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### NEARBY



#### U.P. Minister tells officers to assess crop damage

LUCKNOW  
Uttar Pradesh Agriculture Minister Surya Pratap Shahi on Saturday directed officials to undertake a survey to ascertain the extent of losses in crops due to the recent hailstorm in the State. Instructions have also been given to insurance companies to ascertain the extent of loss, and pay for the damages caused to farmers.

**NORTH** ▶ PAGE 5

#### Denial of starvation deaths sparks anger

KOLKATA  
The JMM-Congress government, headed by Hemant Soren, has denied any starvation death in the State under BJP rule in the past five years. The denial triggered a strong reaction from right-to-food activists and prompted questions on the coalition's charge about irregularities in the PDS.

**NEWS** ▶ PAGE 13

### SRIRAM'S IAS

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**MAGAZINE** ▶ 12 PAGES  
**CLASSIFIEDS** ▶ PAGES 6 & 7

## COVID-19 cases jump to 34

### One case confirmed from Tamil Nadu and two from Ladakh

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

Three more cases of COVID-19 were confirmed on Saturday – two from Ladakh and one from Tamil Nadu – taking the total number of cases in the country to 34.

"Two cases have been reported from Ladakh with travel history to Iran while one case has come in from Tamil Nadu with travel history to Oman. All the cases are stable," said a Union Health Ministry release.

The Tamil Nadu patient, a 45-year-old man from Kancheepuram district, with a



**Safety cover:** Many people opted for masks in New Delhi on Saturday over COVID-19 fears. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

history of travel to Muscat in Oman, has been admitted to the isolation ward at the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital in Chennai.

Senior State health officials said the man was advised home quarantine after

patient might have come into contact with. The patient has become asymptomatic, according to Health Secretary Beela Rajesh.

The Union Health Ministry added that in the case of the two American nationals found positive in Bhutan with a travel history of various places in India, more than 150 of their contacts had been put under surveillance.

Thirty-one cases are being treated in hospitals and are stable, a senior health official said.

"In addition, 108 samples have been received from Iran on Saturday morning," the Health Ministry said.

**CONTINUED ON** ▶ PAGE 10  
**ASSAM SANITISES ROUTE** ▶ PAGE 9  
**OVER 1,00,000 CASES** ▶ PAGE 13

## Ban on two Malayalam channels lifted

### Government supports freedom of the press, says I&B Minister Javadekar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry on Saturday withdrew the 48-hour ban on two Malayalam news channels after it was imposed late on Friday, with I&B Minister Prakash Javadekar saying he would look into the matter and take "essential steps" if any wrong doing was found.

The channels, Asianet



Prakash Javadekar

News and Media One, were accused of "siding with one community", alleging inac-

tion by the Delhi police and the Union Home Ministry, and being critical of the RSS in their coverage of last month's riots in Delhi.

**'We fought Emergency'**  
"We immediately found out what actually happened and, therefore, we immediately restored the channels. One of the channel owners talked to me. By night his channel, Asianet,

was on and Media One is also on from today morning," Mr. Javadekar told reporters in Pune.

For his government, press freedom is absolutely essential in a democracy, Mr. Javadekar said.

"We fought the Emergency, we went to jail to remove clamps on press freedom," he said.

**CONTINUED ON** ▶ PAGE 10

## A shot at history

India will have the opportunity to win its first women's T20 World Cup when it takes on Australia in the title clash in front of an expected sellout crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday. A look at how the sides have fared against each other and in the tournament so far:

### H2H: India vs Australia in T20Is

OVERALL	India	Australia
	6	13

Last six matches:	India	Australia
	3	3

In T20 World Cups:	India	Australia
	2	2

### TOP PERFORMERS

**Australia: Batting:** Beth Mooney: 181 runs (5 innings). **Bowling:** Megan Schutt 9 wickets (5 matches).

**India: Batting:** Shafali Verma: 161 runs (4 innings). **Bowling:** Poonam Yadav 9 wickets (4 matches).



**We are going to have 90,000 in the stadium and it's a great feeling. We just need to enjoy the moment because it's a big moment for all of us.** **HARMANPREET KAUR, INDIA SKIPPER**

**This build-up to the game is something I've not experienced before. When I saw it was the MCG and they were hoping for a big crowd, I just wanted to be involved.** **MEG LANNING, AUSTRALIA CAPTAIN**

**Final: India vs Australia, Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), 12.30 p.m. IST | Live on Star Sports 1 & 2 (SD & HD)**  
**REPORT ON PAGE 18**

## ECI unveils road map for revamp

### E-voter cards are among the 25 draft recommendations

DAMINI NATH  
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India (ECI) is considering new voting methods, capping the campaign expenditure of political parties, on-line registration of new voters at 17 years and ending social media campaigning 48 hours before polling among the recommendations proposed by working groups it set up in June 2019.

The nine working groups, constituted after the Lok Sabha election and comprising ECI officials and State Chief Electoral Officers, had presented their draft recommendations on February 18.

On Saturday, the ECI published 25 of the main recommendations and invited comments or suggestions from the public till March 31 on the email address: [coordination@eci.gov.in](mailto:coordination@eci.gov.in)

"Working groups collated inputs [and] analysed these inputs, and suggested pathways for the future to add value to the electoral process in the country," the ECI said in the letter inviting suggestions.

