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NEARBY



Cabinet approves Bill to regulate surrogacy

NEW DELHI
The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2020, allowing a "willing" woman to be a surrogate mother and proposing that the Bill would benefit widows and divorced women besides infertile Indian couples. The Cabinet approved the Bill after incorporating the recommendations of a Rajya Sabha Select Committee.

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Set my mother free, Iltija Mufti urges SC

NEW DELHI
The government dossier justifies detaining former J&K Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti under the Public Safety Act on grounds such as she was "scheming, hard-headed and a daddy's girl" with a "short-lived marriage", Iltija Mufti, her daughter, informed the Supreme Court on Wednesday. In a habeas corpus petition, Ms. Iltija sought a direction to the J&K police to produce her mother in the SC and set her at liberty.

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Death toll rises to 27 in Delhi violence

14 more succumb to injuries on Wednesday; NSA Ajit Doval, CM Arvind Kejriwal visit disturbed areas

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The death toll in Delhi's worst-ever communal violence since 1984 rose to 27, with 14 more persons succumbing to injuries sustained in clashes that began over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act on Sunday evening.

After four days, both the Centre and the Delhi government swung into action, with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal going to the disturbed parts of the city on Wednesday to rebuild confidence among people.

In a walkabout shown live on television, Mr. Doval spoke to residents, some of whom posed tough questions. A bearded man could be heard telling him: "Muslims are being killed wherever their numbers are few." "The situation is under control and people are satisfied. We have confidence in law enforcement agencies. The police are doing their job and are alert," Mr. Doval said, suggesting that the demand for calling out the Army was not under consideration.

PM's appeal
Minutes after Congress president Sonia Gandhi demanded the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appealed for calm



Restoring order: Paramilitary personnel conducting a flag march at Chand Bagh in Delhi on Wednesday. • SANDEEP SAXENA

and normalcy to be restored at the earliest. These were his first public comments on the violence since Sunday.

Addressing the Assembly, Mr. Kejriwal, who has come under fire for not reaching out to the people, said, "This was not done by Delhi's common people. It was done by people from outside, political and anti-social elements. Because of the actions of these people, some areas of Delhi are burning."

"We are hearing that it is a Hindu-Muslim fight. Hindus and Muslims are not fighting in Delhi," he said.

The Chief Minister then read out the names of those who have died in the violence in northeast Delhi and said both Hindus and Muslims had died.

Fewer incidents
Though Wednesday witnessed fewer incidents than the previous three days, reporters saw fresh cases of the wounded and dead being brought to Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) Hospital.

Delhi police PRO M.S. Randhawa said a total of 18 FIRs had been registered and 106 people arrested for

indulging in the violence and killings.

"We have obtained CCTV footage of miscreants to identify them and are using drones to check rooftops. We will take action against the building owners if stones are found on the rooftops. On Wednesday, we conducted route marches, and calls to police control rooms were monitored by senior police officers," Mr. Randhawa said.

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Shah should resign: Sonia

Congress president Sonia Gandhi held Union Home Minister Amit Shah responsible for the violence in Delhi, and demanded his immediate resignation. She said the events since last Sunday had a "history, design and pattern". Ms. Gandhi held Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal "equally responsible" for not reaching out to the people.

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'Timely action by Delhi police could have saved lives'

SC judge slams 'lack of professionalism'

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Lives could have been saved and the spiral of communal mob violence stopped had the Delhi police acted in time to halt people from making inflammatory remarks, Supreme Court judge K.M. Joseph remarked on Wednesday.

When Solicitor General Tushar Mehta tried to hush the judge lest his oral remarks "demoralise the police" during these tense times, Justice Joseph said, "I will talk! I will talk because of my loyalty to this institution."

Both Justices S.K. Kaul and Joseph told Mr. Mehta there was no harm in hearing them out first.

'Act according to law'

"Lack of professionalism of the police is the main problem here. If you had not allowed people to get away after inflammatory remarks, all this would not have happened. If you act the way law requires to act, you will see the difference," Justice Joseph observed orally.

"One of my constables has died. My DCP is injured. He is on ventilator. Let us not demoralise the police by saying anything now. We

'Decide on FIRs for hate speech'

The Delhi High Court asked the police to take a "conscious decision" on registering FIRs against the three BJP leaders accused of making hate speeches. The Bench of Justices S. Muralidhar and Talwant Singh observed that the city could not be a witness to another 1984-like riots. The court asked the police to communicate its decision by Thursday.

don't know what the situation on the ground is," Mr. Mehta kept repeating.

