



India no longer a showcase of liberal democracy: Manmohan
Exclusive on Editorial Page



Fugitive diamondaire Nirav Modi's assets sale garners ₹53 cr. for ED
page 13



After Super Tuesday rout, Elizabeth Warren ends presidential bid
page 14



India enters final after semifinal washout against England
page 18

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NEARBY



Bimal Julka to be sworn in as CIC today

NEW DELHI
Bimal Julka will be sworn in as Chief Information Commissioner by President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday, more than two weeks after he was selected by a committee chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The appointment of Sanjay Kothari as Chief Vigilance Commissioner, which was decided by the panel at the same meeting on February 18, is yet to be notified.

NEWS PAGE 13

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FRIDAY REVIEW PAGE 4

SC to step in if Nirbhaya convicts are not hanged on March 20

It will decide govt. appeal for nod to hang them separately

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday made it clear that any delay in the execution of the death sentence of the four Nirbhaya gang-rape case convicts on March 20 will see the court itself step in on March 23 to decide the government's appeal for permission to separately hang them.

The assurance from a three-judge Bench, led by Justice R. Banumathi, came while it was addressing the government's apprehension that chances were high that one or other of the convicts might turn up in court before March 20 with a new plea and further delay the execution.

'No astrologer'
"I am no astrologer... but they [the convicts] will find something to delay the



Nearing justice: Asha Devi, mother of the victim, coming out after the hearing on Thursday. •BIBEK CHETTRI

March 20 execution... I am not in a hurry to execute them, but the system is suffering when the punishment keeps getting postponed. The convicts have been taking the system for a ride... Even now, it has been over two years since their review petitions were dismissed by the Supreme Court," Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta submitted.

At this juncture, Justice Banumathi turned to the convicts' lawyers to come prepared on March 23 as the court would not entertain any request for adjournment.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

PM's visit to Brussels put off as COVID-19 cases rise to 30

Ghaziabad man tests positive; States asked to form rapid response teams

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Owing to the recent global COVID-19 outbreak, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Brussels has been rescheduled, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday. This development came as India reported another confirmed novel coronavirus case from Ghaziabad, taking the total to 30.

To prevent the spread of the virus, the Delhi government has now ordered the immediate closure of primary schools in the capital till March 31. "All Delhi government, aided, private and schools run by civic bodies will remain shut," said Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia. Delhi has also suspended biometric attendance.

Responding to questions



Preventive measure: NGO members distributing protective masks in Hyderabad on Thursday. •NAGARA GOPAL

about the India-EU summit, MEA spokesperson Raveesh Kumar told journalists that it was decided that delegates should not travel to each other's countries.

Mr. Kumar said the summit would be rescheduled to a mutually convenient date,

which is yet to be decided. The summit was expected to take place at the EU office in Brussels on March 13. On Wednesday, 10 new cases of coronavirus were reported from Brussels, taking the total number of cases in Belgium to 23.

Mr. Kumar also said no case of any Indian being affected by the virus had emerged in Iran, and embassies across the world were on the job to help Indians.

Steps suggested

The Union Health Ministry on Thursday confirmed that India had a total number of 30 positive cases of COVID-19. "A man from Ghaziabad, with recent travel history to Iran, has tested positive for the virus, taking the total number to 30. We have now asked the States to form rapid response teams at district, block and village levels to contain the spread," said a release by the Health Ministry.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12
RAJYA SABHA ERUPTS ON COW URINE CLAIMS PAGE 9

EPFO lowers interest rate to 8.5% for 2019-2020

Employees set to get 0.15% less interest

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Salaried employees are set to get 0.15% less in interest on Provident Fund deposits for 2019-2020, with the Central Board of Trustees of the Employees' Provident Fund on Thursday reducing the interest rate from 8.65% to 8.5%.

At the meeting of the Board, chaired by Minister for Labour and Employment Santosh Kumar Gangwar, the "Central Board recommended crediting of 8.5% annual rate of interest on the EPF accumulations in the EPF members' ac-

counts for 2019-20," the Ministry said.

Relief for pensioners

The Board also ratified the restoration of normal pension after 15 years from the date of commutation – a move that will benefit about 6.3 lakh pensioners who had opted for commutation on or before September 25, 2008, the statement said.

It also approved a proposal to empanel the Jamuna and Kashmir Bank as one of the banks for the collection of EPF dues in J&K.

Standing in awe



Bidding adieu: Advocates at the farewell of Justice S. Muralidhar (not in picture) at the Delhi High Court on Thursday. •PTI (REPORT ON PAGE 3)

Suspended AAP councillor denied bail, arrested in Delhi

He was wanted in murder of IB staffer during recent riots

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Suspended Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor Tahir Hussain was arrested by the Delhi police on Thursday in connection with the murder of Intelligence Bureau staffer Ankit Sharma in northeast Delhi during the recent riots.

Hussain, who was absconding, had applied for anticipatory bail at the Karkardooma court, and a decision on his plea was to be announced by the magistrate on Thursday. In between, he reached the Rouse Avenue



Tahir Hussain

court to surrender and moved an application, saying he was facing threats. The court rejected the application, saying the matter did not fall under its jurisdiction,

said a police officer. Hussain was taken into custody from the Rouse Avenue court premises and was taken to the Sunlight police station for further investigation, the officer said.