Among the proposals is to issue electronic versions of the voter ID card – EPIC – for convenience of voters.

**CONTINUED ON** ▶ PAGE 10

### Perfect setting



Artists performing a folk dance during the inauguration of Khelo India Winter Games in Gulmarg on Saturday. It's the first mega sports event to be held in the Valley since the Centre revoked J&K's special status last August. ■ NISSAR AHMAD

## Uddhav offers donation of ₹1 crore for Ram temple

### I have parted ways with the BJP, not Hindutva, he says

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
LUCKNOW

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday offered ₹1 crore for the construction of a Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

The amount would not be on behalf of the Maharashtra government or his party, Shiv Sena, but a personal contribution towards the Trust in the capacity of "a Bhakt", he said.

At a press conference in Ayodhya, Mr. Thackeray said he might have parted ways with the BJP, but that did not mean a departure from Hindutva. "Hindutva and BJP are separate. The meaning of Hindutva is not BJP."

He said just as the Ram Mandir would be built brick-



**Temple run:** Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray addressing a press conference in Ayodhya on Saturday. ■ PTI

by-brick, his ₹1 crore would be a small contribution towards building it.

**'Small contribution'**  
"Whenever I come to Ayodhya or think about the Ram Mandir, I recall the days when my father Balasaheb [Bal Thackeray] had provided leadership... and when people from villages across Maharashtra brought with

them bricks with Sriram engraved on them," he said.

He requested members of the Ram Temple Trust to accept "this small contribution of us Ram bhakts".

Mr. Thackeray requested Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to grant land to the Maharashtra government to construct a Maharashtra Bhavan in Ayodhya for pilgrims coming from the State.

## HC to hear 'name & shame' PIL today

OMAR RASHID  
LUCKNOW

The Allahabad High Court has taken suo motu notice of the Lucknow administration's controversial decision to "name and shame" persons accused in the violence during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act by putting up their hearings all over the city.

A Division Bench of Chief Justice Govind Mathur and Justice Ramesh Sinha will hear the matter in the form of a Public Interest Litigation on Sunday, March 8, as per the court list.

The police put up several hoardings across Lucknow identifying those accused of violence during the anti-CAA protests in December last, making those named fear for their safety.

## Survivors visit ransacked houses under police protection

### Delhi government officials accompany riot-affected people to their houses for verification of losses

STAFF REPORTER  
NEW DELHI

On Saturday afternoon, inside the Idgah in Mustafabad, which has doubled up as the largest relief camp for families in riot-hit north-east Delhi, Haji Naim Malik, 47, made an announcement through a hand-held loudspeaker: "Those who have to go to Shiv Vihar for verification should assemble here. There is no need to worry. There is a vehicle and also police protection."

Vikas Anand, a senior IAS officer, was heard telling a group of women to wait for the vehicle that had been arranged to take the displaced people to Shiv Vihar. Mr.

Anand is one of the six IAS officers who have been leading the verification drive since Saturday morning in north-east Delhi.

The Delhi government has announced multiple compensations for people whose houses and shops were burnt, ransacked and looted in the communal violence in north-east Delhi.

It has already distributed compensation of ₹2.96 crore, according to official figures till Saturday. But with hundreds of people still living in relief camps, the government is finding it difficult to check their locked houses, which is delaying the distribution of



Security personnel manning an area hit by riots in north-east Delhi. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

compensation.

To speed up the process, Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia announced on Friday a two-day verification drive, headed by six senior IAS officers. From Saturday

the survivors reaches the area, a Sub-Divisional Magistrate goes with the family to the property for verification.

**'More confidence'**  
"Many were going back to the locality for the first time [after the riots]. This also helped us to show them that shops have reopened, people have started coming back. Now, they have more confidence to return," said SDM Pradeep Tayal, who was carrying out the verification drive in Shiv Vihar, one of the most affected areas.

The riot-hit families have to first fill up a form to claim compensation, which is followed by the verification.

"Today we opened and saw many buildings and did the assessment [of the damage]. This will speed up the process of giving compensation," the SDM said.

"The forms were filled by officials at people's houses, and also at help desks, relief camps and by NGOs and this led to duplication [of requests]. Now we are creating an authoritative database," the official said.

Officials said since morning more than 100 people from the camp were taken to the riot-affected areas for verification. But many requests are still pending.

**MORE REPORTS ON** ▶ PAGES 3 & 4

VIKAS VASUDEVA  
CHANDIGARH

The Punjab government on Saturday denied that training was being given to the field staff for the National Population Register (NPR) exercise in the State, saying there was no question of going against the Assembly resolution on the issue.

"The ongoing training is a routine exercise related to the conduct of housing census, scheduled to take place in Punjab in May-June, and had absolutely nothing to do with the NPR," said an official statement.

The statement added that Sanjay Kumar, Additional Chief Secretary (Local Go-

vernment), had given instructions to this effect to the Deputy Commissioners at a recent workshop. The DCs were asked to exclude the NPR training chapter from this exercise, it added.

The resolution passed by the Assembly in January had rejected the NPR. It stated: "Given the apprehensions about NRC and that the NPR is a prelude to the NRC designed to deprive a section of persons of citizenship of India and implement CAA, this House resolves that Central government should amend the forms-documentation associated with the NPR to allay such apprehension in the minds of the people."