



**NEARBY**  
**Modi gov't. in denial of slowdown: Manmohan**

**NEW DELHI**  
Former PM Manmohan Singh on Wednesday said the Narendra Modi government was in denial of the economic slowdown and its target of making India a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25 was "wishful thinking". He was speaking at the release of a book authored by former Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

**NORTH** ▶ PAGE 5

**Arvind Kejriwal calls on Union Home Minister**

**NEW DELHI**  
Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal called on Union Home Minister Amit Shah at his residence here on Wednesday and discussed various development issues pertaining to Delhi, the State government said in a statement. Various issues and matters concerning the people of Delhi were discussed, Mr. Kejriwal said at a press conference later.

**CITY** ▶ PAGE 3

# Trade agreement with U.S. only delayed & not stuck, says govt.

It points to grand scale of Trump-Modi Motera rally as 'key deliverable' of visit

**SUHASINI HAIDAR  
SRIRAM LAKSHMAN**  
NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON DC

An Indo-U.S. trade deal has been delayed but is not "stuck", the government said on Wednesday, hours after President Donald Trump confirmed that negotiations will not be completed in time for his visit next week.

However, government sources said expectations on trade would not overshadow the larger context of the visit, which will be a massive roadshow for Mr. Trump and his wife Melania from the Ahmedabad airport to Motera as well as a joint rally with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the stadium (billed as the world's biggest cricket stadium), the "key deliverable" of the visit.

"From the moment of their arrival at the airport, [Mr. and Mrs. Trump] will be treated to a display of famed Indian hospitality and India's Unity in Diversity," Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla told reporters.

**'Big deal later'**

Speaking in Washington DC, Mr. Trump spoke in a similar vein. "We can have a trade deal with India but I am saving the big deal for later on. We're doing a very big trade deal with India...we'll have



**Welcome sign:** A hoarding featuring U.S. President Donald Trump, wife Melania and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. • VIJAY SONEJI

it. I don't know if it'll be done before the elections but we'll have a very big deal with India," he told reporters on Tuesday.

The comments come days after U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer cancelled a trip to India — as reported in *The Hindu* — to finalise a mini-trade deal that the two countries were hoping to finalise during the visit.

"We're not treated very well by India but I happen to like Prime Minister Modi a lot. And he told me we'll have seven million people

between the airport and the event. And the stadium, I understand, is sort of semi under-construction but it's going to be the largest stadium in the world. So it's going to be very exciting," Mr. Trump said.

**Performing arts**

"The route of their travel to the stadium is expected to have tens of thousands of ordinary citizens as well as artists showcasing the performing arts from different States and Union Territories," Mr. Shringla said, adding that Mr. Trump's motor-

cade would pass through an "India roadshow" along the way, with 28 stages representing various parts of the country on display.

The figures represent a considerable contrast to the U.S. President's repeated reference to crowds of "7 million" that he expects will come out to greet him but the government feels that rather than the figure being taken literally, the "spirit" of the grandness of the event is important.

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**MORE REPORTS ON** ▶ PAGE 12

# 'No one was killed by police bullets in anti-CAA protests'

U.P. CM says 'rioters were killed by the bullets of rioters'

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
LUCKNOW**

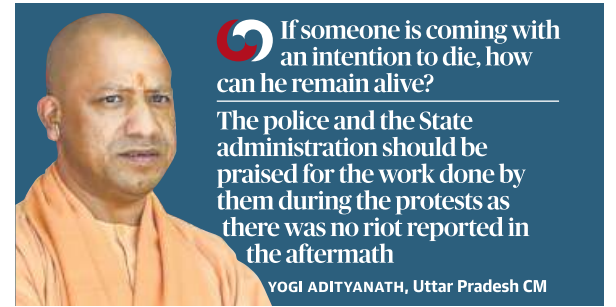
Not a single person was killed by police bullets during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on December 19 and 20, 2019, and those who died were killed by the "bullets of rioters", Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said in the Assembly on Wednesday.

At least 23 people died in the violence during the protests, most of them of bullet injuries. "Agar koi marne ke liye aa hi raha hai toh woh zinda kahan se jaega? [If someone is coming with an intention to die, how can he remain alive?]" Mr. Adityanath said. "Upadravi upadraviyo ki goliyon se hi mare hai [the rioters died from the bullets fired by other rioters]," he claimed.

The police and the State administration "should be praised" for the work done by them during the protests as there was no riot reported in the aftermath, he said.

While Mr. Adityanath claimed that not a single death occurred due to police firing, the district police in Bijnor had in December admitted that a youth, Suleiman, died after a constable fired at him in self-defence.

Mr. Adityanath accused the Congress and the Samaj-



**If someone is coming with an intention to die, how can he remain alive?**  
The police and the State administration should be praised for the work done by them during the protests as there was no riot reported in the aftermath  
YOGI ADITYANATH, Uttar Pradesh CM

wadi Party (SP) of supporting and sympathising with the outfits that participated in the protests. These outfits "do not believe" in the Constitution and they received "terror funding", he alleged. He singled out the Popular Front of India and accused it of terror funding.

The Chief Minister said he would support any protest if it was done in a democratic manner and even provide it security. However, in the garb of democracy, anyone "tears the Constitution to shreds", attacked innocent persons, dishonoured women or participated in arson, "then we will explain it to them in the language they understand".

Mr. Adityanath evoked the 1990 firing on Ram Janmabhoomi activists or *kar sevaks* to target the Opposition, especially the SP, which was in power then, for questioning his government on the action taken against alleged vandals

during the anti-CAA protests. "Those who ordered firing on *Ram bhakts* and tried to pollute the esteem of Ayodhya are today seeking answers from us," he said.

The Supreme Court, which ruled in favour of building a Ram temple at the disputed site, had put a stamp of approval on the claim of "*Ram bhakts*". "The *Ram bhakts* who were demanding a Ram mandir were right. And those who fired at them were wrong," he said. Mocking former CM Mulayam Singh Yadav for his famous comments that even a *parinda* (bird) would be able to breach the security in Ayodhya in 1990, Mr. Adityanath said: "There was not a *parinda* but lakhs of *Ram bhakts*. But U.P. proved on November 9, 2019 that even a *parinda* cannot move its wings under law and order."

**AMU STUDENTS CONDEMN STATEMENT** ▶ PAGE 5

## Here to find a solution: mediators

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court-appointed interlocutors, Sanjay Hegde and Sadhana Ramachandran, on Wednesday made their first direct contact with the women protesters of Shaheen Bagh, who have been on a sit-in against the CAA-NRC-NPR regime since December 16.

"This was our first interaction with the women and *dadis* (grandmothers)

of Shaheen Bagh, apart from other citizens. We heard their grievances and concerns. They want us to come again as we could not speak to all of them. They have expressed their pain and sorrow," Ms. Ramachandran told reporters after a nearly two-hour interaction with the protesters.

Initiating a conversation with the protesters, Mr. Hegde said, "We are here to listen to all and speak to you all."

Ms. Ramachandran, while explaining the court order to the protesters, said: "It is your right to protest but like us, there are other citizens also who use the roads, like shopkeepers and doctors. Do we want to take away the rights of others? So the Supreme Court has sent us. We want to find a solution along with you all."

**WOMEN STAND THEIR GROUND** ▶ PAGE 2

## Muralidhar among 3 HC judges to be transferred

**LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court Collegium has recommended the transfer of Justice S. Muralidhar, who is third in the order of seniority in the Delhi High Court, along with two other transfer recommendations of judges.

The Collegium, led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, has recommend-

ed that Justice Muralidhar be shifted to the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

The Collegium's resolution, dated February 12, was uploaded on the court website on Wednesday. Two other HC judges have also been recommended for transfer.

**CONTINUED ON** ▶ PAGE 12  
**BAR ASSOCIATION CONDEMNS JUDGE'S TRANSFER** ▶ PAGE 4

## Ram temple trust elects chairman

**NISTULA HEBBAR  
NEW DELHI**

The Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust, set up to oversee the construction of the Ram temple in

Ayodhya, held its first meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday, and elected Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas's Mahant Nriyaya Gopal Das as chairman and Champat Rai, de-

scribed as a social activist and also associated with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, as general secretary.

**CONTINUED ON** ▶ PAGE 12

## President to inaugurate The Huddle on Feb. 22

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
BENGALURU**

The fourth edition of The Huddle, *The Hindu's* annual thought conclave, will be held at the ITC Gardenia in Bengaluru on February 22 and 23.

President Ram Nath Kovind will address the audience as the Chief Guest and inaugurate the conclave on February 22. The keynote address will be delivered by the former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Over the two days, The Huddle features 15 sessions and 32 speakers, showcasing some of the best minds from the world of politics, business, academics, sports, entertainment and the arts. The sessions are designed to be interactive, and they take place before an invited audience.

From its launch in 2017, The Huddle has been designed to expand the space for democratic debate and provide an opportunity for speakers and members of the audience to interact formally and informally.

This year, The Huddle is powered by Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt. Ltd.



(HCCB), in association with the Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan governments.

Kamlesh Sharma, chief communications officer of HCCB, said: "Although a young event, the platform is already a 'festival of ideas' for the new India. HCCB is rooted to the idea of India and given that The Huddle is convened in Bengaluru, which is also HCCB's headquarters, we think of ourselves as a natural ally with such a forum."

Among The Huddle's other sponsors are Life Insurance Corporation of India (Associate Sponsor), Royaloak (Comfort Partner), NTPC and SSVM (Session Sponsors), Anand Prakash (Gift Partner), SpiceJet (Travel Partner) and WION TV (International News Partner).



## IN BRIEF

## Jamia violence: police serve notices on 10

NEW DELHI  
Delhi Police on Wednesday served notices on 10 Jamia Millia Islamia students asking them to appear for questioning in connection with the December 15 violence during an anti-CAA protest. PTI

## Air quality of Delhi-NCR

City	PM2.5	PM10
Delhi	272	186
Ghaziabad	323	272
Noida	277	295
Greater Noida	295	295

Good 0-50 Satisfactory 51-100 Moderate 101-200  
 Poor 201-300 Very poor 301-400 Severe >401

AIR QUALITY INDEX AT 4 P.M. YESTERDAY (AVERAGE OF PAST 24 HOURS) | SOURCE: CPCB

## DELHI TODAY

**Exhibition:** "Homage.... A tribute to Mother Nature", a solo show of photography by Juma Datta at Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

**Exhibition:** "Spiritual Journey", a solo painting exhibition by Sanjay Majumdar at Convention Centre Foyer, India Habitat Centre (IHC), 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

**Exhibition:** "Aarambh", a group show of sculptures and painting at Alturaash Art Gallery, 147, DLF South Court, Saket, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.

