



Andhra Cabinet decides to keep NPR process 'in abeyance'

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BJP trying to destabilise Madhya Pradesh govt., says Kamal Nath

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Joe Biden seizes momentum with Super Tuesday surge

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India takes on England for a spot in the final of the Women's T20 World Cup

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NEARBY
Social media makes a comeback to Valley

Nearly 65 lakh mobile internet users in Kashmir were able to use social media platforms after seven months on Wednesday. The order issued by the government on Wednesday on Internet connectivity is, however, silent on whether the ban imposed on social media on January 25 has been withdrawn or not.

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Sengar convicted in two other cases

A trial court on Wednesday convicted seven persons, including expelled BJP leader Kuldeep Singh Sengar who was earlier handed a life term for raping a minor in Unnao, in two other cases linked to her father. Four other accused were acquitted. Sengar was found guilty of culpable homicide not amounting to murder in the death of the victim's father. The quantum of punishment will be announced on March 12.

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COVID-19 cases rise to 29 in India

Paytm employee tests positive in Gurugram; all international passengers to be screened

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Fifteen Italian tourists, including the wife of an already infected person, and eight Indians tested positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday, taking the total number of cases in the country to 29. Two cases with a high viral load were also detected in Telangana.

A Paytm employee tested positive in Gurugram. The company said in a statement that the person had a travel history to Italy. The Health Ministry also confirmed the case, which came to light in the evening.

"As a precautionary measure, we have suggested that his team members get health tests done immediately. Our Noida and Gurgaon [Gurugram] offices will be shut for two days. We have also advised all our colleagues to work from home for a couple of days, while we get our offices sanitised. However, there will not be any impact on our daily operations and Paytm services will continue as usual," the company said.

Giving details of the cases, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said six family members of a 45-year-old Delhi patient had tested positive.

The infection broke out in China's Wuhan city in December and has spread to over 60 countries, killing more than 3,000 and infecting over 90,000.



Fighting the virus: A Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation employee spraying disinfectant inside a bus in Bengaluru on Wednesday. ■ K. MURALI KUMAR

"India, with a significant rise in COVID-19 cases, will start universal screening at all international airports and seaports through the use of thermal imagery equipment as well as mandatory filling of declaration forms of places visited by tourists and travellers returning from abroad. All passengers of international flights will now have to undergo screening, and not just from the 12 countries listed earlier," he said.

'Cluster approach'

The Minister said the government would adopt a cluster approach to contain the virus. "Health authorities will check and sensitise every

household within a 3-km radius of the house of the infected person," he said. "Over 5,89,000 people have been screened at airports in two months, over 10 lakh screened on borders with Nepal and around 27,000 are under community surveillance," he said.

Mr. Vardhan said that of his relatives in Agra whom he recently visited, and they all are being treated at Safdarjung Hospital. The 24-year-old man from Hyderabad has also tested positive, and has been isolated. Besides, 15 members of a tourist group from Italy and their Indian driver have been

found infected with the virus.

"While an Italian man and his wife are being treated at Jaipur's SMS Hospital, the other Italians who have tested positive are being treated at designated hospitals and some others are in preventive isolation at a different location. The Italian tourists wanted to go back to their country after the first person in their group tested positive in Jaipur, but the authorities advised them to stay in India. Three persons, infected earlier in Kerala, have already been discharged," he said.

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IRAN TOLL UP TO 92 ► PAGE 14

President, PM to skip Holi

In the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak, President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi said they would not attend any gathering to mark Holi (March 10). Mr. Kovind wrote on Twitter: "With alertness and safeguards, we all can help contain the outbreak of COVID-19 Novel Coronavirus. In a precautionary measure, the Rashtrapati Bhavan will not hold the traditional Holi gatherings." ► PAGE 9

Scare grips Telangana

A scare gripped Telangana on Wednesday as the attention of the entire State was on the COVID-19 status of two persons, including a software employee, whose samples were tested at the Gandhi Hospital. Health Minister Eatala Rajender said two samples had been sent to the National Institute of Virology, Pune, for retesting. The samples were among the 47 tested at ICMR's laboratory at Gandhi Hospital. ► PAGE 8



Towards normalcy: A peace meeting in progress at Garhi Mendu village that suffered during the riots. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

SC asks HC to list Delhi riots cases on March 6

Delay in hearing pleas 'unjustified'

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it was "unjustified" on the part of the Delhi High Court to delay hearing the pleas for arrest and prosecution of leaders who instigated the communal rampage in the national capital and directed the High Court to list the petitions on Friday (March 6).

Less than a week ago, the HC adjourned to April 13 the hearing of petitions seeking immediate registration of FIRs against those who egged mobs on with their hate speeches. It had seemed to agree with the government that the "atmosphere was not conducive" for action.

A Bench, led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde, said April 13 was too far away. It requested Delhi HC Chief Justice D.N. Patel to decide the petitions "as

expeditiously as possible". With this, the top court signed off the case, saying it did not want to "assume jurisdiction" over the petitions when the HC was already on the job.

