

IN BRIEF



**FASTag to be available free of charge for 15 days**

**NEW DELHI**  
The National Highways Authority of India has decided to waive the FASTag registration fee between February 15 and February 29, the government said. Road users can visit any point-of-sale location with a valid vehicle registration certificate and get a FASTag free of cost, it said. **PTI**

**3 priests attack visitor with sword, arrested**

**BERHAMPUR**  
Three priests of the Tara Tarini hill shrine in Odisha's Ganjam district, who had attacked and injured a visitor by a sword in a tussle over amount of 'dakshina' were arrested by the Purushottampur police on Wednesday, said police.

**NEET scam: CB-CID seeks UIDAI's help**

**CHENNAI**  
The Crime Branch-CID of the Tamil Nadu police has written to the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), seeking its assistance to track down those suspected of having acted as proxies in the sensational NEET scam. Investigators have shared the photographs and biometrics of suspects with the UIDAI authorities.

**Missing idol traced to London museum**

**CHENNAI**  
The Idol Wing of the CID has traced the bronze idol of Thirumangai Azhvar that went missing from a Kumbakonam temple in Tamil Nadu about 60 years ago to the Ashmolean museum in London. The museum had purchased the idol in 1967 from an auction house for about \$2,340.

# Court offers lawyer to Nirbhaya convict

A condemned convict is entitled to legal aid: judge

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

A Delhi court on Wednesday offered Pawan Gupta, one of the four death row convicts in the December 16, 2012 Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case, an advocate, noting that a condemned convict is entitled to legal aid.

Additional sessions judge Dharmender Rana adjourned the hearing for Thursday and told Pawan, who has removed his lawyer, that he could choose from a list of empanelled advocates to represent him in the case. Nirbhaya's parents and the Delhi government had on Tuesday moved the court seeking fresh death warrants



**Awaiting justice:** Nirbhaya's mother protesting outside the trial court in New Delhi on Wednesday. **PTI**

for the four convicts, after the Supreme Court granted liberty to the authorities to approach the trial court for issuance of a fresh date for the execution of these convicts.

The trial court had on January 31 stayed the execution of the four convicts — Mukesh Kumar Singh (32), Pawan Gupta (25), Vinay Kumar Sharma (26) and Akshay Kumar (31).

## Victim's mother sits on a protest outside court

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI**

Nirbhaya's mother Asha Devi broke down at the Delhi court requesting a fresh date to execute the four death row convicts in the gang rape and murder case and sat on a protest outside the court premises. "I too have some rights," she said after the court offered a lawyer to one of the four

convicts, Pawan Gupta. After the hearing, Ms. Devi joined a protest led by women's rights activist Yogita Bhayana outside the Patiala House Courts premises.

"There is no appeal pending in any court in the country... I appeal to the Supreme Court to issue the death warrant as this court (trial) is in no mood to issue one," she said.

Except Pawan, all convicts have exhausted their legal remedy to file a curative petition before the Supreme Court.

The President has also rejected the mercy pleas of

Mukesh, Akshay and Vinay.

The four convicts have since been sentenced to death by a local court.

The order has been upheld by the High Court and the Supreme Court.

## LPG refill price hiked by up to ₹149

But subsidy raised for domestic users

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**

The price of the non-subsidised LPG refill cylinders weighing 14.2 kg was on Wednesday increased by between ₹144.50 and ₹149, the steepest since January 2014.

However, the government almost doubled the subsidy for domestic users. While in Delhi the cost per cylinder rose from ₹714 to ₹858.50 compared to the January 1 rate, it went up by ₹149 to ₹896 in Kolkata. The price in Mumbai rose by ₹145 to ₹829.50 and by ₹147 to ₹881 in Chennai.

The subsidy to domestic users has been increased from ₹153.86 per cylinder to

₹291.48. In January 2014, the prices had gone up by ₹220 to ₹1,241 per cylinder. Subsidy under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana has been increased from ₹174.86 to ₹312.48 per cylinder.