**Exhibition:** "Known Unknown", an exhibition of contemporary artists curated by Amitava Das at Shridharani Gallery, Triveni Kala Sangam, 205, Tansen Marg, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.

**Exhibition:** "Deceptive Rhapsody", a group show displaying exquisite and recent artworks of leading and emerging contemporary artists at SAU Art Gallery, Satya Marg, Chanakya, 11 a.m. - 5 p.m.

**Exhibition:** "Memory's Cut: Its Deep Embrace", a solo exhibition by multidisciplinary artist Remen Chopra V. Van Der Vaart at The Gujral Foundation, 24 Jor Bagh, 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. (Mail your listings for this column at cityeditor@thehindu.co.in)

## Women stand their ground on not vacating protest site

Protesters at Shaheen Bagh interact with two interlocutors

SHINJINI GHOSH  
NEW DELHI

Women protesters at Shaheen Bagh on Wednesday interacted with two Supreme Court-appointed interlocutors while they stood their ground on not vacating the protest site until the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) was revoked by the Centre.

In a nearly two-hour-long interaction between advocates Sanjay Hegde, Sadhana Ramchandran and the protesters, several women, including students, the Shaheen Bagh dadis, voiced their concerns and reservations against the CAA, NPR and the NRC.

Bilkhis Banu, one of the Shaheen Bagh dadis, while addressing the interlocutors said: "We will not move an inch till the law is revoked. When we voted for you [Centre] we were not *gad-dars* [traitors] but now suddenly we are. Don't forget that we [citizens] managed to send the British away as well. Only a part of the road has been blocked by us while the police have blocked the rest of it. Why is that not being opened?"

Fatima, a student, told the interlocutors: "Is inconvenience being caused only to people who are stuck in traffic? What about us - the women, children and elderly



Protesters at Shaheen Bagh on Wednesday. • BIBEK CHETTRI

**People have the right to travel on roads but when it's about saving democracy and the Constitution, it is important to come out on the streets**

FATIMA  
A student

protesters who have continued to sit on this road braving the rains and winters? Now you want us to move from here as well. Where do we raise our voices then?"

"If we move from here we will be letting down the previous generations which have fought for us and the future generations will have to prove that they are citizens of this country. Yes, people have the right to travel on

roads but when it's about saving democracy and the Constitution, it is important to come out on the streets," said Ms. Fatima.

Prakash Devi, a resident of Karol Bagh, said, "We are saying this again. The road will be emptied in 30 minutes of the law being revoked by the government."

Before the interlocutors reached the protest site, announcements were made that when a team met the two advocates near the barricades they were told that the protesters would not be addressed in the presence of media, an appeal which was also made later. Even as protesters in union demanded talks to be held before the media, later they were asked to leave.

## CPWD seeks environmental nod to cut 194 trees

Its application mentions no court cases, though pleas against land use change are in HC

DAMINI NATH  
NEW DELHI

The Central Public Works Department (CPWD) has sought environmental clearance to build a new Parliament building, which it estimates will cost ₹776 crore and take 12,700 workers 260 days to construct, and lead to the cutting down of 194 trees, according to the application filed with the Union Environment Ministry.

As part of the Centre's proposed revamp of the Rajpath or Central Vista, the CPWD applied for environmental clearance for the construction of a triangular Parliament building next to the existing heritage structure on February 12. It wrote: "Government of India plans to renovate the existing Parliament building and construct a new Parliament building adjoining the existing Parliament".

The benefit of the project would be "social", according



Plan for green belt in the new Parliament building as submitted by the CPWD for environmental clearance.

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to the CPWD, which justified it, saying: "A larger Parliament building for the nation is needed for better functioning of the legislature. The project will also provide short-term and long-term employment opportunities."

The CPWD has sought permission to increase the built-up area on the 8-acre plot from 44,940 square metres to 1,04,740 square metres. The

application says the total project cost would be ₹776 crore, of which ₹2.2 crore will be allocated for environment management, and a total of 8,60,738 tonnes of raw material or fuel would be needed. The application gives zero as the value of air, water, soil and noise pollution at the site. However, whether these studies are required or if the project will be exempted

from an environment impact assessment will be decided by the environment impact assessment authority.

The CPWD said the project would lead to the generation of 438 kilolitre/day of waste water, which it said would all be reused. A total of 4.75 tonnes of municipal solid waste was projected to be generated and sent to sanitary landfills.

While the application proposes cutting down of 194 trees and clearing of "other vegetation growing" on the plot, it says 250 new trees would be planted. The application says there are no court cases pending against the project and/or the land. However, two petitions have been filed in the Delhi High Court against the Delhi Development Authority's proposed land use change of several plots, including for the new Parliament.

(With inputs from Jacob Koshy)

## Taking cue from Shaheen Bagh



Women sitting on a dharna against the CAA at Hazrat Nizamuddin in the city on Wednesday. • SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

## IIMC interacts with students on fee hike

Students are on indefinite hunger strike demanding course fee be made 'affordable'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The management of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC), Delhi, on Wednesday met students who are on an indefinite hunger strike demanding that the institute make course fees for PG Diploma courses "affordable" for students.

The students have alleged that the institute has been increasing its course fee by 10% every year since 2010.

The students, on the second day of their strike, said that IIMC had agreed to form a committee to look into the matter but alleged that the institute was not serious as an earlier committee formed to look into the fee structure had not submitted any report



The IIMC management appealed to the students to withdraw their strike. • JAIDEEP DEO BHANJ

and had not consulted the students. The students also demanded that suspension against eleven students for protesting against the fee hike issue earlier be revoked.

Responding to the students, IIMC on Wednesday

said that in the light of the "indefinite hunger strike" since Tuesday, the management has been holding a series of meetings with class representatives, members of the students' grievance committee and finally a general

meeting with all students in the institute.

"While it has been explained to all students that the fee for the current academic year will stay as per the present rates, except for those eligible for 25% free-ship, the last date for paying fees is being extended to March 31 from March 2 by when it is expected that the committee to look into the fees structure in its entirety will finalise its report/recommendations," the administration said. It added that the report of the committee will be sent to the government after fulfilling all procedural formalities.

IIMC also appealed to the students to withdraw their indefinite hunger strike.

## Railways to run tourist train from March 28

People can go on a 16-night-17-day tour

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Indian Railways will begin commercial run of its Ramayana-themed special tourist train, Shri Ramayana Express, from March 28.

The train will commence its journey from Delhi on March 28, and tourists can board the train from Delhi Sadrajung, Ghaziabad, Moradabad, Bareilly and Lucknow.

In a 16-night-17-day tour, people will be visiting the places associated with Lord Ram, including Ram Janmabhoomi and Hanuman Garhi at Ayodhya; Bharat Mandir at Nandigram; Sita Mata Mandir at Sitamarhi in Bihar; Janakpur in Nepal, Tulsi Manas Mandir and Sankat Mochan Mandir at Varanasi; Sita Samahit Sthal at Sitamarhi in U.P.; Triveni Sangam, Hanuman Mandir and Bharadwaj Ashram at Prayag; Shringi Rishi Mandir at Shringverpur; Ramghat and Sati Anusuiya Mandir at Chitrakoot; Panchvati at Nasik; Anjanadri Hill and Hanuman Janm Sthal at Hampi and Jyotirlinga Shiva Mandir at Rameshwaram.

Tourists will be offered pure vegetarian meals, accommodation and wash and change facilities in dhamshalas or hotels. In addition, considering that the train will begin operations

during the Navratras festival, food served to the travellers will be cooked without onion and garlic. "Fasting food will also be available for the tourists that will include sabudana khichdi, fruits, curd, potato chat etc.," the Railways said.

Sleeper class package has been priced at ₹16,065 per person, while AC class package is priced at ₹26,775 per person.

The train, which will be run by the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), will have ten coaches - five sleeper class non-AC coaches and five AC three-tier coaches. The bookings for the train will be on a first-come, first-take basis, the statement said.

"A similar tourism train on this circuit was introduced last year with only sleeper class coaches which was a huge success... [hence] IRCTC has decided to launch this unique product with some AC three-tier coaches as well," it added.

### Srilanka tour

An option of add-on tour to Srilanka is also available with limited 40 seats, that will allow tourists to visit places related to Ramayana in Srilanka. This will cost additional ₹37,800 per person.

## Govt. seeks IIT-Bombay's help to build smog tower

20-metre tower with air purifiers proposed

NIKHIL M BABU  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has written two letters this month to IIT-Bombay seeking assistance in building a 'smog tower' in Connaught Place to control air pollution.

After being asked by the Supreme Court to check the feasibility of the tower in November, a High-Level Committee (HLC), comprising experts and government officials, had submitted in December a proposal for a 20-metre 'smog tower' fitted with air purifiers to clean the air.

On January 13, it was approved by the top court and the court gave the Delhi government three months to install the tower in Connaught Place.

On the same day, the court also ordered a 'smog tower' to be installed in Anand Vihar by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).

"Would request you to impress upon Centre for Science and Environmental Engineering of IIT-Bombay to assist Government of NCT of Delhi for setting up the Smog Tower using the same formulation as has been done for the CPCB," a letter dated February 7 from Special Secretary of Environment Department,

Arun Mishra, to Director of IIT-Bombay read.

Later, a reminder was sent to IIT-Bombay on Tuesday requesting the institute to respond that would help the Delhi comply with the Supreme Court order and fight air pollution.

"Basically, we want to sign an MoU with IIT-Bombay for construction of the smog tower. They would be responsible for the complete work and we will monitor it," a senior Delhi government official told *The Hindu*.

