accountability for infant deaths, says Sachin Pilot

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot on Saturday called for fixing accountability for the deaths of over a 100 infants at the J.K. Lon Hospital at Kota in December 2019, and said it would not help to blame the previous BJP government as the Congress had been in power for the past 13 months.

Talking to reporters in Kota, he

said: “Our response was not satisfactory, to some extent. We should have been more compassionate. Since we are in power, we have to be responsible and face the consequences,” he said.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot had recently said infants had died at the hospital even when the BJP was in power, and the number of deaths had come down under the Congress rule.

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR EMPOWERMENT OF PERSONS WITH MULTIPLE DISABILITIES (Divyangjan) (NIEPMD)
(Accredited by NAAC) (ISO 9001:2015)
(Dept. of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Govt. of India)
Muttukadu, East Coast Road, Kovalam (P.O), Chennai-603 112, Tamil Nadu
Fax: 044-27472389 Tel: 044-27472104, 27472113, 27472046
Website: www.niepmnd.in.nic.in • E-mail: niepmnd@gmail.com
Vacancy Notification (Temporary) No.01/2020
NIEPMD invites Applications from Indian Nationals who are eligible for the following temporary project consultant positions at Composite Regional Centre for Skill Development, Rehabilitation and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan), Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh.
Assistant Professor (PMR) Administrative Officer (Consultant)
Vocational Instructor (Consultant) Clinical Assistant (Dev.Therapist) (Consultant)
Note: Type of engagement: Contractual for 11 months. For details visit website www.niepmnd.in.nic.in Last date: 21st day from date of publication in Employment News. Sd/- Director

FROM PAGE ONE

After Gurdwara attack, BJP justifies CAA

Former Congress chief, Rahul Gandhi, while condemning the attack, called attention to ‘bigotry’ that transcends borders.

“The attack on Nankana Sahab is reprehensible & must be condemned unequivocally . Bigotry is a dangerous, age old poison that knows no borders. Love + Mutual Respect + Understanding is its only known antidote,” tweeted Mr. Gandhi soon after Union Minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal questioned his silence over the attack.

“Cong leader @RahulGandhi’s refusal to condemn stoning of #GurdwaraNankanaSahib & threat to the very existence of holy shrine reveals his anti-Sikh face. Rahul working overtime to mislead ppl on #CAA but has no time to take on Pak & expose atrocities it’s committing against Sikhs,” Ms. Badal has tweeted.

Union Minister Hardeep

Singh Puri shared a video of the mob outside the Nankana Sahib gurdwara on Twitter and said: “Murderous mob which laid siege to Sri Nankana Sahib has also threatened to change the name of this holiest of holy places to Ghulam-e-Mustafa. Persecution of minorities in Pakistan is for real. Do those opposed to CAA still need more proof? (sic),”

In Chandigarh, the SGPC chief said they would sens a delegation to meet with Punjab Governor and Chief Minister in Pakistan and urge them to ensure the safety of Sikhs. “Pakistan should take an immediate and strict action against all those who were involved in this condemnable act of attacking the historic gurdwara. We have decided to send a four member delegation to Pakistan, which will asses the ground situation there,”said SGPC president Gobind Singh Longowal.

India caught in crossfire as Trump invokes Delhi

Mr. Chegeni said that by raising the issue, Mr. Trump was attempting to cover the U.S.’s action in killing the Iranian official while he was visiting Iraq after travelling to Syria for “anti-terrorism consultations”.

“Gen Soleimani fought against the ISIS, Jubhat Al Nusra, Al-Qaeda. He was invited to Syria and Iraq by their governments for advice and assistance on fighting these terror groups. So anyone who assassinated him, is for the terrorists. And if this was ordered by their President, as the U.S. says, then this is an act of state terrorism,” he noted.

Delhi expresses concern

On Friday, India issued a statement that expressed concern over rising tensions between the U.S. and Iran, and “noted” the U.S.’s killing of the senior Iranian official.

When asked, Mr. Chegeni said he expected India

would also “condemn the assassination of an official who was on a visit to another country on official invitation.”

He stated, “We expect India as our reliable friend to advise the United States to follow international norms and not destabilise the region. We have the right to retaliate, but Iranians are patient, we will choose the time and place of our response to this killing.”

Tougher language is expected from Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif, who is due in Delhi on January 14 to address the Raisina dialogue.

The 3-day event, where U.S. Deputy National Security Advisor Matt Pottinger will also speak, could see India, which has attempted a “tightrope walk” in ties with both countries, caught in the middle again.

(With inputs from Saurabh Trivedi)

Sena denies reports of Minister’s resignation

Abdul Sattar Abdul Nabi, a three-time MLA from Sillod, was a Cabinet Minister in the Congress government in 2014. However, he resigned from the Congress, claiming that he did not get any support during the local elections.

Two years later, he resigned from the Assembly in support of the Maratha quota demand. He later attempted to join the BJP, but was denied ticket and joined the Shiv Sena in September 2019.

Meanwhile, Sena leaders said the rumours of Mr. Sattar’s resignation were baseless. Sena leader Arjun Khotkar said there was no question of Mr. Sattar tendering his resignation.

Senior Sena leader Sanjay Raut also denied a rift in the

MVA. “There are no differences in our Cabinet. If some minister resigns then normally resignation is sent to CM or Raj Bhawan. But both have no information about it yet,” Mr. Raut told reporters.

Mr. Sattar’s son Sameer told the media he was not aware of the resignation and requested everyone to wait for a statement from the father himself.

The BJP claimed it was the beginning of the end for the MVA.

“They have taken a full month to expand the Cabinet and now without any portfolio allocation, one minister has already resigned. This is the beginning of the fall of this government,” said former Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

Bedi gets trolled for tweeting fake video

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT PUDUCHERRY

Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi was trolled on Twitter for her comments. This time, Ms. Bedi, a popular figure on Twitter with more than 11 million followers, shared a doctored clip that claimed “NASA recorded sound of Sun... Sun chants Om”.

Twitter users, who lost no time debunking the video as fake, had a field day with all sorts of hilarious memes and comments. “It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to develop scientific temper, human-

ism and the spirit of inquiry and reform,” tweeted a user. “Is this actually what the Lt Governor of a UT believes in???? As a role model need to be careful what is tweeted!!!,” said a user.

A clip from the movie *Koi Mil Gaya* in which Hrithik Roshan is shown communicating with aliens using peculiar sounds, was used to poke fun at her tweet. The tweet was retweeted 7,600 times and liked by around 25,000 people.

Ms. Bedi in a WhatsApp message said: “Even if it is fake its worth listening to. It’s good and soothing.”

Unrest in Maharashtra Cong. over berths

Ahmed Patel meets Sonia as MLAs feel hurt over ‘raw deal’; tensions rise with Sena over Savarkar book

SANDEEP PHUKAN NEW DELHI

Days after the expansion of the Maharashtra Cabinet, there is unrest within the Congress camp about the party getting a “raw deal” in the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government.

With ally Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) likely to get both the Finance and Home portfolios besides 16 berths, a section of the Congress is unhappy over the reported allocation between the allies.

Senior Congress leader Ahmed Patel is reported to have discussed the Maharashtra issue with party chief Sonia Gandhi but there was no official word on the 45-minute meeting on Saturday.

Apart from the Ministry allocation, the Congress stance on Hindutva ideology Vinayak Damodar Sa-



Three is a crowd: Ashok Chavan, with Ajit Pawar and Uddhav Thackeray, will now speak to party MLAs. • VIVEK BENDRE

varkar, especially a controversial booklet taken out by the Congress Seva Dal in Madhya Pradesh, has added to the tensions with ally Shiv Sena.

“We are different parties with different ideologies and there would be differences

dated in the Cabinet, with MLA from Jalna Kailash Gorantyal issuing a fresh threat on Saturday that he would resign from all party posts along with his supporters.

Burnt in effigy

On Friday, Congress workers in Solapur burnt an effigy of senior leader and State in-charge Mallikarjun Kharge for including local MLA Praniti Shinde in the Cabinet.

A three-time legislator from Solapur City Central, Ms. Shinde is the daughter of veteran Congressman, former Chief Minister and Union Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde.

With 44 MLAs, the Congress has been given 12 berths, apart from the Speaker post to Nana Patole. Distribution of portfolios have made matters worse as

key Ministries have either gone to the NCP or the Shiv Sena.

Though the Congress was keen on having some of the key Ministries like Rural Development, Agriculture, Transport and Housing Development, it will have to settle with the Revenue and Public Works Ministries.

“We have got a raw deal both in terms of portfolios as well Ministries. We should have stuck to 14-14-14 formula where each ally would have got 14 berths,” a Congress functionary familiar with the State told *The Hindu*.

Former Chief Minister Ashok Chavan, who was inducted as a Cabinet Minister in the December 30 Cabinet expansion, and State Congress chief Balasaheb Thorat have been asked to speak to the disgruntled MLAs.

Withdraw Savarkar booklet: NCP

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has demanded that a Seva Dal booklet containing “insulting” remarks against Hindutva ideology Vinayak Savarkar be withdrawn.

The booklet issued this week claimed Vinayak Savarkar and Mahatma Gandhi’s assassin Nathuram Godse were in a physical relationship. The NCP on Saturday said this was not a fair claim to make when the persons in question was not alive. The Congress and the NCP are coalition partners in Maharashtra in the Maha Vikas Aghadi government.

“Since Savarkar is not alive, it is not correct to make this claim,” said State Minister and senior NCP leader Nawab Malik.

CAA: Sinha announces protest yatra

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MUMBAI

Former Union Minister Yashwant Sinha on Saturday announced a nationwide ‘Yatra’ (tour) in protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the National Register of Citizens and the National Population Register.

The campaign, organised under the banner of his organisation Rashtra Manch, would be called “Gandhi Shanti Yatra”, Mr. Sinha told presspersons here in the presence of former MP Shatrughan Sinha and former Gujarat Chief Minister Suresh Mehta.

The Yatra will start at Mumbai’s Apollo Bunder on January 9, pass through Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi and cover over 3,000 km, he said. It would end at the Raj Ghat in Delhi on January 30, Mahatma Gandhi’s death anniversary. Accusing the BJP-ruled States of using violence to suppress protests against the CAA, he blamed the government for disturbing peace.



