

# **NEWS ALERT**

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## **LIST OF NEWSPAPERS COVERED**

**BUSINESS LINE**

**DECCAN HERALD**

**ECONOMIC TIMES**

**HINDU**

**HINDUSTAN TIMES**

**INDIAN EXPRESS**

**PIONEER**

**STATESMAN**

**TELEGRAPH**

**TIMES OF INDIA**

**TRIBUNE**



## **CONTENTS**

|                                |              |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>CHILD WELFARE</b>           | <b>6-7</b>   |
| <b>CLIMATE CHANGE</b>          | <b>8-9</b>   |
| <b>DEFENCE</b>                 | <b>9-10</b>  |
| <b>DISASTER MANAGEMENT</b>     | <b>11-13</b> |
| <b>E-COMMERCE</b>              | <b>14-16</b> |
| <b>ELECTION</b>                | <b>17-19</b> |
| <b>GST</b>                     | <b>20-22</b> |
| <b>HEALTH SERVICES</b>         | <b>23-25</b> |
| <b>HIGHER EDUCATION</b>        | <b>26-27</b> |
| <b>INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS</b> | <b>28-32</b> |

|                                             |              |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>JUDICIARY</b>                            | <b>33-34</b> |
| <b>MINORITIES</b>                           | <b>35-36</b> |
| <b>MINES</b>                                | <b>37-38</b> |
| <b>POLITICS &amp; GOVERNMENT- RAJASTHAN</b> | <b>39-40</b> |
| <b>TERRORISM</b>                            | <b>41-43</b> |
| <b>WILD LIFE</b>                            | <b>44-48</b> |

## **CHILD WELFARE**

HINDU, DEC 28, 2018

### **POCSO Act: Assault on boys punishable by death**

*Cabinet approves changes to POCSO Act to protect all children under 12*

The government on Friday approved amendments to the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, to bring punishments for sexual assaults on boys on a par with those against girls. These include the provision of death penalty when the child is under 12 years and when a penetrative sexual assault is committed by a relative.

The amendments approved by the Union Cabinet will now have to be passed by Parliament. An official of the Ministry of Women and Child Development said the government intends to introduce the amendment Bill in the Rajya Sabha.

The move will ensure that the Bill, once introduced even if not passed, will not lapse when the term of the present government comes to an end and the Lok Sabha is dissolved.

### **Kathua rape case**

Following the outrage over the gang rape of a minor girl in Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir, the government had brought an ordinance in April and followed it by passing a Bill in Parliament during the monsoon session to amend the Indian Penal Code. The changes included death penalty for gang rape of a girl under 12 years and 20 years in jail or death penalty for rape of a girl under 16 years.

Provisions were also added to provide imprisonment for the rest of one's natural life for gang rape of a girl under 16 years, while rape of a girl in the same age bracket would be punishable with jail of minimum 20 years upto life imprisonment.

### **Anomalies set right**

However, the absence of these changes to POCSO Act , 2012, which deals with sexual crimes against both girls and boys, meant that same offences committed against boys carried lighter punishments. Friday's changes will address these anomalies.

The Union Cabinet approved changes to Section 6 of the POCSO Act, which deals with punishments for aggravated penetrative sexual assault, enhancing the punishment of 10 years to life imprisonment and 20 years to imprisonment for remainder of a person's natural life or with death.

This category of offence includes assault on a child under the age of 12 years, gang rape, assault on a mentally or physically challenged child or one that is committed by a relative or a custodian of a child. According to National Crime Record Bureau data as many as 94.6% of total crimes under the POCSO Act as well as Section 376 are committed either by relatives or acquaintances.

The government has also amended the definition of aggravated penetrative sexual assault to include an offence that causes the death of a child. The minimum punishment for penetrative sexual assault has been increased from seven years in jail to 10 years.

# CLIMATE CHANGE

PIONEER, DEC 26, 2018

## **Climate change hits crops, farmers alike**

Climate change has hit agrarian Uttar Pradesh very hard and experts claim that crop yield in over a dozen districts across the state has been adversely affected and might result in a drop in production and financial losses to farmers.

“Global warming is accelerating severe changes in the agriculture of the state. There are dry spells in monsoon. Small rivers get flooded because of freak rains and winters are either very severe or hot winds blow in December,” pointed out Dr SP Pandey of Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant Institute of Studies in Rural Development.