In the proposal submitted to the Supreme Court in December, the committee had said that 65% reduction in pollution could be achieved on an average up to 700 metres from the tower. The tower is also expected to influence air quality of more than 1 km in the downwind direction.

However, the committee had also said that smog towers, as per the current knowledge and experience, might not provide a "viable solution" to improve air quality on a "large scale". Officials said that since there was a localised effect, they still wanted to try it.

The tower is expected to cost around ₹12-15 crore, but the Delhi government is yet to receive a concrete proposal from IIT-Bombay.

## Students to meet DCW in Gargi College case

Panel had sought principal's reply by Feb. 25

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The students of Gargi College will meet the Delhi Commission for Women on Saturday to get a status update in the commission's probe into the alleged molestation incident at the all-women college during a cultural festival, according to the panel.

The women's panel had issued a notice to the college principal over the incident and asked her to reply by February 25.

Student representatives will meet the panel on Saturday to get a status update on the panel's probe into the matter.

The students had boycotted classes after the incident. Now, they are holding hour-long boycotts since some students have their examinations in April.

## E-rickshaw facility at 12 more stations

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) on Wednesday said that in a bid to improve last-mile connectivity, e-rickshaw facility has been extended to 12 more stations, taking the total figure to 29.

"A fleet of around 250 e-rickshaws were flagged off from Patel Nagar metro station and will ply from 12 stations across DMRC network to boost last-mile connectivity for passengers of nearby localities, from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.," officials said. The said stations are Qutub Minar, Ghittorni, Arjangarh, Nawada, Shadi-pur, Patel Nagar, Nangloi, Govindpuri, Botanical Garden and Harkesh Nagar Okhla, Nangloi railway station and Moolchand.

Sources said the students are looking for someone to file an RTI on their behalf to get details of the college budget under various heads, including security.

A Fact Finding Committee constituted by the college has submitted its preliminary report after recording 600 testimonies. A final report is still awaited.

On February 6, a group of men broke into the college and allegedly groped, harassed and molested girl students. The attack took place during the college festival, "Reverie". The students had alleged that the drunken men, in their 30s, groped and dragged girls and performed obscene acts, while the college security staff and Delhi Police personnel kept standing there like mute spectators.

## Delhi Police writes to govt. on JNU sedition case

'File on prosecution sanction pending'

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Wednesday wrote to Delhi Home Department to expedite the prosecution sanction in the Jawaharlal Nehru University sedition case.

In a letter, police have written that on February 9, 2016, during a gathering, which had been cancelled by Jawaharlal Nehru University authorities, "anti-India slogans were raised" after which an FIR on charges of sedition and criminal conspiracy among others was registered at Vasant Kunj Police Station.

The case was subsequently transferred to the Special Cell.

On January 14, 2019 a report was submitted in the court and on January 10, the Investigating Officer had

moved an application seeking prosecution sanction which was forwarded to the Home Department on January 14. "Till date, despite follow up, the file seeking prosecution sanction under Section 196 CrPC is pending with GNCT Delhi," the letter reads.

On Wednesday, the matter was listed before the court which directed the Investigating Agency to send a reminder to the Delhi government to expedite the matter. Therefore, the police requested the Delhi government to expedite the process to accord prosecution.

### Report sought

The court had also directed the Delhi government to file a status report till April 3 in the case.

## Modi makes surprise visit to 'Hunar Haat' at Rajpath

He had 'kulhad' tea with Minister Naqvi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday made a surprise visit to 'Hunar Haat' at Rajpath here, where he interacted with artisans and relished 'litti-chokha' and 'kulhad' tea.

Soon after chairing the meeting of the Union Cabinet, Modi reached Rajpath where 'Hunar Haat' is being organised by the Ministry of Minority Affairs.

Sources in the government said that officials of the Ministry were surprised when they came to know about the Prime Minister's visit.

Modi, who was there for 50 minutes, ate 'litti-chokha', a dough ball made of whole wheat flour and stuffed with 'sattu', and paid ₹120 for it.



PM Narendra Modi relishes litti-chokha at Hunar Haat on Wednesday. • PTI

The dish is popular in Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand. He later had tea in 'kulhad' (earthen cup) with Minority Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, and paid ₹40 for two cups.

## Jaishankar to address CPR dialogue

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will address the annual public discussion of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR) here, the institution has announced.

The annual dialogue to be held on March 2-3 will figure several prominent commentators and speakers on foreign and political affairs, including Congress MP Shashi Tharoor. The event will also feature former Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, American economist Lant Pritchett and Kabul's former Foreign Minister Zalmi Rassoul.

The event will cover foreign affairs, environmental issues, climate change, regional and global politics.



## AAP MLA's discharge in 2010 case upheld

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

A sessions court on Wednesday upheld the discharge of Aam Aadmi Party MLA Amanatullah Khan in a child labour rescue case of 2010.

Mr. Khan was earlier cleared of all charges by the court of an Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate in May 2018.

The magisterial court had also reprimanded the police for slow probe into the rescue of 15 child labourers from *zari* units in south Delhi's Batla House, in a joint operation with a non-government organisation, stating that the time taken by them proved to be fatal to the case of prosecution.

The police had registered a first information report on November 1, 2010. Mr. Khan was accused of obstructing the rescue operation.

In 2016, they filed the chargesheet that was described as "choreographed" by the magisterial court.

The court had said the limitation period for filing the chargesheet was three years, but it was submitted after five years, barring the cognisance of alleged offences.

# CM meets his Ministers to discuss '10 guarantees'

'Prepare road map to fulfil promises in Guarantee Card'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday held a high-level meeting with all Cabinet Ministers, Secretaries and Heads of Departments to discuss the 10 "guarantees" made by him during the recently concluded Assembly elections here.

This was followed by the first Cabinet meeting of the Aam Aadmi Party-led Delhi government's second tenure.

Mr. Kejriwal, the Delhi government said in a statement, directed all HoDs to prepare a detailed road map to fulfil the promises in the 'Guarantee Card' within one week and provide an estimate for the budget required to implement the same.

"The new government has already started its processes following the oath ceremony without wasting much time. We have started working towards the development of Delhi, and I hope that we will work at a much faster pace than we had during our last tenure," Mr. Kejriwal told reporters at a press conference.

"...I have been consistently asked why I did not take charge of any department. I did not take charge of any-



Arvind Kejriwal

ing except the Delhi Jal Board during my last tenure. It is much easier to monitor the functioning of all the departments than handling any one. I believe it is the responsibility of the Chief Minister to overlook the performance of all the Ministers and the operations of their departments," he said further.

Mr. Kejriwal, the government said, also made clear in the meeting that all free schemes implemented during his previous tenure would continue for the next five years. These include free electricity up to 200 units, free water up to 20,000 litre, free ride for women on buses and a free pilgrimage scheme for senior citizens.

Mr. Kejriwal said the respective heads or the Secre-

taries of departments such as Education, Health, Security, Water, Electricity, Transport, Environment, had been instructed to formulate a plan for the smooth functioning of their departments.

"The plan will contain the timeline as well as the budget or monetary requirements for the fulfilment of the guarantees concerning their departments. The plan will also have set milestones of the execution of work, to assess the fulfilment of plans in the stipulated timelines," he said.

"Separate meetings will be held a week later with each of these departments every week where they will hold presentations notifying their requirements. The budget allocation on these 'guarantees' will be announced during the announcement of the budget for this financial year in the Delhi Assembly," he said further.

The Delhi Cabinet, Mr. Kejriwal added, had decided that the first Delhi Assembly session would be a three-day one and be held between February 24 and 26. The Chief Minister also issued an assurance related to 24-hour safe and clean tap water in the next five years.

## Kejriwal meets Shah

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal called on Union Home Minister Amit Shah at his residence here on Wednesday and discussed various development issues pertaining to Delhi, the State government said in a statement.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday at the Delhi Secretariat, Mr. Kejriwal said, "I met with the honourable Home Minister Amit Shah ji today. It was a fruitful meeting in a cordial atmosphere. Various issues and matters concerning the people of Delhi were discussed. We mutually agreed on working together for the development of Delhi."

The Central and State government, he said further, would work together on various matters, including security of women to avoid any differences in approach, as there is a major division of power and responsibilities when it comes to the functioning of departments in Delhi.

"We have agreed that both the governments will work together on all matters concerning Delhi, including significant issues such as women's security," he said. When asked whether they discussed about the anti-CAA protest at Shaheen Bagh, Mr. Kejriwal replied in the negative.

## 'Take proactive steps to trace missing children'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday said proactive steps should be taken by the Delhi

police to trace missing children.

The court directed that district anti-human trafficking units shall henceforth func-

tion as nodal agencies for all cases of missing children and they shall work in close coordination with the local police, providing expert assistance.

## 'Women's safety, transgenders' empowerment focus areas'

Rajendra Pal Gautam meets DCW chief

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

New Women and Child Development Minister Rajendra Pal Gautam on Wednesday said that women's safety and empowerment of transgender community will be the top priorities of the government.

"The transgender community has been neglected for very long. They are subjected to discrimination and exclusion by the society. We need to work towards the protection and empowerment of the this community. Transgender inclusion and equality is pivotal to us," the Minister said.

On Wednesday, Mr. Gautam also met Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) chief Swati Maliwal to discuss the issue of women's safety in Delhi. "The work done by the DCW is lauded all across the country. They have been successful in busting sex rackets and have rescued girls from



Rajendra Pal Gautam

human trafficking. In the upcoming years, we want women in the Capital to feel safer. Special focus should be on cases of domestic violence and to protect the victims," the Minister said.

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Chairperson and Managing Director of Biocon, a biopharmaceutical enterprise, paid a visit to a mohalla clinic in Saket constituency of Delhi and termed it as a "step in the right direction" towards achieving the sustainable development goal of universal health coverage. She later met Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal at his office in the Secretariat.

## New DPCC chief selection process begins

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The process of selecting the new president of the Delhi Congress began with AICC interim in-charge Shaktisinh Gohil taking feedback from senior leaders of the city unit during meetings on Wednesday.

Sources said that Mr. Gohil held separate meetings with several senior Delhi Congress leaders, including working presidents Haroon Yusuf and Rajesh Liloithia, Tarvinder Singh Marwah and Jitender Kochar.