Attack aftermath: Policemen inspect a spot after the grenade attack in the old city of Srinagar on Saturday. • NISSAR AHMAD

Civilian injured in attack

Militants hurled a grenade at a CRPF deployment in Srinagar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR

In separate incidents on Saturday, a teenager was injured in a grenade blast in Srinagar, and security forces arrested an injured Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) militant after two months from a local hospital here.

An official said Azhar Ahmed Bhat, 17, suffered minor splinter injuries when

unknown militants hurled a grenade at a CRPF deployment at Srinagar’s Kawdara area. “No CRPF jawan was injured,” said a CRPF spokesman.

Two vehicles were also damaged in the blast that occurred around noon. The grenade exploded in the middle of the road and triggered panic, with shopkeepers shutting their shops.

Meanwhile, the security forces arrested LeT militant Nisar Ahmed Dar, who was injured in an encounter on November 12, from the Bone and Joint Hospital, Srinagar.

A Srinagar-based police spokesman said Dar was held in an operation launched “on a credible input”. Dar was a close associate of LeT “commander” Saleem Parray, alias Billa.

Qalander completes five months in Valley jail

He was part of Rangarajan-led committee to formulate employment policy for Jammu & Kashmir

PEERZADA ASHIQ SRINAGAR

Neither a politician nor leader of a trade body, Shakeel Qalander, who was a member of a committee headed by eminent economist C. Rangarajan to formulate an employment policy for J&K in 2010-11, completed five months of detention on Saturday, with the family groping in the dark for reasons for his arrest and the possibility of release.

The relatives and family members of Mr. Qalander, who is from Srinagar’s Kanitar area, huddle together every Wednesday and Saturday – the days of the week when a blood relative is allowed to visit the Srinagar Central Jail and ascertain his



Behind bars: The family of Shakeel Qalander is groping in the dark for reasons for his arrest. • NISSAR AHMAD

well-being. “It was around 3 a.m. on August 5 when policemen surrounded our house, scaled the boundary wall and barged in,” recalled Mr. Qalander’s son Ahtisham Qalander, who is an IIT graduate. “The whole family was

part of preventive measures under Section 107, a magistrate’s order against Mr. Qalander read: “I have been given to understand that you and your associates are about to organise processions and such meetings which are likely to deteriorate the law and order situation.”

Regular speaker

Owning a well-known local furniture brand, the detained entrepreneur was a regular speaker at a civil society group, the Kashmir Centre for Social and Developmental Studies, and at public functions, debates and television shows and wrote newspaper columns.

“My father is well read

and understands the dynamism of economy,” said his son. “He would get invited frequently for lectures. Most of his lectures would focus on the economic welfare of J&K. He has been apparently detained for having an opinion. If he was such a threat, would the previous regime make him a member of the Rangarajan committee,” wondered the younger Mr. Qalander, who left work on his start-up initiative in New Delhi to return to oversee the family business. The family said it had assured the district administration that Mr. Qalander would sign a bond, as required under Section 107, undertaking “not to cause any law and order issue”.

Vyapam scam: CBI secures 94 convictions in 4 years

The investigation agency is pursuing 154 cases in the exam scandal in Madhya Pradesh

DEVESH K. PANDEY NEW DELHI

Pursuing as many as 154 cases on the Vyapam scam for four years, the Central Bureau of Investigation has so far secured 94 convictions against those who subverted the entrance tests for admission in educational institutions and government jobs in Madhya Pradesh. More than 3,100 accused persons have been chargesheeted.

The convicts have been awarded three to 10 years of imprisonment, based on the

severity of proven charges. The agency has filed about 145 charge sheets against the accused persons. They include the masterminds, middlemen, a large number of candidates, impersonators and former Vyapam officials. Over 130 of them have been arrested. Complaints against suspects who were minors have been filed in juvenile justice courts.

The agency used advanced software for the identification of those who impersonated candidates,

based on the facial features lifted from examination hall admit cards and other records.

Cases filed in July

The CBI took over the investigation with the registration of the first set of cases on July 15, 2015, following a direction from the Supreme Court. Subsequently, 154 cases were instituted over a period of time. The cases pertained to multiple instances of rigging of tests for admission in medical colleges, be-

sides the recruitment for posts such as police constable and forest guard.

The amount of effort that has gone into probing the cases was reflected in a key chargesheet filed against 592 accused persons in November 2017. Among those arraigned were 334 paper solvers and beneficiary candidates, 155 guardians of the candidates, 22 middlemen and 46 invigilators.

Chairmen of four private medical colleges, who allowed the admission of un-

qualified candidates, were also arraigned.

In order to trace 145 unidentified accused persons, most of whom were paper solvers hired to help the candidates clear the 2012 pre-medical test, the CBI collated details of more than 10 lakh students from Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Maharashtra.

The effort led to the identification of 42 persons in that case.



‘PM diverting attention from real issues’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT BENGALURU

Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad on Saturday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had been “insulting” Indians by frequently referring to Pakistan as a threat.

At a press conference at the party office here, he said, “Pakistan is a dead horse... Just to divert issues, Pakistan’s name is raised. What is Pakistan? If you send Kashmir police, they can also defeat Pakistan ... It is very insulting to say that Pakistan will attack us,” he said.

He accused Mr. Modi of resorting to rhetoric in the name of Pakistan to divert the nation’s attention from real issues.

“I have not seen the Prime Minister speaking on unemployment, the Home Minister speaking on farmers’ issues, any Minister talking about improving the GDP, and any of the BJP leaders speaking on controlling price rise. These are the issues that concern each and every individual,” he said.

Azad needs medical care: Bhim Army

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Bhim Army claimed on Saturday that its jailed chief Chandrashekhar Azad was unwell and needed immediate medical care.

Rejecting the claim, a jail official said Mr. Azad was “absolutely fine” and no such issue had come to their notice during routine medical check-ups.

Mr. Azad’s doctor Harjeet Singh Bhatti said the Bhim Army chief suffers from a disease which requires biweekly phlebotomy, a “procedure to remove extra red blood cells to treat certain blood disorders”.

Bhim Army spokesperson Kush Ambedkarwadi, who had met the jailed chief on Friday, said Mr. Azad had informed Tihar jail authorities about it.

CAA ends Assam Accord betrayal: BJP

‘Act will undo damage done by setting the cut-off year for accepting foreigners as 1971 instead of 1951’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Leaders of the BJP’s Assam unit said here on Saturday that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) was designed to undo the damage done by the leaders of the Assam agitation who settled for 1971 as the cut-off year for accepting foreigners instead of 1951.

Former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was the president of the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) when it led the agitation from 1979 to 1985. That stir ended with the signing of the Assam Accord, which prescribed deportation of “illegal immigrants” who entered the State after March 24, 1971.

“Assam was made to absorb the burden of illegal immigrants for 20 years by accepting 1971 as the base year instead of 1951 for accepting



Hat trick: BJP working president J.P. Nadda being presented an Assamese *japi* at a party rally in Guwahati on Saturday. •PTI

them. This was because of the Accord the AASU had signed with the Rajiv Gandhi government. Wasn’t that a betrayal by those who are

branding us betrayers now [because of CAA],” asked State Finance and Health Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at a rally of the party’s booth-

level presidents and elected rural representatives in Guwahati.

Show of strength

The rally was a show of strength after other parties including the Congress had joined hands against the BJP in the past few days.

The BJP had been on the back foot after the stir shook the State in December with protesters attacking the houses of party MLAs and leaders.

Mr. Sarma was particularly severe on Mr. Mahanta, who had gone against the Asom Gana Parishad leadership to slam the CAA that he said would open the floodgates for “Hindu Bangladeshis” to threaten eventually the existence of the Assamese people.

The anti-CAA activists say the law violates the Assam Accord.

“Samujjal [Bhattacharyya, chief adviser to the AASU] said the Accord was the best agreement. Why then was there no outrage when the Citizenship Act was amended in 1987 and 1992 for granting citizenship to the children of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants,” Mr. Sarma said.

People flustered

He said the first step toward setting things right was taken by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government when it decided not to let the children of illegal immigrants become Indians.

“Some people get flustered when we talk about the Hindus. The Congress has nothing against the CAA. They want the Muslims to be included. In Parliament, they had said they were opposed to it as the Muslims were not considered,” Mr. Sarma said.

U.P. panel seeks reports on minors’ use as ‘shields’

DMs, SPs told to submit reports

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (UPSCPCR) has asked all district magistrates (DMs) and police chiefs to submit reports providing details of persons who allegedly used minors and teenagers as “shields” during the violent protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

In a letter to the DMs and Superintendents of Police, Commission Chairperson Vishesh Gupta alleged that in the recent protests, students, minors and teenagers were used as “shields” to give a “violent shape” to the protests.

“Misleading children and minors to participate in violent protests in an organised

Misleading minors to participate in violent protests is a violation of child rights

VISHESH GUPTA
Commission Chairperson

manner is a violation of child rights,” Mr. Gupta said in the letter dated January 2. He asked the administration to submit reports within 10 days, and demanded action against those who used minors as “shield.”

This comes amid allegations against the police that they beat up children, minors and students, and even detained several of them across the State.

The accusation of police excesses, however, do not find a mention in the UPSCPCR letter.

Flashing the ‘gamosa’



Protest canvas: A demonstrator holding a piece of cloth locally known as *gamosa* during a protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in Nagaon district in Assam on Saturday. •REUTERS

Priyanka visits victims of police ‘violence’

Congress general secretary says people were beaten up ‘without any reason’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
LUCKNOW

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday visited the families of those who allegedly faced police excesses in Meerut and Muzaffarnagar.

“We will go wherever there has been injustice and stand with them and support [the victims],” she said after visiting the families in Muzaffarnagar.

The police beat up people “without any reason”, she said.

“Nobody has an objection when the police act against those who do something. But here, they entered homes and beat up [people]. They broke the items kept for the girl’s [Ruqaiya] marriage. She has 16 stitches on her forehead,” Ms. Vadra



Mourning a loss: Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday visiting the family of a person killed in violence in Meerut. •PTI

said after meeting Ruqaiya Parveen, whose house was allegedly ransacked by the police.

Policemen allegedly barged into her grandfather Haji Hamid Hasan Hasan’s house and went on a ram-

page damaging furniture and looting cash from the drawers he was saving for the marriage of his granddaughters. Mr. Hasan was assaulted with lathis and also hit with the butt of a rifle, as per accounts.

The marriage of his granddaughters Ruqaiya and Mubashshira is coming up in February.

In Muzaffarnagar, Ms. Vadra met Maulana Asad Raza Hussaini, who was allegedly beaten up by the police during a crackdown on the protests against the CAA.