The police said interrogation would focus on the events of February 23 to 25. In his statement after he was accused of inciting violence, Hussain said his house was attacked by a group and he was the one who informed the police about the violence.

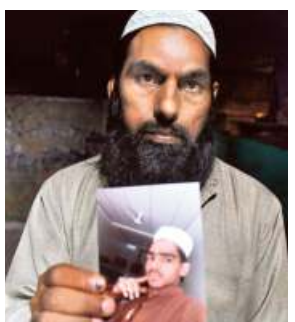
CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

A father's long wait: 13 days and counting

Hujefa, 18, missing since he stepped out for tuition class on February 22

NIKHIL M BABU
NEW DELHI

A 42-year-old man has been doing the rounds of city hospitals hoping against hope. Mohammad Haroon has visited mortuaries of three hospitals and seen bodies of more than 25 victims, but there's no news on his 18-year-old son, Hujefa, missing since February 22. The death toll from the communal violence in north-east Delhi continued its upward march, touching 53 on Thursday.



Mohammad Haroon showing the photograph of his missing son. •SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

'Police not helping'

Fishing out a brown envelope from his pocket in which he has kept a photo of his son, Mr. Haroon, an Urdu teacher,

said, "There is a high chance that he might have got caught in the riots. Police are not doing anything. Now everything is in god's hands."

The father of four children

said his wife has been distraught since the day Hujefa went missing. "Police are not even tracing his mobile number. Please help us," he said.

Around 10 a.m. on Saturday, February 22, Hujefa, sporting a brown salwar kameez, left for a tuition class about 500 metres from their Mustafabad home. The family has not heard from him since and his cell phone is switched off.

"He said he would attend a religious event in Old Delhi after tuition, but we do not know what happened," Mr. Haroon said.

As the situation calmed down a little, on February 29, Mr. Haroon went to Guru Teg

Bahadur Hospital. "They had said that there was a body that could be my son's. I went inside the mortuary to check, but it was not him," he said.

On March 1, he went to the police station and to RML Hospital and LNJP Hospital the next day.

While the Delhi High Court on Thursday directed the police to publish on its website details and photographs of all unidentified victims brought to government hospital mortuaries, Mr. Haroon is still clutching at straws, leaving for Uttar Pradesh to meet a tantric. "I don't know what to do," he said.

MORE REPORTS ON PAGES 2 & 3

LS suspends 7 Cong. MPs for rest of session

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Thursday suspended seven Congress members for the remaining period of the Budget session for "gross misconduct and utter disregard" for House rules after Opposition MPs snatched papers from the Speaker's table.

Meenakshi Lekhi, who was in the chair, named Gaurav Gogoi, T.N. Prathapan, Dean Kuriaakose, Manicka Tagore, Rajmohan Unnithan, Benny Behanan and Gurjeet Singh Aujla.

DETAILS ON PAGE 12

Yes Bank under moratorium till April 3

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

Private sector lender Yes Bank has been placed under moratorium till April 3 by the government after severe deterioration of its financial

position. The Reserve Bank of India has superseded the board of the bank and has appointed Prashant Kumar, deputy managing director and chief financial officer of the State Bank of India, as

the administrator. Deposit withdrawals have been capped at ₹50,000, but exceptions will be made for depositors who need money for unavoidable emergency.

FULL REPORT ON PAGE 15

NPR data useful for welfare schemes, says Home Ministry

It tells parliamentary panel that date and place of birth of parents will complete data for all households

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has informed a parliamentary panel that it proposes to collect details on additional questions such as "date and place of birth of parents" in the National Population Register (NPR) to "facilitate back-end data processing and making the data items of date and place of birth complete for all household[s]".

The Ministry said there was a need to update the NPR to "incorporate the changes due to birth, death and migration". "Aadhaar is individual data, whereas NPR contains family-wise data," it said.



Mandated by law: People waiting to enrol their biometric details for the National Population Register, 2013. •FILE PHOTO

"Various welfare schemes of the State and Central governments are generally family-based, for which NPR data may be used," it said.

Though the final NPR form for 2020 has not been made public, on February 18, Ministry officials informed the panel that "during the update of NPR 2020,

it is proposed to collect data on some additional items like place of last residence, mother tongue, Aadhaar number (voluntary), mobile number, passport (Indian passport holder), voter ID card, driving licence number, date and place of birth of father and mother".

The submission was made in response to a question by parliamentary committee members on the new questions in the form.

West Bengal, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Puducherry, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Rajasthan, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Delhi have de-

mandated that either the NPR be scrapped or the update be done using the 2010 form.

The Centre has proposed that the next phase of NPR will be conducted along with the house listing and house census exercise between April and September.

Ministry officials said, "The date and place of birth of parents were collected in NPR 2010 as well for all parents who were enumerated within the household. For parents living elsewhere or expired at the time of enumeration, only the names were collected..."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

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