The post of Delhi Congress president is lying vacant as Subash Chopra stepped down, after the party suffered a humiliating defeat in the recent Assembly polls. P.C. Chacko, who was Delhi Congress AICC in-charge, also resigned.

"Mr. Gohil enquired about the party's massive defeat in the Assembly elections and also the ways and means to resurrect the party," said a party leader.

Mr. Gohil will hold meetings for some more days and submit a report to the party high command, a Congress leader said.



## IN BRIEF

**Driver killed after truck turns turtle**

**NEW DELHI**  
A truck driver was killed when his tractor turned turtle on National Highway 24 in east Delhi's Kalyanpuri in the early hours of Wednesday. The victim has been identified as Mushroof (34), a resident of Ghazipur. Police said that a case has been registered and CCTV footage is being obtained to ascertain whether he had been hit by another vehicle or lost control of the truck.

**Chawla case: no word given to U.K. on probe, says Ministry**

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

The Home Ministry informed the Delhi High Court on Wednesday that it never gave any assurance to the U.K. authorities that no further investigation would be carried out in the case related to Sanjeev Chawla, who was extradited from Britain last week.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said for a fair trial, the alleged bookie and key accused in one of cricket's biggest match-fixing scandals that involved former South African captain Hansie Cronje, has to be confronted with the evidence gathered against him to "unearth the conspiracy and identify the other persons involved".

After hearing the arguments of the MHA counsel and Chawla, the court reserved the order on Chawla's plea challenging his 12-day custodial remand and said the decision would be pronounced on Thursday.

A trial court had on February 13 sent Chawla to 12-day custodial interrogation by the Delhi police.

Additional Solicitor General Sanjay Jain, appearing for the MHA, submitted that Chawla would remain in the Tihar and his questioning would be done there itself.

**STF set up to study minimum age of girls entering motherhood: Centre**

HC gives time to govt. to submit response on plea seeking uniform marriage age

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

The Centre has informed the Delhi High Court on Wednesday that a Special Task Force has been formed to study the issue of minimum age of girls entering motherhood.

The Centre's submissions were made during the hearing of a petition seeking equality in legal age of marriage for men and women.

A Bench of Chief Justice D.N. Patel and Justice C. Hari Shankar was informed about Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's recent speech while presenting the Budget in Parliament where she discussed the issue of age of girls entering motherhood.

Ms. Sitharaman had said: "Women's age of marriage



was increased from fifteen years to eighteen years in 1978, by amending erstwhile Sharda Act of 1929. As India progresses further, opportunities open up for women to pursue higher education and careers."

"There are imperatives of lowering maternal mortality rate [MMR] as well as im-

provement of nutrition levels. Entire issue about age of a girl entering motherhood needs to be seen in this light. I propose to appoint a task force that will present its recommendations in six months' time," she had said.

Taking note of the submission, the High Court granted more time to the Centre to submit its response to the petition by BJP leader and advocate Ashwini Upadhyay.

The petition has claimed that the difference in minimum age of marriage for men and women was based on patriarchal stereotypes and has no scientific backing.

The plea has contended that limit of 18 years for a woman to get married amounts

to "blatant discrimination" when men in India are permitted to wed at the age of 21.

Mr. Upadhyay argued that more than 125 countries in the world have a uniform age of marriage for men and women. Noting this fact, the National Human Rights Commission, pursuant to the National Conference on Child Marriage held in New Delhi in August 2018, recommended that India follow suit and bring uniformity in the minimum age limits, he said.

He contended that to protect women's fundamental rights, it is imperative that the minimum age of marriage be equalised and fixed at 21 years.

**Loud and clear**

Members of Peoples Union for Democratic Rights protesting against death penalty for gang rape and murder, at Jantar Mantar on Wednesday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

**Police foil murder plan, arrest criminal from Dwarka**

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

A 34-year-old criminal, who was allegedly out to kill another, was arrested in Dwarka, police said on Wednesday. The accused wanted to build his clout in the area and hence planned to eliminate his rival, they said.

DCP (Dwarka) Anto Alphonse said that the accused, Jitender alias Bittoo, is a resident of Bindapur.

Police said that on Monday, they received a tip-off that Jitender was roaming near Rajapuri in Dwarka after which a trap was laid and he was apprehended. A load-

ed countrymade pistol was recovered from his possession, they said.

During interrogation, Jitender confessed that he was on his way to murder one Pawan Gupta because of personal enmity, but the arrest spoiled his plan. On further investigation, it was found

that a few months ago, Pawan and Jitender got into an argument during which the former abused the latter. "Jitender's friends taunted him for being abused and he took it as a challenge to build his clout in the area. He decided to eliminate Pawan by shooting him," Mr. Alphonse said.

Police said that a case under Section 25 of Arms Act was registered against him and he was arrested.

Jitender used to rent lights to vegetable vendors in the area but later got into bad company. He was first arrested in 2007 in a firing incident, police said.

**Bar Association passes resolution condemning judge's transfer**

DHCBA says it's a rarest of rare case; to abstain from work today

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

The Delhi High Court Bar Association (DHCBA) has unanimously passed a resolution condemning the transfer of Justice Muralidhar, who is third in the order of seniority in the Delhi High Court, to neighbouring Punjab and Haryana High Court.

"Unequivocally and in the strongest possible terms, the Delhi High Court Bar Association condemns the said transfers. Such transfers are not only detrimental to our noble institution but also tend to erode and dislodge the faith of the common litigant in the justice dispensation system," DHCBA said in the resolution.

DHCBA has also resolved to request its members to abstain from work on Thursday as a token of protest claiming "the transfer is a rarest of rare case" due to which, "the majesty of our revered institution is at stake".

Following a meeting on

February 12, the Supreme Court Collegium headed by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde has recommended the transfer of Justice Muralidhar, who is third in the order of seniority in the Delhi High Court, to neighbouring Punjab and Haryana High Court.

The Collegium order was uploaded on the Supreme Court's official website on Wednesday and as the news spread, the executive committee of the Delhi High Court Bar Association held an urgent meeting.

**Expresses shock**

"The Delhi High Court Bar Association expresses its shock, dismay and outrage at the transfer of one of the finest judges to have adorned the Bench - Dr. Justice S. Muralidhar - by the collegium of the Supreme Court," the DHCBA said.

DHCBA president and senior advocate Mohit Mathur and secretary Abhijit have also sent a copy of the resolution to the Chief Justice of India.

"The Delhi High Court Bar Association sincerely hopes that the Collegium of the Supreme Court revisits the issue and recalls the move to transfer Justice Muralidhar," the resolution stated.

Justice Muralidhar, who was elevated as a judge of the Delhi High Court in May 2006, has delivered many significant decisions. The judge, who had convicted politician Sajjan Kumar in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots case, had also revoked the transit remand of activist Gautam Navlakha in the Bhima Koregaon case.

Justice Muralidhar is also one of the few judges in the Delhi High Court who refuses to be addressed as 'My Lord' or 'Your Lordship' by lawyers and gives them prior notice not to do so in the causerlist itself.

Reacting to the development, advocate Karuna Nundy tweeted, "The Delhi High Court Bar Association stands up against Justice Muralidhar's forced transfer. Proud".

**One held for abducting man for ransom**

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

A 26-year-old man has been arrested for allegedly kidnapping a businessman for ransom in west Delhi's Tilak Nagar, police said on Wednesday.

DCP (West) Deepak Purohit said that the accused has been identified as Haripal, a resident of Najafgarh. Police said that around 9.30 p.m. on Tuesday, a PCR call was received regarding kidnapping of a person from near gate number 3 of Tilak Nagar metro station. The caller also said that the kidnapper was asking for a ransom of ₹25 lakh.

Police said that the kidnapper's phone was put on technical surveillance after which a trap was laid near Delhi Cantonment metro station where the kidnapper had allegedly asked for the ransom money to be delivered.

Meanwhile, the kidnapper started negotiating and finally agreed to settle it at ₹10 lakh. The kidnapper said that he would come in a white car, police said, adding that the victim's friend along with a police official in civil uniform went to the place of delivery as a police party followed them. Haripal was arrested and the victim was rescued.

**Two arrested for killing local goon in Govindpuri**

Victim was involved in 10 cases: police

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

A local goon was stabbed to death in south-east Delhi's Govindpuri in the early hours of Wednesday. Two persons have been arrested in connection with the case, police said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South-East) R.P. Meena said that the victim has been identified as Vishal Sharma alias Khali, a resident of Kalkaji. The accused have been identified as Yash Jham alias Sonu (35) and Shubham Sharma (24).

The victim was involved in 10 cases of attempt to murder, assault and Arms Act, Mr. Meena said, adding that accused Yash was also involved in an attempt to murder case in which Vishal was also an accused.

According to the police, a PCR call was received around 3 a.m. regarding a murder near Hanuman Temple at Gurudwara Chowk. The injured was taken to AIIMS Trauma Centre where he was declared brought dead.

During investigation, Mr. Meena said that it was revealed that Vishal had a quarrel with a few men after which he was stabbed multiple times. During further probe, it was revealed that Vishal was a local goon and used to beat Yash and Shub-



The victim, Vishal Sharma. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ham. The victim also suspected Yash of attacking him in 2017.

On Tuesday night, Yash and Shubham went to the street to eat paranthas. On seeing them, Vishal started beating up Shubham. Yash came to his rescue and he stabbed Vishal, Mr. Meena said.

**Stabbed 15 times**

Vishal's brother Gaurav said that he received a call late night from a resident saying that Vishal had a fight with someone and he was stabbed. "I immediately reached the spot and took him to the hospital but doctors could not save him. He was stabbed over 15 times," Gaurav said.

Police have registered a case under Section 302 (punishment for murder) of the IPC at Govindpuri Police Station and further probe is on.

**NGT imposes ₹10,000 fine on officials**

**STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI**

The National Green Tribunal on Wednesday imposed a fine of ₹10,000 each on the Ghaziabad Municipal Commissioner and the Executive Officer of the civic body for their failure to remove encroachments in the green belts as per earlier directions of the green panel.