Ms. Vadra said Mr. Hussaini was in a madrasa with children when the police assaulted him “mercilessly”. Many, including minors, were put in jail, she said, adding that only some of them were released.

Sitharaman to campaign for CAA in Jaipur

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAIPUR

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will address BJP workers on the issue of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) here on Sunday.

She will inaugurate the awareness campaign on Citizenship (Amendment) Act in Sanganer and will later address party workers at the party’s State headquarters here, BJP State general secretary Bhajan Lal Sharma said.

The BJP had earlier announced that its leaders will undertake campaigns across the country to spread awareness about CAA. They will also try and dispel alleged myths against the amended citizenship law.

Semester exams at Jamia to resume on January 9

Varsity had declared vacation after protests turned violent

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) on Saturday announced that semester examinations will resume on January 9.

By mid-December, the JMI had declared vacation till January 5 after violence erupted outside the campus following protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

The university had also postponed the ongoing examinations.

“The remaining semester exams shall start from January 9 (mostly for postgraduate courses). Most of the undergraduate courses shall start from January 16. The JMI is scheduled to open on

January 6 after winter vacation,” said the university administration.

The university said that medical cases would be treated separately. “Cases of serious hospitalisation or medical grounds will be dealt with separately. Parents are requested to ensure that their ward(s) appear for the examination on the given date,” said JMI.

‘Check updates’

Asking students to visit the university website “regularly” for updates, the administration said the examination schedule had been uploaded. “Students appearing in odd-semester examinations are hereby advised to come

to the university as per scheduled date of their examination displayed at www.jmi.ac.in and www.jmicoe.in,” reads a statement released by the university.

On December 15, a demonstration against the amended citizenship law saw the police enter the campus and allegedly baton-charge students.

Peaceful protests against the law have continued outside the JMI campus with students, residents and members of civil society participating in the demonstrations. The administration said the schedule for the upcoming semester will be notified faculty-wise on the website.

Sushil Modi dares Bengal, Kerala CMs

‘No State govt. can refuse CAA, NPR’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
PATNA

Senior Bihar BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi on Saturday dared the Chief Ministers of West Bengal and Kerala, Mamata Banerjee and Pinarayi Vijayan respectively, not to implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Population Register if they can.

Mr. Modi, who is also the Bihar Deputy Chief Minister, asserted that there is no question of discussing the issue of National Register of Citizens (NRC) as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made it clear that the government never discussed it.

“NPR and NRC are two different things,” he told newsmen here and blamed the Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal for the confusion on them and the CAA.



Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi

just before the 2021 census.

The NPR process in 2020 will be carried out between April 1 to September 30 in the country. In Bihar, it will be done between May 15 and May 28, 2020, Mr. Modi said.

Administrative and punitive action will be taken against officials if they refuse to carry out the NPR, he added.

The Deputy Chief Minister expressed satisfaction that there were no incident of major violence as people, especially Muslims, understood that the CAA is not meant to take away anyone’s citizenship.

Asked whether respondents will have to disclose the date and place of birth of their parents in the NPR, Mr. Modi said there is no mandatory provision for it. He also stressed that no documents like birth certificate or land documents will be sought from the respondents.

Replying to a query, Mr. Modi favoured adding a caste column in the Census 2021 and said that he would request the Centre for it as the State legislature has passed a resolution in this regard.

Replying to a query on Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s statement that NRC will be implemented across the country by 2024, he said: “There is no importance of anyone’s statement once the PM has said that the government has never discussed it.”

‘Statutory provision’

“No State, including West Bengal, Kerala, Rajasthan, can refuse to implement the CAA or NPR as the Centre has the power to bring legislation over citizenship. Preparing NPR is a statutory provision which no State can refuse to implement,” Mr. Modi said.

“No Chief Ministers, even if he/she is opposed to CAA and NPR, can refuse to implement them. Neither West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee nor Kerala CM P. Vijayan can say that they won’t implement NPR in their States. They can say anything for public consumption, but they can’t say no to CAA and NPR... A census director in each State has already been appointed, including in West Bengal,” he added.

The process of preparing the NPR began in 2010 during the UPA regime, which was completed between April 1 and September 30 that year, he said.

The Centre is just “updating” the NPR 2010 to 2020

Thousands mourn Soleimani in Iraq

Political leaders, clerics attend mass ceremony to honour slain Iranian commander

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BAGHDAD
Tens of thousands of Iraqis, many chanting “Death to America”, on Saturday mourned a top Iranian commander and others killed in a U.S. drone attack that sparked fears of a regional proxy war between Washington and Tehran.

The killing of Iran’s Major General Qassem Soleimani on Friday was the most dramatic escalation yet in spiralling tensions between Iran and the United States, which pledged to send thousands more troops to the region.

Iraqi political leaders and clerics attended the mass ceremony to honour Soleimani and the other nine victims of the pre-dawn attack on Baghdad international airport.



Raging fire: A demonstration in Karbala, Iraq, on Saturday against the U.S. airstrike that killed Qassem Soleimani. • AP

Mortars hit U.S. embassy compound

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BAGHDAD
Two mortar rounds hit the Iraqi capital’s Green Zone on Saturday and two rockets slammed into a base housing U.S. troops, security sources said, a day after a deadly American strike that killed Iran’s Commander-General Qassem Soleimani.

The precision drone strike outside the Baghdad airport on Friday killed Iranian commander Soleimani, top Iraqi paramilitary chief Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis and a

clutch of other Iranian and Iraqi figures.

In Baghdad, mortar rounds on Saturday evening hit the Green Zone, the high-security enclave where the U.S. embassy is based, security sources said.

The Iraqi military said that one projectile hit inside the zone, while another landed close to the enclave.

Sirens rang out at the U.S. compound, sources there said.

A pair of Katyusha rockets then hit the Balad airbase north of Baghdad, where American troops are

based, security sources and the Iraqi military said. Security sources there reported blaring sirens and said surveillance drones were sent above the base to locate the source of the rockets.

The Iraqi military confirmed the missile attacks in Baghdad and on Balad base and said there were no casualties.

U.S. troops and diplomats had been bracing themselves for more rocket attacks following the precision drone strike that killed Soleimani.

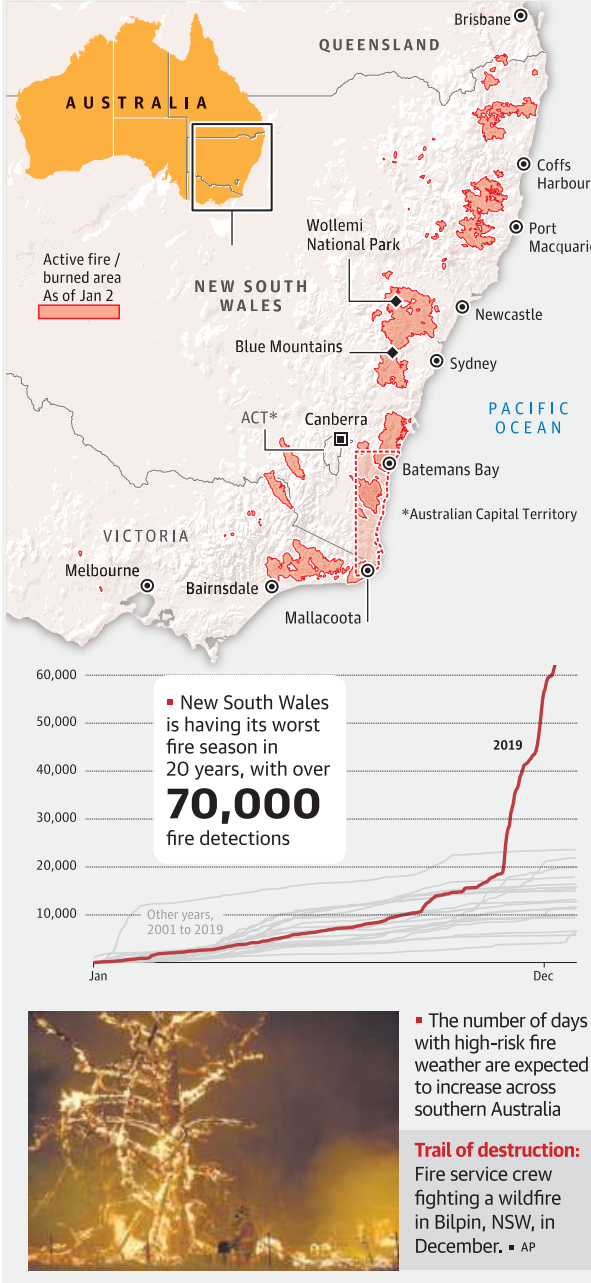
to Soleimani. Mass ceremonies started in Baghdad on Saturday for the dead, with Iraq’s caretaker Premier Adel Abdel Mahdi and top pro-Iran figures in large crowds accompanying the coffins. They were first brought to a revered Shia shrine in northern Baghdad, where thousands of mourners chanted “Death to America!”

Call for revenge
Dressed in black, they waved white Hashed flags and massive portraits of Iranian and Iraqi leaders, furiously calling for “revenge”. The remains were then moved to the shrine city of Karbala and would ultimately end up in Najaf, where the Iraqis will be buried. The Guards’ remains would be flown to Iran, which has declared three days of mourning and religious rituals.

Iraqis worry the U.S. strike could unleash a new wave of destabilisation for Iraq.

Amid the tensions, the Pentagon said up to 3,500 additional U.S. troops would be dispatched to Iraq’s neighbour Kuwait, to boost some 14,000 reinforcements already deployed to the region last year. About 5,200 U.S. troops are stationed across Iraq to help fight the IS. As a result of the tensions, NATO said it was suspending its training activities in Iraq and a U.S. defence official said that American-led coalition forces would “limit” operations. U.S. citizens were meanwhile urged to leave Iraq immediately and American staff were evacuated from oil fields in the south.

Iraq’s pro-Iran factions have seized on Soleimani’s death to push Parliament, which convenes on Sunday, to revoke the security agreement allowing U.S. forces on Iraqi soil.