"This will happen if you allow people to get away. Unless you get the police to act, there will be no difference. Look at how police acts in the U.K. Do they require somebody's nod? If somebody makes an inflammatory remark, police swings into action immediately," Justice Joseph responded.

Justice Kaul said what had happened (riots) in the past few days was "unfortunate".

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24 dead as bus falls into river in Rajasthan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
JAIPUR

At least 24 persons were killed and five sustained injuries when a private bus fell into the Mej river from an 80-foot bridge in Rajasthan's Bundi district on Wednesday. The deceased include 10 women and three children. The victims were members of a marriage party carrying mayra (gifts) for the bride.

The accident occurred near Pappi village, 75 km from Bundi district headquarters, when the driver lost control of the vehicle while traversing the bridge. The bridge had no walls or railings. The bus submerged in the waters, making rescue difficult for the State Disaster Response Force team.

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HC to the rescue of riot victims

Police told to provide necessary assistance, security

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday issued a series of directions to the Delhi police, the State government and other agencies for providing all necessary assistance to those affected by the violence in northeast Delhi.

The court said the highest constitutional functionaries who move with 'Z' category security should reach out to the affected people to give them confidence that the law was functioning.

The directions were given on a petition seeking police protection for the safe passage of the injured persons from AI Hind Hospital to other nearest hospitals.

Midnight hearing

The petition was first taken up during an urgent midnight hearing at the residence of Justice S. Muralid-



Fire services personnel dousing the flames at a scrap market in Gokulpuri. • SANDEEP SAXENA

har, when the court ordered the police to ensure safe passage to the victims.

Later on Wednesday, the court directed the police to provide information and safe passage to the families of the deceased and make security arrangements to ensure that burials and cremations were carried out with dignity.

When informed that the victims at AI Hind Hospital

had been shifted, the court commended the police for a prompt response.

The court directed that Special Commissioner of Police Pravir Ranjan would ensure adequate number of help desks and persons assigned to handling distress calls. The police were also told to explore the possibility of taking help from the civil defence volunteers and Home Guard personnel.

The police had been directed to arrange for safe passage to fire tenders and ambulances. The Health Secretary and the Fire Services Director had also been given necessary orders. The State government had been told to provide shelter and basic amenities, including medicines, to the displaced. If necessary, rehabilitation centres had to be set up.

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In Rakhigarhi, anxiety trumps history

Villagers fear loss of land, as Centre moves to turn Harappan site into tourist hub

DAMINI NATH
RAKHIGARHI

Looking at the mounds at the Harappan site of Rakhigarhi, where locals dry cow dung cakes and dump garbage, there is little to show the thousands of years of history beneath. But the Centre is moving ahead with its plan to develop the site as a tourist hub and set up a museum, and this has got residents in two villages in Haryana's Hisar district — Rakhi Khas and Rakhi Shahpur — known as Rakhigarhi worried.

After Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the government's plan to fund five on-site museums, including the under-construction museum initiated by the Haryana government at Rakhigarhi, in her Budget speech on February 1, there is excitement and



A look into the past: Local residents near a mound at the Harappan site of Rakhigarhi in Haryana. • SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

concern here. The Archaeological Survey of India has started planning the project. Union Tourism and Culture Minister Prahlad Singh Patel visited the site on Sunday and spoke to villagers about their concerns.

"If Dholavira changed history, Rakhigarhi is changing history for the second time. People in Delhi will have to visit Rakhigarhi," Mr. Patel

said, adding that the government would work with the villagers to address their concerns as the tourist hub is formed.

A former sarpanch, or local head, Dinesh, told the Minister, "We are happy that there will be work in our villages, but we are scared about what will happen to us. Already, people are anxious about the rehabilita-

tion of homes around mound number four and five."

The ASI has been able to get under its control just 83.5 acres of the 350-hectare site that spans 11 mounds, after first taking over the site in 1996, due to encroachments and pending court cases, said ASI Chandigarh Circle Superintending Archaeologist Zulfeqar Ali. The site is under ASI protection.

"If encroachments are removed, the cow dung on the mounds will also shift," he said, adding that about 5% of the site had been excavated so far by the ASI and Deccan College, Pune. Among the findings, which indicate both early and mature Harappan phases, were a 4,600-year-old female skeleton, fortification and bricks.

SHIFT TO FLATS ▶ PAGE 9

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