A Bench headed by Justice Raghuvendra S. Rathore asked the municipal corporation to execute its order on removal of encroachments within 30 days.

"The facts and circumstances leave no room of doubt that compliance of the order of the tribunal have not been made so far, much less to say within a period of 30 days even from December 11, 2019. The tribunal has no option but to pass order in respect of the failure on the part of the officer of the Municipal Corporation to execute the order within 30 days," the Bench said.



**Timings**  
**DELHI**

THURSDAY, FEB. 20  
RISE 06:56 SET 18:15  
RISE 04:43 SET 15:17

FRIDAY, FEB. 21  
RISE 06:55 SET 18:15  
RISE 05:31 SET 16:13

SATURDAY, FEB. 22  
RISE 06:54 SET 18:16  
RISE 06:14 SET 17:09

**Delhi Weather** max min

Delhi City 26 08  
Safdarjang 26 08  
Palam 27 09

**Delhi Palam Today**  
28°C A Rise in morning temperature is expected. Day will be partly cloudy sky. South easterly light to moderate winds are expected.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
26°C Few spells of rain with gusty winds are expected. Drop in day temperature with mainly cloudy sky is likely.

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**THE HINDU**  
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# Central govt. cuts its share in flagship crop insurance scheme

Enrolment in two schemes has been made voluntary for all farmers

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Centre has almost halved its contribution to its own flagship crop insurance schemes, slashing its share of the premium subsidy from the current 50% to just 25% in irrigated areas and 30% for unirrigated areas from the kharif season of 2020.

The Union Cabinet approved the revamp of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) and the Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme at its meeting on Wednesday.

In another significant step, enrolment in the two schemes has also been made voluntary for all farmers, including those with existing crop loans. When the PMFBY was launched in 2016, it was made mandatory for all farmers with crop loans to enrol for insurance cover under



Changes made after consultations with States, says Minister.

the scheme.

Announcing the decision after the Cabinet meeting, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar said that 58% of farmers enrolled in the schemes are loanees who will no longer have to compulsorily take insurance cover. "The numbers [of enrolled farmers] may go down in the first year, but it will pick up again after that," he said, adding that the Centre

would launch an awareness campaign to encourage farmers to voluntarily sign up for crop insurance policies. Coverage under the scheme is now 30% of cropped area, according to government data.

**Flak for PMFBY**

PMFBY has come in from flak from a wide variety of stakeholders. Farmers groups and opposition politicians have claimed that private insu-

rance companies have made windfall gains on the scheme. Several major insurers, including ICICI Lombard and Tata AIG, have opted out of the scheme in 2019-20, reportedly due to losses because of high claims ratios. Several States, including Punjab and West Bengal, have refused to participate in the scheme as well.

The Centre has made changes to the scheme based on consultations with States and inputs from all stakeholders, said Mr. Tomar.

Farmers pay a fixed share of the premium: 2% of the sum insured for kharif crops, 1.5% for rabi crops and 5% for cash crops. Currently, the Centre and State split the balance of the premium equally. However, the revamp now reduces the burden on the Centre and increases the share of States.

# Modi government in denial of slowdown: Manmohan

'A \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25 is wishful thinking'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Wednesday said the Narendra Modi government was in denial of the economic slowdown and its target of making India a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25 was "wishful thinking".

He was speaking at the release of *Backstage: The Story behind India's High Growth Years*, authored by former Planning Commission Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

Dr. Singh also spoke about the challenges to the opening up of the economy during the 1991 crisis, and acknowledged the crucial role played by Mr. Ahluwalia and P. Chidambaram, who was then Commerce Minister.

"We have today a government that does not acknowledge that there is such a word as slowdown. I think



Old hands: Manmohan Singh with Montek Singh Ahluwalia, left, at a book launch. •PTI

this is not good for our country because if you don't recognise the problems that you face, you are not likely to find credible answers to take corrective action," he said.

"Montek has pointed out that contrary to what the ruling group may say today, a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25 is wishful thinking," he said.

Dr. Singh recalled the challenges he had faced during the 1991 economic crisis

as the Finance Minister in the Cabinet of Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. Not only was the dominant opinion against reforms but the business community formed the "Bombay Club" to resist liberalisation.

He faced stiff opposition from several quarters to his decision to devalue the rupee. Among them was former President R. Venkataraman.

## Operation clean



Earthmovers remove debris from the Yamuna bed ahead of U.S. President Donald Trump's visit, in Agra on Wednesday. •PTI

# AMU students condemn U.P. CM's statement in Assembly

'He is trying to cover up State terror against students'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
GHAZIABAD

The Aligarh Muslim University students strongly condemned the statements made by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in the State Assembly on Wednesday accusing the university's students of hitting the roads in large numbers to "burn" Aligarh city on December 15, 2019.

"His statement that the students of AMU used stones, petrol bombs and weapons against police is an absolute falsehood. He is trying to cover up the State terror committed against the students of AMU on December 15," said Salman Intiaz, president AMU Students' Union (2018-19).

"We demand the immediate resignation of U.P. CM Yogi Adityanath as his pre-



CM Yogi Adityanath

sence in the office is a great hurdle in the deliverance of justice. We ask the President of India to take notice of his false claims and seek his removal," said a statement issued by Mr. Intiaz.

Faizul Hasan, former president of AMUSU and one of the prominent faces of the ongoing protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and National Register of Citizens at the Bab-e-Syed, said, "either the CM has not

been told the truth or he is lying. The AMU fraternity, which includes teachers and old boys, has never attempted to create a problem for the common man in the city. Perhaps, people are jealous of how we remained peaceful despite provocation," he said.

Mr. Intiaz said the truth remains that AMU students were protesting peacefully on the campus since December 8 against CAA-NRC.

"On December 15, a peaceful march was held to condemn the excessive use of force at Jamia Millia Islamia. U.P. police and other armed State forces were present in massive numbers at the university gates and were ready with ammunition. Police entered the university campus and attacked the students like criminals," he alleged.

# Ammonia gas leak: 15 hospitalised

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
KURUKSHETRA

Fifteen persons have been hospitalised and 45 others were affected after inhaling ammonia gas leaking from a cold storage unit at Shahbad Markanda, about 20 kms from here, police said on Wednesday.

The leakage started at the cold storage at about 9 p.m. on Tuesday when all employees had stepped out for dinner.

The gas spread to the nearby 'Baajigar Dera' where 40 families reside. The residents there complained of suffocation and many of them started vomiting and some were rushed to a nearby hospital.

A doctor said 15 persons were admitted to the hospital at Shahbad while two were sent to Kurukshetra. A few were discharged after treatment. All of them were stable, he said.

# SC directs Rajasthan govt. to stop illegal sand mining at once

Court seeks action-taken report within four weeks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday took strong note of rampant illegal sand mining in Rajasthan and directed the State government, its Collectors and SPs to take immediate steps to stop it.

Seeking an action taken report from the State government within four weeks, the Bench headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde said illegal sand mining is likely to "damage the environment irreparably".

The Bench, which also comprised Justices B.R. Gavai and Surya Kant, also directed the apex court ap-



CM Ashok Gehlot

pointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC) to look into the issue of illegal sand mining and submit a report suggesting measures to deal with it.

The Bench said the CEC would also consider the pro-

blem faced by sand traders, transporters and other stakeholders and it will have the authority to summon any person including government officials with the purpose of holding the probe.

**CEC report**

The Bench said the CEC will submit its report within six weeks.

The apex court was hearing a batch of petitions relating to sand mining in Rajasthan.

The apex court in 2017 had ordered stopping of illegal sand mining in Rajasthan.

# Ex-DIG, 4 others get 8 years in jail

Convicted for abetting a family of four to end their lives

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
AMRITSAR

A former DIG and four others were sentenced to eight-year imprisonment by a local court in a 2004 case in which a family of five ended their lives, blaming the accused for the extreme step.

A serving DSP of the Punjab Police was also sentenced to four years in jail.

The court of Additional District Sessions Judge Sandeep Singh Bajwa also slapped fine ranging from ₹10,000 to ₹20,000 on them.

Former DIG Kulnar Singh, DSP Hardev Singh, Parminder Kaur, Palwinder Singh, Mohinder Singh and Sabreen Kaur were convicted in the case on Monday.

Kulnar Singh was posted as

the Amritsar Senior Superintendent of Police while DSP Hardev Singh held the charge of an Inspector in 2004 when the incident happened.

Hardip Singh, along with his wife, mother and two children, had taken some poisonous substance on October 31, 2004.

**Note on the walls**

Before taking the extreme step, the entire family had written a note on the walls of a room of their house.

They also sent copies of the note to their friends and some known people by post. The family had directly blamed Kulnar Singh for the extreme step.

The Amritsar police had registered a case in 2004

when public pressure mounted but the accused were not arrested then.

In 2009, Punjab Human Rights Organisation activist Sarabjit Singh Verka took up the matter before a local court and sought justice for the victims while alleging that the local police was not probing the case properly.

The court issued non-bailable warrants in September 2011 against Kulnar Singh and Hardev Singh under Sections 306 (abetment to end live), 420 (fraud), 467 and 468 (forgery) of the IPC.

*Suicide prevention helpline: Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health, Telephone: 011-4076 9002, Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m. -7.30 p.m.*

# Punjab Assembly session likely to be stormy

Opposition to take up power tariff issue

VIKAS VASUDEVA  
CHANDIGARH

The budget session of Punjab Assembly, beginning February 20, is expected to start on stormy note as the Opposition parties have geared up to corner the ruling Congress government on the issues of power tariff hike, farmers' plight and stray cattle menace.

The principal Opposition - the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) - have both planned to forcefully raise the issue of hike in electricity tariff among other public interest issues during the session.

"Congress promised to give electricity at ₹5 per unit, but the rate today is between ₹9 to ₹10 per unit. It's the most expensive in the country. The Chief Minister's remark about renegotiating power purchase agreements with private players is nothing more than a political statement. We will bring a calling attention motion on misgovernance," former Minister and Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Majithia, who along with other party leaders met Punjab Assembly Speaker K.P. Rana on Wednesday, said they have demanded a 15-day budget session to discuss issues.