Hot and dry Down Under

Australia is experiencing an unprecedented, drought-fuelled bushfire crisis that has burnt swathes of land across the continent over the last few months

6 million hectares burnt across the country

23 people killed, 17 in New South Wales (NSW)

Entire towns in NSW and Victoria were destroyed on New Year’s Eve

1,500 homes impacted

3,000 military reservists called up for rescue efforts

1 degree Celsius – rise in Australia’s temperature since 1910

2019 was the country’s hottest and driest year

Source: Graphic News, NYT Graphic Service

Australia PM criticised for bushfire ad

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
SYDNEY
Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison faced renewed criticism on Saturday, after sharing bushfire themed party campaign ads that opponents condemned as “disgusting” and a respected defence association said was “milking” the crisis.

Facing sustained anger for his handling of the months-long crisis, Mr. Morrison sought to get on the

front foot on Saturday, announcing increased military assistance to beleaguered volunteer firefighters.

In a string of media appearances, he vowed every resource would be provided to help ease a disaster that has killed 23 people and burned swathes of the country, announcing more funding for water-bombing planes. But he found himself in fresh scandal late on Saturday after tweeting a video

heralding his announcements about the military, and his Liberal Party made a similar post linking to the party website.

The non-partisan Australia Defence Association, a public-interest watchdog, said the Liberal Party advert was a “clear breach” of conventions keeping the military out of politics and accused the party of “milking ADF support to civil agencies fighting bushfires”.

China replaces top envoy in Hong Kong

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIJING
China has replaced its top envoy to Hong Kong, state media reported on Saturday, the most significant personnel change by Beijing since pro-democracy protests erupted in the city nearly seven months ago.

The removal of the head of the Liaison Office, which represents the Central government in semi-autonomous Hong Kong, comes as the city grapples with its biggest political crisis in decades. “Wang Zhimin has been dismissed from his position as head of the Liaison Office” and replaced by Luo Huining, state broadcaster CCTV said, without giving details.

Indian-origin MP to bid for Labour leadership

Party needs to change course: Nandy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON
Indian -origin British MP Lisa Nandy has formally launched her bid to replace Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader, urging the party members to “change course” to avoid becoming “irrelevant” in the wake of the party’s worst defeat in over 70 years in last month’s general election.

In articles written in *The Guardian* and the *Wigan Post*, the Ms. Nandy, 40, said she wanted to “bring Labour home” to voters that have abandoned the party in its traditional strongholds. Ms. Nandy has become the fourth Labour hopeful to throw her hat in



the ring after Clive Lewis, Jess Phillips and Emily Thornberry.

In a stark warning to party members, Ms. Nandy, who has championed the needs of Britain’s towns, said “unless we change course, we will become irrelevant”.

Lebanon banks close over clients’ demands

Since September, there has been a cap on the money that can be withdrawn

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
BEIRUT
Banks in a region of northern Lebanon were closed until further notice on Saturday, the National News Agency said, after lenders balked at customer anger over a liquidity crisis.



Being adversarial: Protesters shouting slogans against the Lebanese political class in Beirut, on December 30. • AP

Since September, banks have arbitrarily capped the amount of dollars that can be withdrawn or transferred abroad, sparking fury among customers who accuse lenders of holding their money hostage. There is also a limit on Lebanese pound withdrawals.

Clients wanting dollars often have to stand in queues for hours to make withdrawals, only to be told bills have run out once they reach the counter.

On Saturday, all banks in the northern region of Akkar were closed, the NNA said, following a call from the Association of Banks for them to shut their doors “until further notice”.

On Friday, citizens entered a bank branch in the town of Halba to protest about customers being unable to withdraw enough dollars or their salaries in Lebanese pounds in full, NNA reported.

They said they would not

leave until a customer – who suffered an unspecified health complaint while waiting – was given a guarantee that he would be paid in full. The 10-hour standoff – which included security forces firing tear-gas inside the building – ended with the man being taken to hospital and management promising to pay him in full.

The Association of Banks the same day called for lenders in the area to close over the incident, which it described as an “attack” and “a threat to the lives and safety of employees”. Unprecedented anti-government protests have gripped Lebanon since October 17, in part to decry a lack of action over the deepening economic crisis.

ELSEWHERE

Greta marks 17th birthday with protest
STOCKHOLM
“I’m not the kind of person who celebrates birthdays,” Greta Thunberg said as she turned 17 on Friday, marking the occasion with a seven-hour protest outside the Swedish Parliament. The climate activist braved winter conditions in Stockholm to continue the weekly ‘Friday School Strike for the Climate’ campaign that helped catapult her to fame. REUTERS

53 killed in Indonesia floods, landslides
JAKARTA
Nearly 1,75,000 people remain displaced in Jakarta and nearby towns, after flash floods and landslides killed at least 53 people, amid some of the heaviest rain since records began, authorities said on Saturday. “The death toll has risen to 53 people, with one person missing,” disaster agency spokesman Agus Wibowo said. REUTERS

Neutral pronoun ‘they’ is word of the decade
NEW YORK
The neutral pronoun “they” has been voted word of the decade by U.S. language experts, beating out other contenders that included “climate” and “meme”. “They” is used in English by a growing number of non-binary individuals, people who do not identify as either male or female. They prefer the plural neutral pronoun to bypass the traditionally male “he” or female “she”. AFP

2 foreigners involved in Ghosn flight: Turkey
ISTANBUL
Turkey on Saturday said two foreigners were involved in businessman Carlos Ghosn’s transit through Istanbul as he fled Japan on his way to Lebanon. “There are two foreigners involved in the transit,” Turkish Justice Minister Abdulhamit Gul told CNN’s Turk broadcaster during an interview. AFP

SUDOKU

	4	7		2			1	
	6					7	5	
9		5						
	1			7	2	9		5
			9		4			
6		9	5	3			8	
					2		6	
	2	1				7		
9			5		8	4		

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to yesterday’s Sudoku

5	8	9	4	6	2	3	7	1
6	1	4	3	7	5	9	8	2
2	3	7	1	9	8	4	5	6
7	9	3	5	2	1	8	6	4
4	6	5	8	7	9	2	1	7
1	2	8	7	4	6	5	3	9
8	4	6	9	1	3	7	2	5
3	7	2	6	5	4	1	9	8
9	5	1	2	8	7	6	4	3

Targeted for mocking Saudi royals through satire

Ghanem al-Masarir’s videos have been viewed more than 300 million times on YouTube

DAVID SEGAL
LONDON

No one has skewered the Saudi royal family as gleefully as Ghanem al-Masarir.

In hundreds of videos posted to YouTube – which have been viewed more than 300 million times – Mr. al-Masarir sits at a desk, usually at his home in North London, offers a jovial greeting in Arabic, then launches into a series of embarrassing Saudi-related stories. The tone is sharply satirical, the delivery a bit hammy.



Living dangerously: Ghanem al-Masarir, a Saudi dissident satirist and YouTube star, in London. • NYT

One of his favourite targets is Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi Crown Prince, whom he long ago tagged with a nickname, now widely used by detractors, that translates to “the bear that has gone astray.” As mild as this may sound to Western ears, calling someone a bear in West Asia is tantamount to calling him fat and ugly, and “astray” in this context means immoral, corrupt, essentially a gangster.

In October 2018, Mr. al-Masarir says, the British police visited his home to deliver an official warning about a threat to his life. They left him with a “panic button” system, attached through his phone line, that summons the authorities when activated, but they offered no specifics about the source of the threat.

To Mr. al-Masarir, it’s no mystery. Years ago, he says,

he was quietly alerted to an apparent Saudi plan to kidnap him, a heads-up that came from an unlikely source: the Saudi intelligence agent later accused of masterminding the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, *The Washington Post* op-ed columnist killed in 2018 in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul.

And the Saudi regime has spent years trying to intimidate Mr. al-Masarir, he says,

through cyberattacks on his social media platforms.

Campaign by Riyadh

A few months before the police showed up at his door, Mr. al-Masarir says, the campaign against him escalated.

His smartphones had turned unaccountably sluggish, and at the behest of a friend – familiar with the side effects of covertly installed spyware – he asked a cybersecurity watchdog group to figure out why.

After examining his smartphones, Citizen Lab, a non-profit organization based in Toronto, told him that they had been infected with Pegasus, a virus created by an Israeli tech company, NSO Group. It turns smartphones into all-purpose surveillance tools, hoovering up texts and emails, eavesdropping on calls and tracking locations.

Citizen Lab found digital footprints on Mr. al-Masarir’s smartphones leading directly to Saudi Arabia. That dis-

covery, and the police visit, prompted Mr. al-Masarir to take an unusual step: He sued the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, demanding an apology and unspecified damages, for ruining his phones and causing personal distress and anxiety. “You’re dealing essentially with the mafia,” Mr. al-Masarir said, during a meeting at the offices of Leigh Day, a law firm that is representing him on a “no win, no fee” basis. “Except they have diplomatic passports and a lot of money.”

Mr. al-Masarir came to Britain 16 years ago, seeking both an education and a way to denounce his native country from afar. Along the way, he discovered his inner performer and YouTube, an on-line platform that provided both a steady flow of income and a prominence he had never imagined. A 2018 list of thought leaders in the Arab world compiled by Global Influence ranked him No. 17. NY TIMES

Nippon MF, Credit Suisse, IRDAI spat headed to SAT

Dispute about pledging Reliance General Insurance shares

ASHISH RUKHAIYAR
MUMBAI

An ongoing tussle between the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), Nippon India Mutual Fund and Credit Suisse is likely to head to the Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) after the insurance watchdog declared that the pledging of shares of Reliance General Insurance with the two entities was in violation of the law.

According to persons familiar with the development, the two entities intend to contest the IRDAI directive as they believe that the pledge was created to safeguard the interests of their investors and unit holders without an intent of owning the shares of the insurance company.

Reliance Home defaults
“The pledge was invoked after a default by Reliance Home Finance and was done purely based on the fiduciary responsibilities and the share pledge agreement,” said a person familiar with the matter.

“The IRDAI directive has created a scenario wherein the issuer has already defaulted and the bond holders no more have access to the collateral that was placed while restructuring the payment terms,” he added on the condition of anonymity.

The matter goes back to March 2018 when Reliance Home Finance issued non-convertible debentures to raise about ₹400 crore. The bonds were subscribed by Nippon India MF and Credit Suisse.

Thereafter, the bonds matured in June 2019 but Reliance Home Finance was unable to meet the payment



The Insurance Act caps the foreign holding limit in an insurance company. •GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

obligations and hence sought restructuring of the terms wherein the maturity date was extended to October 31, 2019 and additional security was brought in by Reliance Capital, the promoter of Reliance Home Finance.

For the additional collateral, Reliance Capital pledged its 100% shareholding in Reliance General Insurance Company.