Meanwhile, the Congress flayed the price hike and accused the Centre of 'electrocuting' household budgets. "They have struck the pockets of the public with current," said party spokesperson Randeep Surjewala.

In Kolkata, the Trinamool Congress and the CPI(M) also slammed the BJP-led government and alleged that the objective was to avenge the saffron party's drubbing in the Delhi Assembly polls. *(With PTI inputs)*



## T.N. HC stays order against A.R. Rahman

**LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
CHENNAI**

The Madras HC on Wednesday stayed the order passed by a Commissioner of Goods and Services Tax and Central Excise on October 17, accusing music composer A.R. Rahman of evading payment of service tax. The court directed him to pay arrears to the tune of ₹6.79 crore, excluding interest, from April 2013 to June 2017, along with a penalty of ₹6.79 crore.

## Delhi court raps CBI on Asthana case probe

'Accused with bigger role roaming free'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**

A city court on Wednesday pulled up the CBI over the probe in a case against its former Special Director Rakesh Asthana and others, wondering why "an accused having a bigger role" was roaming free but the agency arrested its own Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP).

Special CBI Judge Sanjeev Aggarwal placed the chargesheet filed by the agency against Manoj Prasad, an accused in the case, for consideration on February 19. The CBI chargesheet gave a clean chit to Mr. Asthana and DSP Devender Kumar.

The court observed that the names of Mr. Asthana



Rakesh Asthana

and Mr. Kumar, who was arrested in the case in 2018 and later released on bail, were mentioned in column 12 of the chargesheet as there was no evidence against them.

The CBI filed the charge sheet on Tuesday, a day before the matter was to come up at the Delhi High Court.

# Bill to regulate pesticide business gets green light

It provides for compensation due to losses

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Pesticides Management Bill, 2020, which, the government claims will regulate the business of pesticides and compensate farmers in case of losses from the use of spurious agro chemicals.

"Today, the pesticide business is regulated by 1968 rules which have become age-old and need immediate rewriting," said Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar.

Mr. Javadekar said farmers would also be empowered to get all information as the data would be in open source and in all languages.

In February 2018, the Centre released a draft of the pesticides Bill that aims to re-



The draft Bill had proposed raising penalty on sellers of spurious pesticides.

place the existing Insecticides Act of 1968.

A key proposal in the 2018 version was to raise penalties on the sale of prohibited or spurious pesticides to ₹50 lakh and up to five years' imprisonment, from the current ₹2,000 and up to three years' imprisonment. It is unclear if these provisions have been

retained in the latest version of Bill that was cleared by the Union Cabinet.

**'Central fund likely'**

"If there is any loss because of the spurious or low quality of pesticides then there is a provision for compensations ... If required, the government will form a central fund which will take care of compensation," Mr. Javadekar said.

The Centre for Science and Environment, in 2018, had criticised the Bill. "The existing draft provides inadequate representation to States ... The States should have a say in final decision making on pesticide, as they have the best understanding on the agro-ecological climate, environment and soil conditions," it said in a statement.

## Cabinet clears Major Ports Authority Bill

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**

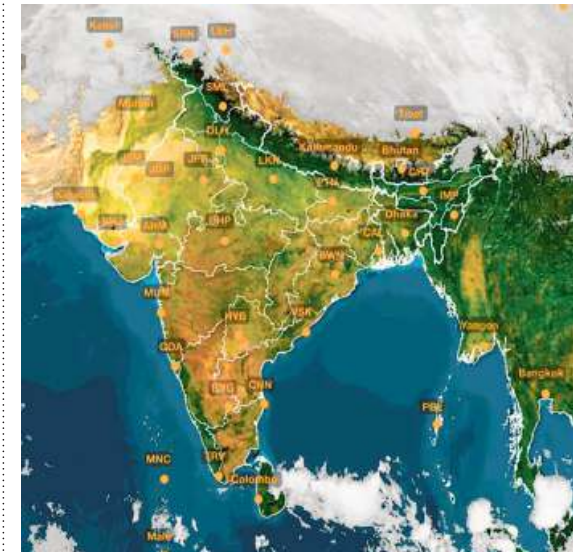
The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Major Ports Authority Bill 2020, which will be introduced in the ongoing session of Parliament, Shipping Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said.