"The Congress government should not run away from the debate. The Opposition should be given appropriate time during the budget session to take up



CM Amarinder Singh

people's issues," Mr. Majithia said.

"People want to know where are the jobs. Not only this, they want to know why unemployment allowance of ₹2,500 per month is still not being given. Discussions are needed on illegal mining, liquor smuggling besides farmers' distress and loan waiver," he said.

**'Promise not honoured'**

Accusing the Congress government of not fulfilling its election promise of scrapping or reviewing the power purchase agreements with private thermal power plants, AAP MLA Aman Arora said instead of securing interests of the people, the State government has chosen to protect the interests of the private companies.

Mr. Arora said the Amarinder regime followed the dotted lines drawn by previous SAD-BJP dispensation, resulting in steep electricity tariff hike.

He said keeping in view the growing menace of stray cattle in the State, the party will move a motion during the session to effectively deal with it.

# Central team assesses damage to crops in locust-hit Rajasthan

Three-member panel interacted with a large number of farmers and asked about their efforts to deal with the situation

MOHAMMED IQBAL  
JAIPUR

An Inter-Ministerial Central Team, visiting the locust-affected areas in Rajasthan, has taken stock of damage caused by insects to the crops in Jodhpur and Bikaner divisions and met the farmers, elected representatives and government officials after getting divided into three groups.

The team members inspected the damaged wheat, gram, castor, taramira, cummin and isabgol crops in Jaisalmer, Barmer, Jalore and Jodhpur districts on Tuesday and Wednesday. Crops in an area measuring 3.71 lakh hec-



Members of the Central team inspecting damaged crops at a village in Jodhpur division on Wednesday. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tares have been destroyed in the biggest-ever locust attack which started in the Thar desert in May 2019.

The tropical grasshoppers emerged in January 2019 from Sudan and Eritrea on Africa's Red Sea Coast and

travelled through Saudi Arabia and Iran to enter Pakistan, where they invaded the cotton-producing belt of Sindh province. The swarms of locusts then entered the Thar desert, damaging the crops in western Rajasthan and northern Gujarat.

The State government has sought an assistance of ₹200 crore from the Centre to deal with the locust menace and compensate the farmers for their losses. A special crop assessment survey was earlier undertaken in some of the affected areas and ex-gratia assistance distributed to the farmers.

The Union Agriculture Mi-

nistry's Locust Warning Organisation (LWO), headquartered in Jodhpur, has launched efforts on a war footing to control locusts. Teams carrying equipment were rushed to the villages during the last few months to spray high-intensity malathion insecticide to prevent the spread of locusts to other areas.

The Central team comprised Atish Chandra, Joint Secretary, Union Ministry of Agriculture; J.P. Singh from the Directorate of Plan Protection, Quarantine & Storage; Anil Dhillon from the Food Corporation of India; Manash Choudhary from NI-

TI Ayog's Agriculture Division and Dayanand Savant from the Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries.

**Farmers' demand**

The team members interacted with a large number of farmers and asked about their efforts to deal with the locust attack. While analysing extensive damage caused to the rabi crops, the team took note of the farmers' demand for enhancement of compensation in view of the cost of sowing of the crops having exceeded the relief amount offered by the government.



## JU students' union polls peaceful

Elections held after a gap of three years; results today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
KOLKATA

The students' union elections in the Jadavpur University, held after a gap of three years, passed off peacefully on Wednesday, with the RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and the CPI (M)-backed Students' Federation of India claiming they received a good response from the students.

A university official said no untoward incident was reported in the elections in both Arts and Engineering faculties, that began at 10 a.m. and ended at 7 p.m.

Vice-Chancellor Suranjan Das, in a statement, thanked all sections of the university for the smooth conduct of the elections.

SFI's Jadavpur University



Students at Jadavpur University in Kolkata on Wednesday.

■ RAJEEV BHATT

unit leader Ushashi Pal said a large number of students voted enthusiastically. "We were cautious of not falling into the ABVP's trap and asked our activists and supporters to be careful so that the election process was not disrupted," Mr. Pal said.

The ABVP had put its can-

didates for the first time in the polls of JU, known as a hotbed of the Left-wing politics. "We were careful so that the SFI or other Left unions could not instigate any trouble," ABVP's JU unit leader Shyamasree Karmakar said.

The results will be declared on Thursday.

## 'Odisha not taking advantage of Central schemes'

STAFF REPORTER  
BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government is not proactive in taking advantage of Central government schemes, alleged BJP general secretary Ram Madhav here on Wednesday.

"The Odisha government does not submit proposals for new projects and also lags behind in spending sanctioned funds. It is the responsibility of State governments to make full utilisation of Central funds. The government should wake up

from deep slumber and come forward to take advantage of Central government schemes," said Mr. Madhav attacking the Naveen Patnaik-government at a press conference here.

Stating that one of the important aspects of this year's Union Budget is to provide necessary support to the State basing on their performance, he said, "heavy budgetary allocation has been made in fishery, solar and water resource sectors. If the State government comes

up with good proposals concerning these sectors, the Centre is ready to provide support."

He termed the Union Budget growth oriented. The Budget had given priority to development of critical sectors such as agriculture, water resources and infrastructure and upliftment of youth, women and socially and economically backward classes, Mr. Madhav said, adding that it would help the country come out of the economic slowdown.



# Government takes steps to end single-use plastic by May 1

Civic bodies told to give incentives to establishments for not using plastic

TANVI DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

In another step towards curbing use of single-use plastic in the State from May 1, the Environment department and the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board have asked municipal corporations across the State to give incentives to establishments, prepare squads similar to Mumbai's to confiscate plastic, and hold review meetings every month.

The Maharashtra government had in March 2018 issued a notification banning the manufacture, sale and use of single-use plastic bags. It also banned an array of plastic products including cutlery, straws and containers. The ban imposes a penalty between ₹5,000 and ₹25,000 for those violating the rules.

The government had given people time till June 23 to dispose of their banned items, following which municipal corporations started drives to confiscate banned plastic and the MPCB conducted drives to ensure manufacturing units were shut down. However, after about a year, the drive lost momentum and single-use plastic is now freely available in the market. The ban was the brainchild of Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray, and was implemented by the then Environment Minister Ramdas Kadam.

After becoming Environment Minister himself, Mr. Thackeray conducted a review of the ban in January,



Following initial success after the State government banned use of single-use plastic in March 2018, the drive lost momentum. ■ FILE PHOTO

and spoke to various stakeholders regarding hurdles faced in its implementation. He also held a meeting via video conference on February 5 with municipal commissioners, district collectors and divisional commissioners. He has now asked the civic bodies in the State to submit plans on how they will become single-use plastic free.

Following the meeting, MPCB has also planned several measures that can be undertaken.

E Ravendiran, member secretary of MPCB said, "We want organisations like offices, municipal councils, gram panchayats to come forward and give self-declaration on being plastic free. Their claims will then be verified and we are considering giving them incentives like certificates or prizes. We might even hold competitions for these prizes through the lo-

cal body. Let us see how many come forward. Local bodies have been asked to submit their action plan. A draft proposal is ready, we will discuss it with the Minister and then declare it." MPCB is hopeful that organisations will come forward to become single use plastic free.

Besides, MPCB is also encouraging municipal corporations to set up team of inspectors along the lines of BMC's blue squads for confiscating banned plastic. District collectors are supposed to hold monthly review of the implementation of the ban. A State-wide meeting will be held in March and the department will kick off its awareness campaign. Students will be held at school, college level to sensitise them.

Anil Diggikar, principal se-

cretary, Environment Department, said, "Corporations can individually decide how to motivate all establishments. The department will do State-wide publicity while the local bodies will be responsible for the execution."

Officers attributed the slowdown in the implementation of the ban to the two elections in 2019.

The other challenge for the department will be preventing import of single use plastic from other States.

"If you look at the larger impact, single use plastic has reduced by 50-60% in the State. But it is possible that it comes from other States. We are looking at ways to prevent that. By May 1, we hope to put an end to that also," said an MPCB official.

Meanwhile, environmentalist Afroz Shah said, "Implementation of the notification is fine but there are two stages of plastic - pre-litter and post-litter. Pre-litter means counselling the consumer about avoiding a lifestyle that stresses on large-scale plastic consumption, especially multi-layered plastic. It is the responsibility of both producers and consumers to avoid products that use non-recyclable plastic. If citizens can achieve that level of lifestyle changes, it could take care of a large part of the problem. We cannot say at this stage if people can or cannot do this, it depends on factors. Even post-litter, which means when plastic hits the streets, is important."

# MVA govt. could fall over Elgaar, Bhima Koregaon: Athawale

RPI chief says it is not appropriate to argue publicly

SHARAD VYAS  
MUMBAI

Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale said on Wednesday that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government could fall any time over differences on the handling of the Bhima-Koregaon and Elgaar Parishad cases.

The Republican Party of India (RPI) chief said Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray should reconsider his decision to join the MVA and shake hands with the BJP-RPI coalition he was part of earlier.

"With repeated controversies and complications arising out of this issue [Bhima-Koregaon], it would be difficult for honourable Uddhavji to run the government. Now is the right time for him to abandon the support of Congress and NCP, and establish a government with the support of the BJP/RPI instead," Mr. Athawale said.

The RPI chief had earlier this week hailed Mr. Thackeray for reportedly agreeing to hand over Bhima-Koregaon/Elgaar Parishad files to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The difference of opinion on this issue between the three alliance parties - Shiv Sena, Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party - has caused a deep rift that cannot be repaired any longer, Mr. Athawale claimed.

A former coalition partner of the Shiv Sena, the Union Minister said the Centre has the authority to push the NIA to take over inquiry into the cases. However, NCP chief Sharad Pawar and Con-



Ramdas Athawale

gress leader Mallikarjun Kharge have publicly opposed the handing over of the cases to the NIA. But the final decision must be taken by the CM and it was not appropriate for the NCP and Congress leaders to publicly declare their opposition, Mr. Athawale said. "The MVA government should hold an internal meeting and deliberate its decisions. It is not

appropriate to argue publicly. Public opposition by NCP and Congress over decision to give NIA inquiry of these cases, is not correct. If such disputes continue, it will be difficult for Uddhav Thackeray to run the government," he said.