Payment default
The company, however, again defaulted on its payment obligations and both, Nippon India MF and Credit Suisse invoked the pledge as per the deed of guarantee dated July 19, 2019 and the amended and restated share pledge agreement dated June 26, 2019.

IDBI Trusteeship, which was acting as the debenture trustee, took possession of the shares of Reliance General Insurance from the depository account of Reliance Capital.

This pledge or the transfer of shares, as per IRDAI, is a violation of Section 6(4)(b) (iii) of the Insurance Act 1938 along with Regulation 3 of IRDAI (Transfer of Equity Shares of Insurance Companies) Regulations 2015.

In its letter dated Decem-

ber 27, IRDAI declared the pledge as “null and void ab initio” while also stating that Section 2(7A) of the Insurance Act caps the foreign holding limit in an insurance company.

While both, Credit Suisse and Nippon India MF are foreign entities, the foreign holding for an insurance company is capped at 49%. While a spokesperson for Credit Suisse declined to comment, an e-mail query sent to Nippon India Mutual Fund remained unanswered till the time of going to press.

“Transfer of shares is sacrosanct in depository system, and SAT, that hears appeals against orders issued by SEBI and IRDAI, has consistently taken a position that reversal of a transfer or invocation of pledge should not be allowed to maintain the sanctity of the market,” said a securities market lawyer wishing not to be named.

Interestingly, in a release issued on December 29, Reliance Capital said that the IRDAI decision has “protected the interest of all lenders and debenture holders” of the company and will help in monetising its stake in the insurance company to reduce its overall debt.

TCS moves SC against NCLAT order on Mistry

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), the flagship firm of the Tata Group, on Saturday said it has filed an appeal in the Supreme Court against the NCLAT order that directed the reinstatement of Cyrus Mistry as a director of the company.

In a filing with the stock exchanges, TCS said the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT), vide its judgment on December 18, 2019, had directed the re-instatement of Mr. Mistry as director of the company for rest of the tenure.

“... the company, based on a legal opinion, has on January 3, 2020 filed an appeal in the Supreme Court of India (i) to set aside the said judgment qua the company and (ii) [to give an] interim stay on operation of the said judgment to the extent it relates to the company,” it added.

Murugappa Group heir for board seat in holding co.

Female heirs must be given equal opportunity, says Valli Arunachalam

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

A storm is brewing in the \$5-billion Chennai-based Murugappa Group with Valli Arunachalam, the elder daughter of late M.V. Murugappan, locking horns with family patriarch, the 80-year-old M.V. Subbiah demanding that female heirs be given an equal opportunity in the family business on similar terms as male heirs.

Mr. Murugappan, who passed away in 2017, was survived by his wife and two daughters, Valli Arunachalam and Vellachi Murugappan.

Ms. Valli Arunachalam,

Smartphones will become passe: Baidu’s Li

Next decade to be an intelligent economy powered by AI, says Baidu founder

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Chinese internet search giant Baidu is very much looking forward to working with Indian institutions in the current decade, its co-founder, chairman and chief executive officer Robin Li said.

“India is one of the fastest growing smartphone markets in the world and it is a very large developing country next to China. Both countries have seen fast growth in the last few decades and over the next decade, there will be more opportunities for us,” he said at IIT Madras’ tech fest, Shastra 2020.

Mr. Li was speaking on the topic “Innovation in the age of AI.”

He termed the decade, which had just gone by, as an internet economy, while the coming decade will be an ‘intelligent economy’ powered by AI.

Mr. Li also predicted that in the next 10 years, people



Baidu is looking forward to working with Indian institutions in the current decade, says Robin Li •BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

would be less and less dependent on mobile phones.

“Because, wherever you go, there will be surrounding sensor infrastructure that can answer your question and that can serve you. So, you don’t have to pull out your mobile phone,” he pointed out.

This will be in contrast to the previous decade where people were more dependent on mobile phones for everything right from pay-

ments, food delivery, retail to ride-hailing, Mr. Li said.

AI as virtual assistant
He also highlighted various use cases for AI as a virtual assistant across sectors.

“Banks find it difficult to open branches. They can use virtual assistance to help customers open accounts. Even people are more comfortable dealing with virtual person than real person,” Mr. Li said.

AI is transforming banking and insurance, customer services, education and pharma industry, among others, he said.

For instance, Mr. Li said AI can help customers choose a suitable tariff plan in telecom services, which would be difficult for a real person to suggest in quick time. AI is enabling pharma industry accelerate drug development, he said.

According to Mr. Li, AI is also transforming transportation and reducing traffic delays by 20-30% in China and also can help reduce accidents.

It has also helped in finding missing people and already 9,000 missing people had been found, he said.

Mr. Li also pointed out that AI can make one immortal

“When everything about you can be digitised, computers can learn all about you, creating a digital copy of anyone,” he said.

Avail Finance eyes 15 million customers

LALATENDU MISHRA
MUMBAI

Fintech start-up, Avail Finance, that provides online loans to blue-collared workers like drivers and security guards earning between ₹15,000 and ₹20,000 a month is targeting to onboard 15 million of such unserved people in the next 18 months on its platform, a top executive said.

The company, which has cumulatively disbursed loans of ₹250 crore to one-million customers since 2017, plans to scale up the cumulative disbursements to over ₹3000 crore by then, said Ankush Aggarwal, its CEO.

“Our objective is to reach out to all the ‘missing middle’ urban poor who are neither served by traditional financial institutions nor by micro finance companies,” he said.

Use working capital limits: SBI

India can become \$5 trillion economy, says chairman Kumar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD

State Bank of India (SBI) Chairman Rajnish Kumar on Saturday urged corporates to utilise working capital limits as well as the facility under which the country’s largest lender extended finance against receivables due from government departments.

“I am absolutely comfortable in discounting receivables or extending receivables finance... ready to give up to 360 days [credit],” he said, adding the due, however, should not be disputed by the government.

In the past, there had been instances of such receivables shown in the balance sheet but the government department saying it did not owe any money, Mr. Kumar told a FICCI event.

The SBI head sought to underscore the need for corporates to work towards building trust.



Rajnish Kumar

“Traditionally lending is always on trust... but last few years have not been good because of breach of trust,” he said, even while pointing out to the significance of encouraging entrepreneurship and accepting business failures.

The problem comes when the failure is not necessarily on account of business circumstances.

“When an enterprise closes down, its employees suffer... but we find no impact

on the promoter. Their lifestyle remains unchanged, we cannot ignore that dimension,” Mr. Kumar said.

On the need for better coordination among banks with regard to consortium lending, he said a committee of six bankers – two foreign and an equal number of private and public sector banks – of the Indian Banks’ Association (IBA) has been formed. It will submit its report in three months to usher in faster decision making, transparency and all bankers agreeing to share information on lending based on cash flows.

On India’s plan to become a \$5 trillion economy, Mr. Kumar said it was achievable, without commenting on the five-year time frame set to achieve the same. The growth will come on the back of private sector revival and not just on government investment, he added.

IT firms must focus on home market

Sectors such as retail and telecom poised for deeper tech deployments

MINI TEJASWI
BENGALURU

In the backdrop of the U.S. election, Brexit and challenges in Europe, Indian technology providers seem to have increased their focus on the home market, where sectors such as retail, telecom, media, travel, logistics, oil, power and hospitality are poised for deeper tech deployments, say global analysts.

Hansa Iyengar, senior analyst, advanced digital services, Ovum, said, domestic market, in the current context, would be much better for Indian technology providers than chasing newer customers in key markets such as Europe and the U.S.

“Retail, telecom, media, travel, logistics and hospitality are important sectors, and most desi providers



Domestic market would be much better for Indian firms, says Hansa Iyengar.

have existing engagements in some of these verticals. In this year and near term, we expect these relationships to grow substantially with India as a whole being on a rapid modernisation drive,” she added.

Commenting on the market scenario, R. Ray Wang,

principal analyst, founder, and chairman of California-based Constellation Research, Inc. said, “There are too many sellers chasing buyers in key markets. We expect clients to reduce the number of vendors they work with and seek more help in digital, AI and automation.”

Growing North America
So, the home market would open up near-term growth opportunities for Indian providers, although the long-term prize would still be around growing accounts in North America and increasing market share in EMEA (Europe, Middle-East and Africa), stated Mr. Wang.

As per Chicago-based analyst firm HFS Research, data explosion, digital disruption and customer experience

have emerged as the top three drivers impacting business operations. Offshoring and traditional outsourcing has lost its mojo. But the promise of emerging technologies across the Triple-A Trifecta (automation, analytics, and artificial intelligence), cloud, IoT and blockchain is unquestionable.

“However, the ‘how’ to scale these technologies to realise their promise continues to be a black hole. Indian service providers, who can help clients get to the promised land beyond the piecemeal initiatives, POCs (proof of concepts) and pilots are the ones that are likely to succeed,” said Saurabh Gupta, chief research officer at HFS.

On the changing environment, Mr. Gupta said, a clash of cultures was imminent.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Tussle over Belagavi

What is the border dispute between Maharashtra and Karnataka all about and what is the Central government’s stand?

SHARATH S. SRIVATSA

The story so far: Last month, Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray appointed Ministers Chaggan Bhujbal and Eknath Shinde as coordinators to oversee the State government’s efforts to expedite the case related to the boundary dispute with Karnataka. On the floor of the Assembly, Mr. Thackeray said Prime Minister Narendra Modi understands the PoK issue, but not Maharashtra’s border issue. This triggered a response on the Karnataka side, with the Karnataka Rakshana Vedike condemning Mr. Thackeray’s statement. Adding fuel to the fire was the case of blackening of Kannada boards in Kolhapur in Maharashtra and stopping of a Kannada film being screened citing law and order issues. The border areas, including Belagavi (earlier Belgaum), the epicentre of the issue for over six decades, remain tense.

What is the controversy?

In 1957, slighted by the implementation of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, Maharashtra demanded readjustment of its border with Karnataka. It invoked Section 2I(2)(b) of the Act, and submitted a memorandum to the Ministry of Home Affairs stating its objection to Marathi-speaking areas being added to Karnataka. It claimed an area of 2,806 square miles that involved 814 villages, and three urban settlements of Belagavi, Karwar and Nippani with a total population of about 6.7 lakh, all part of the Mumbai Presidency before Independence. The villages are spread across Belagavi and Uttar Kannada in north-western Karnataka, and Bidar and Gulbarga districts in north-eastern Karnataka – all bordering Maharashtra.