The Bill, approved by the Cabinet at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will replace the existing regulations under a 1963 law, he said.

The 12 major ports in India would get a boost through the new law, he said, adding that disputes with private companies and PPP operators had been cropping up, but the existing law had no provisions to deal with them. The new law would also help in improving infrastructure, he added.

**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 Thursday:** Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir. Cold wave conditions likely in isolated places over Odisha.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	...	28.0	11.0	Kozhikode	...	36.0	24.0
Ahmedabad	...	32.0	19.0	Kurnool	...	33.0	20.0
Aizawl	...	19.0	8.0	Lucknow	...	24.0	10.0
Allahabad	...	27.0	9.0	Madurai	...	35.0	22.0
Bengaluru	...	30.0	17.0	Mangaluru	...	35.0	22.0
Bhopal	...	28.0	13.0	Mumbai	...	31.0	24.0
Bhubaneswar	...	30.0	13.0	Mysuru	...	25.0	8.0
Chandigarh	...	24.0	9.0	New Delhi	...	30.0	20.0
Chennai	...	31.0	24.0	Patna	...	25.0	9.0
Coimbatore	...	32.0	21.0	Port Blair	...	31.0	25.0
Dehradun	...	26.0	8.0	Puducherry	...	1.8	31.0
Gangtok	...	16.0	8.0	Pune	...	29.0	17.0
Goa	...	35.0	23.0	Raipur	...	28.0	15.0
Guwahati	...	28.0	11.0	Ranchi	...	25.0	10.0
Hubballi	...	31.0	19.0	Shillong	...	16.0	6.0
Hyderabad	...	31.0	20.0	Shimla	...	19.0	8.0
Imphal	...	23.0	5.0	Srinagar	...	...	...
Jaipur	...	25.0	11.0	Thiruvananthapuram	...	35.0	24.0
Kochi	...	35.0	25.0	Tiruchi	...	34.0	23.0
Kohima	...	16.0	7.0	Vijayawada	...	31.0	22.0
Kolkata	...	27.0	13.0	Visakhapatnam	...	30.0	23.0

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

**Pollutants in the air you are breathing**

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>2</sub>	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE	Yesterday
Ahmedabad	67	72	34	181	134	...	
Bengaluru	9	42	59	85	...	...	In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Ballabgarh, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score level of 362 indicating a severe level of pollution. In contrast, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 48.
Chennai	19	10	33	51	79	...	
Delhi	10	191	91	392	350	...	
Hyderabad	7	31	15	85	89	...	
Kolkata	14	84	14	250	197	...	
Lucknow	9	74	57	306	...	...	
Mumbai	13	50	31	127	127	...	
Pune	71	22	76	104	87	...	
Visakhapatnam	11	30	48	104	101	...	

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

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

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

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

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

# A child cannot be put behind bars, rules SC

'Police have no right to detain children'

**KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court has made it clear that the police have no right to detain children in conflict with law in a lockup or a jail.

A juvenile in conflict with law, if apprehended, has to be placed immediately under the care of the special juvenile police unit or a designated child welfare officer. The child has to be produced before the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB).

"Once a child is produced before a JJB, bail is the rule," a Bench of Justices Deepak Gupta and Aniruddha Bose declared. If for some reason bail is not granted, a child cannot be put behind bars.

He has to be lodged either in an observation home or in a place of safety.

The law is meant to protect children and not detain them in jail or keep them in police custody, said the court.

The eight-page order on February 10 came after the court's attention was drawn by the recent media reports about "children being detained in police custody and tortured in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh". The order sends a significant message to the authorities in the light of reports about children detained in connection with the protests against the Citizenship (Amendments) Act.

The Bench has issued notice to the Uttar Pradesh and Delhi Commissions for Protection of Child Rights and directed them to file their responses within three weeks.