**Fellow programme** Meanwhile, former Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, has in a letter to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, said the State government's decision to scrap the Chief Minister's Fellowship Programme has sent a wrong message to the youth. He said Mr. Thackeray must reconstitute the fellowship under which dozens of qualified students were offered internship to work in the CMO on a monthly stipend. But the fellowship was discontinued by the MVA government.

# Two Shiv Sena leaders may face the heat

ALOK DESHPANDE  
MUMBAI

One MLA and one MP, who have been recently awarded a Cabinet rank by the Maha Vikas Aghadi government, may find it difficult to continue their tenure as the Opposition is likely to raise the issue of office of profit in the budget session of the Legislature.

Jogeshwari MLA Ravindra Waikar and South Mumbai MP Arvind Sawant, both from the Shiv Sena, may face the heat. If sources are to be believed, knowing the danger, the government has asked them to ensure their resignations are already kept ready.

Mr. Waikar was appointed as the minister for the CM office while Mr. Sawant was named as the coordinator of the committee of three MPs in Delhi, which will be formed to give the State projects a push.

# Cabinet dips into contingency fund

Orders probe into plantation drive by previous govt.

SHARAD VYAS  
MUMBAI

The State Cabinet on Wednesday approved a grant of ₹10,000 crore as contingency fund for the implementation of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Farmer Loan Waiver Scheme.

The ordinance will be issued by the Governor in consultation with the legislature and law and judiciary department, senior officials said.

At present the State contingency fund has a limit of ₹150 crore, which will be temporarily increased to ₹10,000 crore.

The government has decided to implement the scheme from February 22.

Meanwhile, Forest Minister Sanjay Rathod said a probe has been ordered into allegations of misappropriation of funds in the plantation drive of the previous Bharatiya Janata Par-

ty government, which claimed it planted 33 crore saplings across the State. "There were major irregularities in the scheme," said a Minister after the issue was discussed at the Cabinet meeting.

The BJP reacted by saying, "If they wish to probe our plantation drive, they should appoint a retired justice," said former forest minister and BJP leader Sudhir Mungantiwar.

# Shivaji's birthplace to get ₹23 cr. for conservation, says Ajit

CM attends 390th birth anniversary of warrior king

SHOUMOJIT BANERJEE  
PUNE

The Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government will allot ₹23 crore for the preservation and development of Shivneri Fort, the birthplace of Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji, said Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and senior Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Ajit Pawar on Wednesday.

Speaking at Shivneri Fort in Pune's Junnar tehsil on the occasion of Chhatrapati Shivaji's 390th birth anniversary, Mr. Ajit Pawar said: "At present, three departments, namely the Forest, the Archaeology and the Public Works Department (PWD), are in urgent need of funds amounting to ₹23 crore for the conservation works of Shivneri Fort."

Mr. Pawar, who is also the Guardian Minister of Pune district, informed that he would clear the fund amount at a meeting on Wednesday evening itself.

"When Uddhav Thackeray assumed office as Chief

Minister, his first decision was to allot ₹20 crore for the preservation of Raigad Fort [Shivaji's capital]. The objective of our government is to preserve historical forts by maintaining a heritage touch so as to keep it as it was during Chhatrapati Shivaji's times," said the Deputy Chief Minister.

Earlier, Mr. Thackeray, along with Mr. Pawar and other Cabinet Ministers including Chhagan Bhujbal and local legislators, were present at the birth anniversary celebrations of the legendary Maratha warrior-king, who is said to be born here in 1630 C.E.

Mr. Thackeray witnessed a number of events, including the 'cradle ceremony', while reviewing the progress of the development works at the fort.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that there was a palpable sense among the public of Maharashtra that "a true people's government has come to power in the State

in the form of the MVA government".

He further said that Mr. Pawar (and the NCP) ought to have allied with the Sena much earlier for the benefit of the State.

"Ajit dada and me [the Sena] simply remained apart all these years when we ought to have united much earlier. However, now that we are together, I promise the people of the State that we [the MVA coalition of the Sena-Congress-NCP] will not rest until we have developed Maharashtra," Mr. Thackeray said.

Likewise, in a veiled jibe at the BJP government, Mr. Pawar said: "Today is unique as there is a visible feeling that a true government of the people has come to power in Maharashtra... This is the first time I am witnessing such enthusiasm, especially from the youth on the occasion of 'Shiv Jayanti'".

He also refuted suggestion of differences of opinion between the Sena, the NCP and the Congress over the Elgaar Parishad probe.

# Hail the king



**Joyous celebration:** An acrobat demonstrates her skills at a rally to mark the 390th birth anniversary of Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in Nagpur on Wednesday. ■ S.SUDARSHAN

# Legislative Council to have 22 vacancies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI

As many as 22 seats in the Legislative Council will be falling vacant during April-July this year and elections to these will present an interesting scenario against the backdrop of the changed political equations in the State.

The opposition BJP currently dominates the 78-member Upper House.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who is currently not a member of either of the two Houses, is likely to take the Council route to become a member of the State legislature.

While the tenure of the eight members from the MLA quota ends on April 24, that of the 10 appointees from the Governor quota will expire on June 6 and June 15. The four MLCs from the teachers and graduates constituencies will retire on July 19.

Currently, the BJP has 22 MLCs, followed by NCP (15), Congress (13), and Shiv Sena (13).

# Floating casinos should not be shifted from Mandovi: minister

Lobo springs a surprise by taking stand different from the govt.'s; says more off-shore casinos should be set up

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
PANAJI

Goa Ports Minister Michael Lobo has said the off-shore casinos should not be shifted out of Mandovi river, and suggested that more such vessels be introduced in other rivers of the State.

The Minister's comment comes in stark contrast to the stand adopted by the BJP-led State government, which has assured to relocate off-shore casinos from the Mandovi after opposition from locals.

Mr. Lobo, who is also a BJP MLA, justified his statement claiming that the casino industry helps Goa's economy and generates employment.

"I still remember our former chief minister Manohar Parrikar saying that



**Lifeline:** Every casino, the Ports Minister said, employs over 400 people, and they also help the State treasury. ■ FILE PHOTO

the State is not dependent on the money collected (as taxes) from casinos. But I am saying opposite to it," Mr. Lobo told reporters at Mapusa town near here.

He claimed the casino industry is "helping the

State treasury".

"We get revenue from the casinos after charging fee for annual renewal of their licence. In addition, we also get revenue in the form of GST from them. Every year the renewal fees is

levied by departments like Excise, Food and Drugs Administration and others," he said.

Six off-shore casinos are currently operating from the Mandovi river in Panaji.

The minister said every vessel has been employing over 400 people.

"It is generating employment for Indians. We need to understand that this industry cannot be just stopped overnight," he said.

"I would say that more casinos should be introduced in other places like the Chapora river (in North Goa) and the Zuari river (in South Goa)," Mr. Lobo said. He, however, noted that MLAs representing constituencies around those riv-

ers have opposed the introduction of casinos, "as people are objecting to it".

"Introducing casinos in these rivers will help revive the economy of the State. Casinos will come up in these rivers in the years to come. People will realise it is part of the industry. If you want to grow the industry, then you will have to allow it," Mr. Lobo said.

He also said that he was not in favour of the plan to shift casinos from the Mandovi river to the upcoming international airport at Mopa in North Goa district.

"Mopa can be a different set up all together, we can have a live gaming zone there. But in my opinion, the casinos should continue in the Mandovi river," he added.



Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray visiting Shivneri Fort, the birthplace of Maratha warrior king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, on his birth anniversary, in Pune on Wednesday. ■ PTI







IN BRIEF



Six bureaucrats granted bail in INX Media case

**NEW DELHI**  
A special court granted bail to six public servants, including Sindhu Shree Khullar (in photo), who have been arraigned by the CBI in the INX Media case. The bail was given on personal surety of ₹2 lakh each, with a condition that they would not leave the country without permission.

Two channels face breach of privilege charge

**CHENNAI**  
Tamil Nadu Assembly Speaker P. Dhanapal on Wednesday referred to the House Privileges Committee a charge of breach of privilege levelled against Tamil TV channels — News 18 Tamil Nadu and Puthiya Thalaimurai — by Electricity and Prohibition Minister P. Thangamani.

Serum Institute hopes to offer COVID-19 vaccine

**MUMBAI**  
In six months, Serum Institute of India, Pune, may begin the human trials for a vaccine for COVID-19. Presently in the pre-clinical tests phase, SI's vaccine candidate has been developed using a laboratory-made synthetic virus. Adar Poonawalla, CEO, said the vaccine is likely to be ready by early 2022.

CBI arrests two ITPO officials for graft

**NEW DELHI**  
The CBI has arrested two officials of the India Trade Promotion Organisation for allegedly demanding bribe to allot a stall at the "Aahar Fair 2020." According to a complaint, Akshay Singh, a deputy manager with the ITPO, demanded ₹1.25 lakh as bribe. Singh and his manager were arrested.

Boy uploads exam paper on TikTok, held

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MALDA/KOLKATA**

A 16-year-old student was held in West Bengal's Malda district for allegedly making a TikTok video of the English question paper for the Class 10 state board exams and sharing it on social media, police said. The incident happened in Baidyanathpur High School in Ratua police station area of the district. He will be produced before the district Juvenile Justice Board on Thursday, they said.

# Court pulls up CBI in Asthana probe

The agency did not conduct a lie detector or psychological test on its former Special Director

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI**

A special court on Wednesday pulled up the CBI for not conducting a lie detector or psychological test on its former Special Director Rakesh Asthana in an alleged bribery case.

The court, which earlier in the day asked the CBI to submit the case diary for examination, also enquired about the previous investigating officer, Ajay Kumar Bassi.

The CBI submitted that Mr. Bassi had been transferred to Port Blair, but he was currently in Delhi. He was taken off the case after then agency chief, Alok Kumar Verma, was shunted out. Mr. Verma was stripped of his powers days after the case was registered, amid al-



**In the dock:** The court also asked if Rakesh Asthana was confronted with the other accused. ■PTI

legations and counter allegations between him and Mr. Asthana.