Later, when a four-member committee was formed by both States, Maharashtra expressed a willingness to transfer 260 predominantly Kannada-speaking villages with a population of about 3.25 lakh and total area of 1,160 square miles in lieu of accepting its demand for 814 villages and three urban settlements, which was turned down by Karnataka.

What was the basis of Maharashtra’s claim? Maharashtra’s claim to seek the readjustment of its border was on the basis of contiguity, relative linguistic majority and wishes of the people. If the claim over Belagavi and surrounding areas was based on Marathi speaking people and linguistic homogeneity, it laid its

Maharashtra’s claim to seek the readjustment of its border was on the basis of contiguity and relative linguistic majority. Karnataka says the settlement of boundaries as per the States Reorganisation Act is final

claim over Karwar and Supa where Konkani is spoken by citing Konkani as a dialect of Marathi. Its argument was based on the theory of village being the unit for calculation and enumerated linguistic population in each village. Maharashtra also points out the historical fact that the revenue records in these Marathi-speaking areas are also kept in Marathi.

What is Karnataka’s position?

Karnataka has argued that the settlement of boundaries as per the States Reorganisation Act is final. The State argues that the issue would reopen border issues that have not been contemplated under the Act, and that such a demand should not be permitted. Initially, Karnataka was open to adjusting the border in the 10 mile belt from the drawn boundary.

Did the States make an effort to find a solution?

In 1960, both States agreed to set up a four-man committee with two representatives from each State. Except on the issue of contiguity, the committee could not arrive at a unanimous decision, and respective representatives submitted reports to their government. Between the 1960s and 1980s, the Chief Ministers of Karnataka and Maharashtra have met several times to find a solution but with no avail.

How has the Union Government responded?

Under sustained pressure from Maharashtra, in 1966, the Centre announced setting up a one-man commission under the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India, Meher Chand Mahajan, to look into border issues between Karnataka (then Mysore state) and Maharashtra. The commission was also asked to look into Karnataka’s demand for integration of Kannada-speaking areas in Kasargod in Kerala.

While Maharashtra reiterated its demand, Karnataka sought areas in Kolhapur, Sholapur and Sangli districts from Maharashtra, and Kasargod from Kerala. The commission received more than 2,200 memoranda and met over 7,500 people. It submitted its report to the Union Government in 1967. The commission’s report was placed in Parliament in 1972. The commission rejected Maharashtra’s claim over Belagavi city while recommending transfer of about 260 villages to Maharashtra and about 250 villages in Maharashtra to Karnataka. Maharashtra said the report was inconsistent and an unfair application of its own principle. It also said that the report was not a final word on the issue. Karnataka, however, agreed to the report.

Last week, in response to Mr. Thackeray’s statement, Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa reiterated that the Mahajan Commission report was final and “the question of transferring even an inch of land does not arise”. In 2004, Maharashtra had approached the Supreme Court for a settlement under Article 131 (b) of the Constitution. Karnataka has questioned it. With one of the judges recusing, the court has to set up a new bench.

Is West Asia headed for war?

How will the killing of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani, in a U.S. drone attack, impact the region?

STANLY JOHN

The story so far: Relations between the United States and Iran hit a dangerous new low on Friday, January 3, 2020, when Major Gen. Qassem Soleimani, a top Iranian commander, was killed in a U.S. air strike outside Baghdad airport. Gen. Soleimani, who the U.S. held responsible for the deaths of scores of American soldiers in Iraq, was the commander of the Qods Force, the external intelligence and security unit of the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). A furious Iran has now vowed a forceful revenge for the killing, raising the risks of a direct war between the U.S. and Iran to an all-time high.

Why did the U.S. launch the drone attack?

As the main architect of Iran’s foreign operations, Gen. Soleimani has been in the cross hairs of the U.S. for years. Ever since he took over the Qods Force in 1998, he expanded the operations of the unit, by deepening Iran’s links with its proxy groups such as Hezbollah and the Badr Organisation, or building new militias such as the Shia Popular Mobilization Units and Houthis. As a leading figure of the Iranian regime, he was seen in public quite often, either attending events in Iran or on the front lines of Iraq or Syria. Attacking him with high-precision air strikes was not an impossible option for the U.S., but U.S. President Donald Trump’s predecessors chose not to take that path as the risks outweighed possible benefits. Mr. Trump ordered the hit as tensions between the two countries were soaring, especially in Iraq.

The latest spell of the crisis was triggered after a rocket attack by Iran-trained Iraqi militias in which an American military contractor was killed in Iraq last month. In retaliation, the U.S. launched air strikes at Kataib Hezbollah in Iraq, a Shia paramilitary group trained and funded by the Iranians, killing at least 25. This was followed by an attack on the American Embassy in Baghdad on Tuesday by protesters. The Trump administration held Iran responsible for the storming of the Embassy, and warned of serious repercussions. On Friday, in retaliation, Mr. Trump ordered the drone hit on Gen. Soleimani, who was practically the commander of the Kataib Hezbollah and other Shia militias operating in Iraq. U.S. officials also say that Iran proxies under Gen. Soleimani’s leadership were planning to carry out more attacks on U.S. interests in West Asia and that the assassination was carried out to deter them.

Why is the U.S. targeting Shia militias?

Also killed in Friday’s air strike was Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), an umbrella organisation of pro-Iran Iraqi militias in which Kataib Hezbollah is a member. The PMF was founded in 2014 under Gen. Soleimani’s supervision when Iran was trying to put together militias in Iraq and Syria in the wake of civil wars in both countries. Iran’s main goal was to save the embattled regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria and defeat the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq, which was threatening the Baghdad government in 2014. The PMF is constituted of dozens of militias, including the Kataib Hezbollah, Badr Organisation and Kataib al-Imam Ali, through which Gen.



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Soleimani and Iran in general exercised enormous influence on Iraqi politics. The PMF played an instrumental role in defeating the IS. The militias fought alongside the Iraqi Army, with the U.S. providing air cover, and liberated Iraqi cities in the north and west from the clutches of the IS. But once the IS Caliphate was destroyed and tensions were on the rise between Iran and the U.S. after the U.S. pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, the PMF militias started targeting U.S. forces in Iraq.

In September, the U.S. State Department shut the consulate in the southern Iraqi city of Basra, citing “repeated incidents of fire from Iran-backed militias”.

Iraq is being pushed to a point where it has to choose between Iran and the U.S. Given the influence Iran wields over Iraqi polity, Baghdad is unlikely to antagonise Tehran

The decision followed a rocket attack on Basra airport close to where the consulate is located. As U.S.-Iran tensions soared in the wake of Washington doubling down sanctions on Iran, U.S. forces in Iraq came under several rocket attacks. The U.S. repeatedly blamed Iran-backed militias for the

attacks. Unlike the previous attacks that did not have any American casualty, the rocket attack on a military base in Kirkuk on December 28 killed an American civilian contractor, following which the U.S. launched the hit on Kataib Hezbollah.

What is Iraq’s position?

Iraq is caught between the U.S. and Iran. The U.S., since Saddam Hussein’s regime was toppled, has been a major security partner of Iraq. At present, America has about 5,000 troops deployed in various parts of Iraq. On the other side, Iran is Iraq’s more powerful neighbour. Most Shia political parties and leaders in Iraq have deep, historical ties with the Iranian regime. Also, the Shia militias are a parallel military force; it takes its orders directly from Tehran rather than from Baghdad. Thus, Iraq cannot totally ignore Iran. The U.S.’s unilateral use of air power within Iraq targeting Iraqi militias without the permission of the government has upset Baghdad. The Iraqi government had strongly condemned the U.S. air strikes on Kataib Hezbollah; a huge crowd participated in

Why has the U.S. crippled the functioning of the WTO?

Is the World Trade Organization dying? Why does America disregard the authority of the Appellate Body?

D. RAVI KANTH

The story so far: Even as the trade war between China and the United States shows no signs of ending, Washington has paralysed the World Trade Organization’s Appellate Body, which acts as a supreme court for international trade. In December 2019, the U.S. chose to spike the Appellate Body by starving funds for its functioning. It also stalled the selection process for filling six vacancies at the Appellate Body. Consequently, the Appellate Body is left with only one member, who will not be able to deliver any rulings on pending trade disputes – a minimum of three members is required to adjudicate any dispute.

What is the World Trade Organization’s Appellate Body and why is it in the news?

Global trade disputes are complex and difficult to resolve. For proper enforcement of trade rules, a binding, two-stage dispute settlement system was established at the World Trade Organization in the 1990s. The Appellate Body is the scaffolding of the dispute settlement system, with seven standing members.

In the first stage for adjudicating trade disputes, a panel would decide cases brought before it by the members. Rulings issued by the panels can be appealed at the Appellate Body. As part of the second-stage of adjudication, the Appellate Body can uphold, modify or reverse the legal findings and conclusions of a panel. Therefore, the Appellate Body’s decisions are final and adopted within 30 days by the dispute settlement body. Sanctions can be imposed on a member in case of its failure to comply with the Appellate Body’s rulings.

The panels and the Appellate Body have issued rulings in almost 200 disputes involving bananas, cotton, aircraft, beef, tuna, trade, ‘shrimp-turtles’, hot-rolled coils, subsidies for renewable energy, and gambling. Cases involving trade remedies such as countervailing and anti-dumping measures, and the use of a controversial practice called the zeroing methodology that inflated the anti-dumping duties, dominated the disputes among the WTO members.

The establishment of the Appellate Body has given teeth and credibility to the rules-based multilateral trading system. Moreover, it provided security and predictability in the multilateral trading system. But the U.S. chose to spike the highest appeals body for global trade disputes by alleging that it has gone astray.

Why did the U.S. choose to strangle the Appellate Body?

The smooth and effective functioning of the Appellate Body, which is regarded as the jewel in the crown, has posed hurdles to the U.S. for adopting unilateral measures. Several U.S. provisions for imposing countervailing and anti-dumping measures were found to be inconsistent with core provisions of the WTO agreements.

Finally, the U.S. chose to spike the Appellate Body by resorting to starving funds for its functioning as well as blocking the selection process for filling six vacancies. Consequently, the Appellate Body is left with only one



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member, who will not be able to deliver any rulings on the pending trade disputes. A minimum of three members are required to adjudicate any dispute.

Why did the U.S. block the selection process for filling six vacancies?