In parting, the CJI wished the HC to explore the possibility of finding a "peaceful resolution" to pleas made by victims to prosecute the instigators. He even suggested that victims, represented by senior advocate Colin Gonsalves, put up names of their leaders before the HC in order to initiate a peace parley with the other side and the ruling BJP.

This is when victims had made specific allegations against BJP leaders Kapil Mishra, Anurag Thakur, Parvesh Verma and Abhay Verma of instigating violence. Mr. Thakur is a Minister of State for Finance.

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President rejects plea of Nirbhaya convict

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

President Ram Nath Kovind on Wednesday rejected the mercy petition of Pawan Gupta, one of the four men on death row in the 2012 Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case.

Gupta was the last to file the mercy plea. The petitions of the other three convicts had been rejected earlier by the President. Later, the Delhi government moved a city court seeking a fresh date for the execution of the four convicts.

According to the Delhi Prison Rules, a 14-day period has to be given to a death row convict after the dismissal of a clemency plea and before the prisoner can be hanged. All the four men are to be hanged together.

The Delhi government told Additional Sessions Judge Dharmendra Rana that "all legal remedies of the convicts have been exhausted". The judge then directed the convicts to file their response by Thursday even as the lawyer for the prosecution said no notice was required. The court said principles of natural justice are part of Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) of the Constitution.

The hanging of Mukesh Kumar Singh, 32, Vinay Sharma, 26, Akshay Singh, 31, and Gupta, 25, was deferred for the third time in six weeks on Monday.

Violence was one-sided, says Delhi minorities panel

'Some shops were burnt, others were left untouched'

SHINJINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI

The Delhi Minorities Commission, in an assessment report of the Delhi riots, has concluded that the violence was "one-sided, well-planned" with support from local people and most damage was done to shops and houses belonging to the minority community.

The compensation announced by the Delhi government was inadequate for the extent of damage, it said.

"We found extensive damage to Muslim houses, shops and workshops everywhere we went. We found that people were visiting their damaged houses for the first time since they fled on February 24-25, but since the houses and shops were badly damaged and debris lying, there was no question that they will be able to start living there any time soon," it said.

In the report, the panel, which included Chairman of the Commission Zafarul-Islam Khan, highlighted instances such as those in Bhanjapura, where "Muslim-owned shops like a travel agency and motorcycle showroom were looted and torched, while Hindu-owned shops were left untouched".

The report quoted residents of Gali number 5 in Khajoori Khas claiming that the violence on February 23 began "shortly after the threat and ultimatum" by BJP



A resident checking his damaged car in the parking at Shiv Vihar after days of violence. ■ FILE PHOTO

leader Kapil Mishra. "In this 'gali', we found the house of BSF jawan Mohammad Anis which was badly damaged," the panel said.

'Looting and burning'

At Yamuna Vihar, however, the report stated that shops and houses belonging to both communities were affected. "On one side of the road are Muslim houses and shops while on the other side are Hindu houses and shops. Both areas were affected by looting and burning. At a charred petrol pump, its owner Mahinder Aggrawal claimed that 30 vehicles were torched," it stated.

The panel also referred to testimonies of Raj Kumar, a driver with Rajdhani School that was burnt. "Mr. Kumar

told us that some 500 persons barged into his school around 6.30 p.m. on February 24. They wore helmets and hid their faces. They remained there for the next 24 hours and went away next evening after the arrival of police force in the area. They were young people who had arms and giant catapults, which they used to throw petrol bombs from the school rooftops," the report stated.

Mr. Khan said a fact-finding committee, comprising journalists, human rights activists and civil society members, would be formed.

"We have said the violence was one-sided as that's what we felt from what people told us. They [people] said that it was not possible for outsiders to pinpoint shops and houses owned by Muslims. So there had to be insiders who were helping the outsiders," Mr. Khan said.

The commission has urged Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to double the compensation, Mr. Khan said. "We have also asked the government to fix the compensation depending on the damage caused. For example, a person whose garage has been burnt cannot sustain with the compensation announced by the government. The damage caused might be more" he added.

MORE REPORTS ON ► PAGES 2,3, 4 & 13

SC frees trade in cryptocurrencies, annuls RBI curbs

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday set aside an April 6, 2018, circular of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) that prohibited banks and entities regulated by it from providing services in relation to vir-

tual currencies (VCs). "Till date, RBI has not come out with a stand that any of the entities regulated by it namely, nationalised banks/scheduled commercial banks/cooperative banks/NBFCs, have suffered any loss or adverse effect di-

rectly or indirectly, on account of VC exchanges," a Bench comprising Justices Rohinton Nariman, Aniruddha Bose and V. Ramasubramanian observed in a 180-page judgment.

Justice Ramasubramanian, who authored the rul-

ing, found the RBI circular "disproportionate" with an otherwise consistent stand taken by the central bank that VCs were not prohibited in the country.

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