The court also asked if Mr. Asthana was confronted with the other accused, whether his mobile phones and laptops were examined;

and if there was any evidence to disprove the complainant's statement recorded under Section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

The CBI submitted that the lie detector test on some accused and witnesses had

indicated that they were deceptive.

The next date of hearing has been fixed for February 28, and Mr. Bassi has been asked to be present to assist in the scrutiny of the case diary.

**'Why such indulgence'**

The court also observed that advocate Sunil Mittal, a co-accused in the case, "seems like a fictional character emerging from *Mission Impossible* and *James Bond* movies. Why showing so much indulgence to him?"

On Mr. Mittal's son-in-law Somesh Prasad, who is another accused, the court asked, "Why are you showing so much indulgence to someone who isn't cooperating and didn't even share his phone?"

The court is yet to take cognisance of the charge sheet filed by the CBI, giving a clean chit to Mr. Asthana and Deputy Superintendent of Police Devender Kumar, who was earlier arrested in the case.

The chargesheet names Manoj Prasad as the accused. He was also arrested by the CBI. At the last hearing, the court reprimanded the agency, wondering why an accused, Mr. Prasad's brother Somesh Prasad, having a bigger role, was roaming free and it arrested its own official. The case was registered in October 2018, on a complaint from Hyderabad-based businessman Sana Sathish Babu against Mr. Asthana, Mr. Kumar, and the Prasad brothers.

(With inputs from PTI)

## Swachh Bharat Mission second phase gets nod

Key focus is to end open defecation

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI**

The Centre will begin implementing the second phase of its Swachh Bharat mission in rural areas from April, focusing on solid and liquid waste management and the sustainability of the abolition of open defecation.

On Wednesday, the Union Cabinet approved an allocation of ₹52,497 crore for the scheme from the budget of the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation over the next four years, according to an official statement. The remaining outlay of ₹88,384 crore until 2024-25 will come via a con-

vergence model, depending on funds released under the 15th Finance Commission and money allocated to the rural jobs guarantee scheme, as well as a revenue generation model being developed for solid and liquid waste management.

The Union Budget for 2020-21 had allocated ₹9,994 crore for the first year of the mission's Phase-II.

The scheme will be implemented by the States, with a fund sharing pattern of 60:40 between the Centre and the States.

In the northeastern and Himalayan states, the Central share will be 90%.

## Thousands protest against CAA across T.N.

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT CHENNAI**

Thousands took to the streets across Tamil Nadu on Wednesday, demanding that the State Assembly pass a resolution against implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA).

In Chennai, protesters gathered for a march to the Secretariat, in defiance of a Madras High Court order. However, they stopped on Wallajah Road near Chepauk stadium and erected a make-shift stage for speakers. Hundreds of police personnel were deployed. Drones and CCTV cameras were used to monitor the protest.

## Passenger tries to open aircraft door, offloaded

He wanted 2 persons taken on board

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI**

IndiGo's Delhi-Jeddah flight was forced to turn back just before takeoff after a passenger attempted to open one of the doors, according to a DGCA official.

The incident happened on Tuesday when the flight was taxiing for take-off. The passenger tried to open the door demanding that two of his co-passengers denied boarding for not possessing the boarding pass be allowed on the plane, according to the official.

"The captain of the flight decided to return to bay and offload the passenger and his accomplice for their un-

ruly behaviour," according to the source.

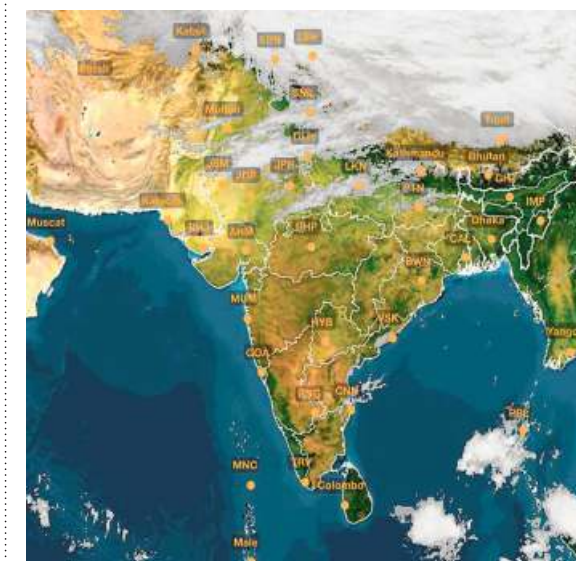
"A group of 110 passengers of the connecting flight from Srinagar were travelling on this flight. Two of them were offloaded at the boarding gate as they had lost their boarding pass," he said.

A Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) official, however, said the two passengers had failed to show up at the boarding gate on time. Thereafter, three more women passengers accompanying these men were allowed to deboard.

An anti-sabotage drill was also performed before allowing the flight to take off.

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:** Dense fog likely in isolated parts over Sub-Himalayan West Bengal & Sikkim. Thundersquall accompanied with hail likely over Uttarakhand. Thunderstorm likely over Himachal Pradesh, West U.P., Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	.....	30.1	15.1	Kozhikode	.....	35	23.6
Ahmedabad	.....	34.7	16.2	Kurnool	.....	36.1	12.2
Aizawl	.....	20.7	10.6	Lucknow	.....	28.6	10.3
Allahabad	.....	30.1	10	Madurai	.....	34.9	20.8
Bengaluru	.....	31.5	17.6	Mangaluru	.....	35.1	19
Bhopal	.....	32.1	13	Mumbai	.....	34.8	20.8
Bhubaneswar	.....	33.8	14.5	Mysuru	.....	31.9	16.3
Chandigarh	.....	23.8	10.2	New Delhi	.....	26.4	8.1
Chennai	.....	32	20.6	Patna	.....	27.4	11.4
Coimbatore	.....	33.1	20.2	Port Blair	.....	31.1	24.8
Dehradun	.....	24.2	9.6	Puducherry	.....	31.6	21.6
Gangtok	.....	15.6	9.5	Pune	.....	34.7	18.1
Goa	.....	33.4	21.7	Raipur	.....	32.2	15
Guwahati	.....	24.6	7.1	Ranchi	.....	29	9.9
Hubballi	.....	34	19	Shillong	.....	16	7.1
Hyderabad	.....	32.6	16.4	Shimla	.....	16.1	7.4
Imphal	.....	25.6	7.7	Srinagar	.....	11.5	0.7
Jaipur	.....	30.4	12.9	Thiruvananthapuram	.....	34.6	21.9
Kochi	.....	33.2	24	Tiruchi	.....	34	19.6
Kohima	.....	18.8	8.6	Vijayawada	.....	32	22
Kolkata	.....	29.7	18.7	Visakhapatnam	.....	30.6	23.6

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

CITIES	SO <sub>2</sub>	NO <sub>2</sub>	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE	Yesterday
Ahmedabad	101	.80	.20	.237	.200	■	In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Siliguri, West Bengal, recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 342, indicating a severe level of pollution. In contrast, Mahhar, Madhya Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 47
Bengaluru	14	.31	.60	.67	.87	■	
Chennai	06	.28	.29	.89	.....	■	
Delhi	37	.79	.54	352	360	■	
Hyderabad	.....	113	105	143	128	■	
Kolkata	29	.77	.25	292	266	■	
Lucknow	12	.88	.40	302	.....	■	
Mumbai	19	.88	.36	247	312	■	
Pune	81	.27	.84	130	107	■	
Visakhapatnam	09	.47	.44	.75	.89	■	

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

## Use biodegradable grow bags, nurseries told

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI**

Polythene grow bags used to plant saplings in nurseries will no longer be allowed in government afforestation projects. The Forest Advisory Committee (FAC), an apex body that decides on permitting the felling of trees in forests for industrial activities, recommended that "...State governments/ Union Territory administrations should ensure that the cost model prepared for CA /Penal CA shall incorporate the cost of alternative biodegradable bags in place of po-

lythene bags." This was decided at an FAC meeting on January 20.

CA refers to compensatory afforestation whereby industries must make good the forest loss by acquiring alternative land and paying the State forest department for planting trees.

The Centre, in 2016, banned plastic bags having a thickness less than 50 microns, under the revised Plastic Waste Management Rules. Several States have announced bans on polythene bags as well as single use plastics.

## 'District judge postings only via promotion'

**LEGAL CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court on Wednesday held that subordinate judicial officers cannot apply or compete for direct appointment as district judge even if they have previous experience of seven years as an advocate. The only way to become a District Judge is via promotion in accordance with the rules under Article 234 and proviso to Article 309, a Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra declared in an 83-page judgment.

## Children made 1 in 10 calls to abuse helpline

About 3 lakh cases booked last year

**JAGRITI CHANDRA NEW DELHI**

Of every 10 calls made to the emergency helpline 1098 to report abuse against children, one was from a survivor desperately seeking help, according to data compiled by the CHILDLINE India Foundation (CIF).

The data is for 2018-2019 from the CIF, the nodal agency appointed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to manage CHILDLINE helpline 1098 — a free, emergency phone service for children in need of help. It is also the largest network of agencies involved in protection of children.

Last year, the helpline received a total of 62 lakh calls, which were converted into three lakh cases. The largest number of phone calls were made to seek intervention for abuse cases, which were at 53,696 or 17% of the total cases. This category of complaints was followed by those pertaining to child labour (13%), education (12%), runaways (11%) and missing children (11%), according to the details exclusively provided to *The Hindu*.

Call register

Details provided by the CHILDLINE India Foundation on the helpline calls

- Phone calls: **62,58,000**
- Cases: **2,99,000**
- Abuse cases: **53,696**
- Abuse cases reported by children: **6,278**
- Sexual abuse: **7,684**

From the total 53,696 calls made regarding abuse against children, 6,278 calls were made by survivors seeking urgent intervention.

An analyses of the nature of abuse children suffered shows that 37% of the complaints were about child marriage, 27% about physical abuse and 13% regarding sexual abuse. The remaining 23% constituted emotional, corporal, domestic and cyber abuse.

CHILDLINE has also collated data to examine the profile of abusers. The analyses show that 35% of the total 8,000 cases of sexual abuse were committed by neighbours, 25% by strangers and 11% by family members.