The independent and impartial functioning of the Appellate Body in complex trade disputes has become a problem for Washington over the past many years. While the U.S. has accepted favourable rulings that served its interests in global trade, it raised intransigent concerns about adverse decisions that struck down the U.S.’s trade measures. Washington has repeatedly accused the Appellate Body of allegedly straying away from the dispute settlement understanding (DSU) in several disputes involving the U.S.’s measures that were challenged by other members. It has maintained that the Appellate Body failed to issue rulings within the 90-day deadline. The U.S. says the Appellate Body’s rulings failed to adhere to the provisions in the dispute settlement understanding in cases involving countervailing (anti-subsidy) and anti-dumping measures based on the zeroing methodology. It argues that the the Appellate Body’s decisions “assert a precedential value for its reports...”. It has suggested that “some Appellate Body members view themselves as ‘appellate judges’... serving on a ‘World Trade Court’ that is the ‘centerpiece’ of the WTO dispute settlement system ... rather than one component of it.” The U.S. has argued: “Such an expansive vision of the Appellate Body is not reflected in the DSU and was not agreed to by the United States.” Finally, “there has been no discussion of why the Appellate Body has departed from its agreed role,” it has maintained.

How did other WTO members respond to the barrage of criticism levelled by the U.S. against the Appellate Body?

Many WTO members did not agree with the U.S. about the functioning of the Appellate Body. Early last year, a facilitator was appointed by WTO members at a general council meeting to address the specific concerns raised by the U.S. about the Appellate Body. The facilitator, who is also the chair for the WTO’s dispute settlement body, Ambassador David Walker of New Zealand, held several rounds of consultations with members to finalise a draft decision on unblocking the crisis at the Appellate Body. The draft decision included a package of reforms to improve the functioning of the Appellate Body as well as

the siege of the American Embassy. The assassination of Gen. Soleimani triggered instant street protests in Iraq, with protesters chanting “Death to America”.

It is a complex situation. The Iraqi government is being pushed to a point where it has to choose between Iran and the U.S. And given the intricacy of Iraq’s domestic power dynamics and the influence Iran wields over the Iraqi polity, Baghdad is unlikely to antagonise a wounded Tehran.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi has said Parliament will meet in the coming days to discuss “appropriate measures to preserve the dignity of Iraq and its security and sovereignty”. The question is whether the Iraqi government will ask the U.S. to leave the country. Already, calls are getting louder from the Iraqi political class to expel U.S. troops from the country.

So is war inevitable?

It depends on Iran’s response. After killing Gen. Soleimani, the U.S. has said it is committed to de-escalation. The U.S. is saying that it does not want the situation to spiral out of control. But for Iran, this is not just another attack. Gen. Soleimani was one of the top generals of the regime. Self-preservation or protecting the lives of the top leaders is the primary objective of any regime. A failure means a hole in its deterrence. If Iran’s deterrence capacity prevented previous American Presidents from taking such a step, Mr. Trump decided to ignore that, taking a huge risk. So it is upon Iran not only to take revenge for Gen. Soleimani’s death but also to bolster its deterrence. If not, there is no guarantee that the U.S. or Israel would not carry out attacks in the future, targeting other Iranian leaders. Iran cannot afford to take such a risk.

Iran has multiple options for retaliation. It can target U.S. troops in Iraq, either using mid-range rockets or ballistic missiles. Iran-backed proxies in the region, from Hezbollah in Lebanon to the PMF in Iraq and the Houthis in Yemen, can carry out attacks, targeting America’s allies and assets. The decision is up to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He could also wait for an appropriate time, plan and execute a surprise asymmetric attack – which is Iran’s main military response model – on the Americans in the region. The risk is that an Iranian attack could trigger a cycle of violence, with both sides targeting each other in West Asia. That is the path to war.

the immediate launching of the selection process for filling six vacancies to ensure that the Appellate Body remained functional after December 11, 2019.

There was an overwhelming acceptance for the facilitator’s package of reforms at the WTO General Council meeting last month. But the U.S. trade envoy, Ambassador Dennis Shea, rejected the facilitator’s draft decision on grounds that it failed to address the issues raised by Washington about the Appellate Body’s overall functioning. “Today’s failure makes it happen that the Appellate Body, an important component of effective WTO dispute settlement mechanism, will temporarily go

A majority of WTO members, who are poor countries, ‘lack the political and economic clout to enforce their rights and protect their interests in a system governed by power and not rules’

lights out,” the Chinese trade envoy Ambassador Zhang Xiangchen said, after the U.S. spurned the facilitator’s report. China maintained: “This is no doubt the most severe blow to the multilateral trading system since its establishment.”

Said India’s trade envoy Ambassador J.S. Deepak: “At the core of a functioning multilateral trading system is an effective dispute resolution

mechanism.” He added: “Although not perfect, the dispute settlement system has led to meaningful reductions in unfair trade practices and has helped to strengthen the rules-based international trading system.” The U.S. has been one of the bigger users of the dispute settlement system and also a beneficiary “of this public good,” India said, cautioning that “unless the Membership acts in concert ... to lift the block on AB vacancies, we are going to lose this public good which has served all of us so well.”

How will the U.S.’s unilateral stand affect developing countries?

Undoubtedly, it is a tremendous loss for the majority of WTO members who are all developing and poor countries. Clearly, they “lack the political and economic clout to enforce their rights and protect their interests in a system governed by power and not rules,” said Mr. Deepak.

What is the future for an organisation that will not be able to enforce rules?

The strangulation of the Appellate Body is a reflection of unilateralism and protectionism that are on a sharp rise. China has said: “It is therefore not surprising that someone attempts to use its might rather than WTO adjudications to change trade policies of other Members.” The absence of the Appellate Body will create a jungle raj and paves the way for a steep descent into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, 1947 rules.

D. Ravi Kanth is a journalist based in Geneva. He writes for several publications on global trade issues and developments at the World Trade Organization

When Conservatives and Greens join hands

Sebastian Kurz, 33, is set to return as Austria's Chancellor with support from the Green Party

INNSBRUCK

 With the start of 2020, it became clear that a new government was going to come to power in Vienna soon. For the first time in Austria's history, a coalition formed by the Conservatives and the Greens will rule the country. Elections took place last year after the previous government, consisting of the conservative People's Party and the far-right Freedom Party, collapsed after a corruption scandal.

Before New Year's eve, both the People's Party and the Austrian Green Party agreed to form a new government. According to initial reports, 11 Ministries will go to the Conservatives, while members of the Green Party will take over four de-

partments. In the September election, more than 37% of the electorate voted for the Conservatives, while around 13% voted for the Greens.

It was clear even before the election that the People's Party's leader, Sebastian Kurz, was going to become the Chancellor again. The 33-year-old Mr. Kurz, who was the youngest head of government last year, was leading in most opinion polls.

The "Ibizagate", the corruption scandal that brought down the government, mainly damaged the Freedom Party. The crisis hit the coalition when Heinz Christian-Strache, the then Vice-Chancellor and leader of the Freedom Party, was filmed while offering lucrative government contracts to an alleged Russian oligarch. However, Mr. Kurz played an impressive political game in the aftermath of the scandal. He ended the coalition and sought a

fresh mandate. In the September election, the Freedom Party suffered a setback as its vote share fell by 9.8 percentage points to 16.2%.

"Sebastian Kurz is taking over again. In his last term, he normalised the far-right and he even copied large parts of their political programme. I think he is just adapting to everything that might help him keep power. This time, it's the Green Party," said Thomas Wurzbacher, 27, a teacher from Innsbruck. "Everyone is talking about Greta Thunberg, climate change and all these issues, and he [Kurz] even made it possible to benefit from that," he underlined.

'Islamophobic agenda'

"We chose a new path," Mr. Kurz said on January 2 when he formally announced the coalition. "It was a challenge for both sides, because the differences between the two sides are big." Werner Kogler, the Greens leader, who will become Vice-Chancellor, added: "We were elected for different things."



The Conservatives are set to take over key Ministries. Klaudia Tanner, a senior member of the People's Party, is expected to become the country's first woman Defence Minister.

The Conservatives will also keep the Department of Integration,

which has raised criticism. Rusen Timur Aksak, a spokesman of the Islamic Faith Community, described the decision as a "remarkable sign for the bad gambling of the Greens", on his social media account. He also hinted that anti-Muslim activists might be happy about the decision.

"During his last term as Chancellor, Kurz pushed an Islamophobic agenda. He justified the hijab ban and regularly tried to use Muslim-related topics to fish for right-wing votes. It's obvious that he will continue doing that," said Mohammad Shakil, 23, an Austrian Muslim rights activist from Innsbruck.

He pointed out Mr. Kurz's anti-migrant policies might continue as well. "During his chancellorship, apprentices from Afghanistan and other countries were deported although they had work or school agreements. Who can guarantee that such things will not happen again?" he asked.

According to the coalition agreement, the hijab ban and deportation centres for unsuccessful asylum

seekers will continue while the government will introduce a carbon tax on airline tickets and set a target to make Austria carbon neutral by 2040.

The Ministries of Justice, Social Affairs, Culture and Environment will be run by the Greens.


Many European media outlets reacted positively about the new government. According to German conservative daily *Die Welt*, many people in Germany "dream about what is happening in the neighboring country". Italian newspaper *Il Messaggero* wrote about a "new chapter" in Austria's history. "The Greens are leaving their traditional role as an Opposition party and are now moving as a coalition partner of the young and charismatic leader of the People's Party", the newspaper wrote.

Meanwhile, Mr. Strache, who left politics and was expelled by his Freedom Party, is planning to make a comeback. He says he still wants to shape Austria's politics.

New law but old problems

The Opposition is critical of the changes brought by government in the Accountability Ordinance

LAHORE

 The Pakistan government brought about changes to the country's accountability law – the National Accountability Ordinance, 1999 – through a presidential ordinance promulgated on December 27. Under the new ordinance, the powers of the National Accountability Bureau (NAB), an anti-corruption watchdog, were curtailed and its jurisdiction limited.

The NAB has been under severe criticism from the Opposition parties ever since the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government came to power in 2018. Both the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) allege that the cases against their members un-

der the NAB law were politically motivated. PML-N leaders, including Nawaz Sharif, Shehbaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz, have faced action under the NAB. Former President and PPP leader Asif Ali Zardari, too, was remanded in NAB custody in a corruption case last year.

Both parties had demanded changes in the NAB law.

According to the amendment, the NAB will now take up cases involving corruption exceeding an amount of 500 million Pakistani rupees, and no action will be taken against government employees in case of departmental deficiencies. The watchdog is also barred from confiscating property of any public office holder without approval of the scrutiny committee.

The Opposition parties, however, are critical of the changes, saying the new law was promulgated to benefit



the leaders of the ruling party.

PML-N spokesperson Marriyum Aurangzeb said the law was brought into effect bypassing the entire parliamentary legislative process. "The Opposition is clearly the chief stakeholder in this process. The ordi-

nance is not a reform document but is actually tailored to benefit Imran Khan and his cronies."

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Ms. Aurangzeb said not much has changed with the new ordinance. Various provisions such as the remand period, burden of proof resting on the accused, rules on bail, and the trial period remain unchanged. "The observations by the High Courts and the Supreme Court say a lot about the truth regarding these issues but they have not been addressed."

According to Ms. Aurangzeb, the PML-N started a consultative process for proper reformation of the accountability system in 2016. "But because the PTI had already planned to use the NAB as a tool for political victimisation, it stalled that process."

Parliament route

The PML-N spokesperson believes that the only logical way to move towards an effective system is to scrap the NAB and formulate a new system of accountability through parliamen-

tary consensus after debate.

"This ordinance benefits only bureaucrats and businessmen; politicians remain the NAB's target for political coercion, manipulation, and engineering. Prime Minister Imran Khan had said the ordinance would grant insulation to the business community from the scrutiny of the NAB," she added.

"This ordinance is an NRO for the corruption committed by the PTI," she said referring to the National Reconciliation Ordinance, which was issued by former dictator General Pervez Musharraf. The NRO, which had granted amnesty to politicians, political workers and bureaucrats who were accused of corruption, was struck down as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 2009.

Senator Quratulain Marri of the PPP said the NAB law was made with the intention to victimise people. "In principle, we are against the NAB law. It's a black law."

On the amendments, Senator Marri said the government has now bas-

ically realised what President Zardari said a while back – that the economy and the NAB can't go together because the NAB is harassing people intending to invest in our economy.

The PTI's Maleeka Bokhari, however, said the criticism of the Opposition lacks merit or substance. "The PTI government inherited the NAB accountability system and other institutions as part of the governance framework of Pakistan. The NAB Ordinance, 1999 was enacted by previous governments and the Chairman of the NAB was appointed by the Leader of House (PML-N) and the Leader of Opposition (PPP)."


Ms. Bokhari told *The Hindu* that both these Opposition parties also used the NAB as a tool of political victimisation against each other in the past.

"The PTI government came to power with a long-standing commitment towards eradication of deep-rooted corruption," added Ms. Bokhari.

Return of the Green Shirts

Cadres of the Integralist Front, a group inspired by European fascism, are back in Brazil's streets

SAO PAULO

 On December 24, when most people in the world's biggest Catholic country were preparing for the Christmas Eve family dinners and prayers, two men appeared at the office of Porta dos Fundos (Back Door), a well-known production company in Rio de Janeiro that makes content for television and online platforms, and flung a couple of Molotov cocktails at its front door. As the office entrance was blasted away and a blaze erupted inside, the attackers fled on a motorbike. The news of attack on Back Door productions, which currently has been streaming a comedy series on the life of Jesus Christ, spread like wildfire across Brazil. As it was a holiday, the office was closed and nobo-

dy was hurt in the attack.

In a country, where popular television shows and top stand-ups routinely make fun of everyone – from football icons to the President and the Pope – the bomb attack on the production company, run by some of the most-celebrated comic writers and actors, in the middle of Christmas holidays jolted Brazil.

As the police investigated the attack, there was more shock in store. On New Year eve, it was revealed that one of the main suspects was the local businessman Eduardo Fauzi who was a member of a group linked with the Brazilian Integralist Front (FIB), an organisation inspired by fascism and with a history of spreading violence, fear and lies. "We are not left or right or centre. We seek good ideas, wherever they come from. We are not interested in the ways of progressivism or liberal-

ism. Nationalism is the only way!!!" says the group's description on Facebook.

Mr. Fauzi has run away to Moscow and the FIB has distanced itself from the attack, but a fear has gripped the Brazilian streets – the Integralists are back. Integralism emerged in Brazil after the end of the First World War. The far-right movement was founded in 1932 under the name of Brazilian Integralist Action (AIB), the party's logo given in picture) by Plínio Salgado, a journalist who articulated his ideas in a document called the "October Manifesto". In the 1974 book, *Integralismo*, Brazilian writer Héglio Trindade explained how Integralism borrowed its concepts from fascism but tried to be original by claiming to be "spiritualist". "Their thinking was that the basic principles of fascism must be adapted to the local conditions to create an original political doctrine," wrote Mr. Trindade in his book.

During the 1930s, when Brazil had a robust communist movement that

was becoming increasingly popular among the working class, the AIB cadres – all White – began to hold their meetings and marches in public squares with the message of "God, motherland and family". From Sao Paulo, the biggest city in the country, to small towns in the north and south, such marches have begun to take place in recent months. Dressed in long-sleeved green shirts with a buttoned collar and cuffs and trousers, the Integralist cadre stand in a military-style formation, wave blue flags with the symbol of sigma, the Greek letter that identifies Integralism, raise their right arm in a Nazi-like salute and shout "God, motherland and family!" after the leaders.

'Ghosts of our past'

"When I saw them doing a march in downtown Sao Paulo, I was amused and scared at the same time. They looked like clowns but it appeared as ghosts of our past have come back to haunt us," says Marcos Silva, 22, a



university student who was approached by a man in a green shirt to join the group. "I used to think they were history."

To the young, the Integralists might look like relics of Brazil's past, but those who follow the country's

history know that the Green Shirts never went away. They were always lurking around, having embedded themselves in the establishment and political parties. Daniel Hunt, a writer and music producer, points out that Miguel Reale, an Integralist leader in the 1930s, was not only involved in the U.S.-backed military coup of 1964 but he also drafted a notorious law, AI-5, which was used to arrest and torture leftist activists during the darkest days of dictatorship that lasted 21 years. "His son Miguel Reale Jr drafted (President) Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, thus ending 14 years of Workers' Party rule in the country," says Mr. Hunt.

It was during Ms. Rousseff's impeachment that Jair Bolsonaro positioned himself as a potential candidate for President. Today, Mr. Bolsonaro is Brazil's President. More than a week has gone but his government has so far not condemned the bomb attack in Rio. No wonder, the Integralists are feeling emboldened to march the streets of Brazil.

'No network' in times of crisis

Bangladesh shut down telecom services along the border citing security reasons, but revoked it later

DHAKA

 Bangladesh shut telecom networks along the border on December 29 apparently to forestall any inflow of undocumented migrants in the aftermath of India's new citizenship law. Just two days later, regulators reversed the ban, saying the restriction was temporary.

Telecom outage was expected to hit 10 million people living within 1 km of border areas. The worst was soon averted as the ban was quickly lifted, but it illustrates a growing trend of shutting telecom and Internet networks by governments in South Asia and beyond.

"It is impossible to thwart any illegal border crossing by shutting down mobile networks," said Abu Saeed

Khan, a senior policy fellow at LIR-NEasia, a Colombo-based ICT policy think-tank. "The movement of human beings across the border is unstoppable unless you erect a wall the way Israel did or whatever Mr. [Donald] Trump is contemplating," Mr. Khan said. "If a group decides to cross the border, they will cross the border at any cost. There may be a debate on the motivation of such migration, but the fact remains that it's happening and it will keep on happening."

Key challenge

Authorities may reduce or stop the flow in some hotspots, but the huge border with India is a key challenge. "If you stop at one place, they will find out another," Mr. Khan said, referring to a fertile frontier of more than 4,000 km that the two countries share.



With the focus cast on the frontier, Major General Shafeenul Islam, Director General of Border Guard Bangladesh, provided some clarity on illegal border crossings. Bangladesh arrested about 1,000 people for illegal crossings in and out of India in

2019, with 445 of them returning home in two months: November and December, Mr. Islam said at a media briefing in Dhaka on January 2.

After the Upper House of the Indian Parliament passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill in December, it sparked fears of illegal crossings into Bangladesh. Mr. Islam, however, did not link the arrests to the fallout of India's new law. He said those migrant workers, all identified as Bangladesh nationals, crossed into India in search of jobs. Jhenaidah and Satkhira emerged as the two major illicit migratory routes.

Risks of illicit crossings across the frontier deepened after all residents of the State of Assam, along the Bangladesh border, had to produce documentary proof that they or their ancestors had lived in India since 1971. About 2 million of Assam's population of 33 million – a mix of Hindus and Muslims – failed the test. They now run the risk of becoming stateless.

As the protests over the new law

spread, India shut down the Internet in Assam and some other areas. The Internet shutdown in Kashmir is now the longest-ever imposed in a democracy, according to Access Now, an international advocacy group that tracks internet suspensions.

Mr. Khan calls it counterproductive. "In doing so, India is antagonising its own people. And telecom carriers are losing money," he said.

The shutdowns of mobile and internet networks have unintended consequences and take a toll on economic life in both urban and rural areas. In Bangladesh, for example, mobile phones are the fastest way for people to transfer money in outlying border areas, where conventional banking is almost non-existent.

That means the network suspension is akin to shutting down a large part of business activity in remote areas. Millions of Bangladeshis living alongside the frontier are largely engaged in cross-border trade of medicines, agricultural commodities,

milk and livestock. "More and more society migrates into digital payment systems, the Internet becomes more important simultaneously. It's like oxygen in life."

Bangladesh has a history of shutting down or slowing the Internet over security concerns. During a road safety campaign by students in 2018, regulators briefly blocked 3G and 4G mobile Internet services to quell protests, leaving users in the lurch.

"I find no reason to shut down the Internet to thwart civil protests because people communicate despite the shutdown. These are not political decisions, but bureaucratic decisions. The bureaucracy has taken over the politicians' space and their over-adventurism is the prime driver of this hegemony," Mr. Khan said.

The regulator's latest decision to shut the frontier mobile networks and retract it shortly afterwards reflect a lack of coordination between government agencies and weakness of the regulator itself, according to Mr. Khan.



Emran Feroz is a journalist based in Stuttgart, Germany



Mehmal Sarfraz is a journalist based in Lahore



Shobhan Saxena is a journalist based in Sao Paulo



Arun Devnath is a journalist based in Dhaka