Dr Pandey said that the freak weather affected the economy of the farm sector as agriculture was the largest employment provider and provided direct employment to 35.5 million people.

He is not off the mark as a joint study by Arvind Kumar, KK Singh, AN Mishra and Pratigya Tripathi maintains that climate change resulting in increase in temperature could lead to possible low yield of rice in eastern UP by 1.0 to 1.1 per cent per hectare.

Similar fall in production is expected if there is a fall in temperature. The yield of rice may go down by 1.5 to 1.9 per cent per hectare.

The researchers said that similarly, wheat production might go down by 5 per cent in neighbouring Bihar due to increase in maximum temperature.

Eastern Uttar Pradesh comprising 28 districts would be the worst affected. An estimate said that around 10 districts, with a population of around 90 million, would be affected.

“The production of rice, wheat and pulses are likely to go down. This will not only impact crop production but also the economy of villagers,” KK Singh said.

The impact of climate change is being felt in the state as there has been a greater frequency of droughts and floods. Figures available with Meteorological department suggest that the region has experienced double the number of monsoon depressions, causing heavy rainfall and flooding across Uttar Pradesh.

The state has been divided into nine agro-climatic zones. Around 90 per cent of the population of the state is engaged in agriculture and allied activities of which majority are small farmers, who are solely dependent on agriculture.

Area of agriculture has worsened over the years. The prevailing situation of drought and flood due to its physical formation and natural calamities of last 10 years are indicative of bigger crisis.

Agro-scientist Vishal Saraswat told this reporter that of late, eastern UP has witnessed flash floods which was also because several rivers originating in Nepal flow down to the state causing immense damage.

## DEFENCE

PIONEER, DEC 24, 2018

### **Nuclear-capable Agni-IV successfully test-fired**

India on Sunday successfully test-fired its nuclear-capable long-range ballistic missile Agni-IV, with a strike range of 4,000 km, as part of a user trial by the army.

The strategic surface-to-surface missile was flight tested from launch complex-4 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island, earlier known as Wheeler Island, at about 8.35 am, defence sources said.

Describing the trial as a “complete success”, they said all mission objectives were met during the test-fire. All radars, tracking systems and range stations tracked and monitored the flight performance of the missile, which was launched with support of a mobile launcher.

Radars and electro-optical systems had been positioned along the coast of Odisha for tracking and monitoring all parameters of the missile, the sources said, adding two naval ships were anchored near the target area to witness the final event.

This was the 7th trial of Agni-IV missile. The last trial conducted by the strategic force command (SFC) of the Indian Army from the same base on January 2, 2018 was successful.

The indigenously developed sophisticated Agni-IV having 4,000 km strike range is a two-stage missile. It is 20 meter long with a weight of 17 tonnes, they said.

“The state-of-the-art missile is equipped with modern and compact avionics to provide high level of reliability and precision,” Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) sources said.

Agni-IV missile is equipped with advanced Avionics, 5th generation On Board Computer and distributed architecture. It has the latest features to correct and guide itself for in -flight disturbances, they said.

The accurate Ring Laser Gyro-based Inertial Navigation System (RINS), supported by highly reliable redundant Micro Navigation System (MINGS), ensures the vehicle reaches the target with accuracy.

The re-entry heat shield can withstand temperatures in the range of 4000 degrees centigrade and makes sure avionics function normally with inside temperature remaining less than 50 degrees centigrade.

Ballistic missiles like Agni-I, II and III and Prithvi have been included in the arsenal of the armed forces, giving India an effective deterrence capability.

## **DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

PIONEER, DEC 27, 2018

### **Central Govt institutes annual awards to recognise excellent work in disaster management**

The Centre has instituted annual awards to recognise the excellent work done by individuals and institutions in the country in the field of disaster management. Three eligible institutions and individuals will be given the 'Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskaar' every year with cash rewards ranging from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 51 lakh, a statement issued by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) said.

If the awardee is an institution, it will be given a certificate and a cash prize of Rs 51 lakh and the prize money will be utilised for disaster management-related activities only. If the awardee is an individual, the person shall receive a certificate and a cash prize of Rs 5 lakh, it said. An application by an institution does not debar any individual from that institution to apply for the award in his individual capacity. The statement said there is a need to recognise the efforts of individuals and organisations who have been working assiduously to alleviate the human suffering caused by disasters. Only Indian nationals and Indian institutions can apply for the award.

The last date for filing of application for the year 2018 shall be January 7, 2019, and the award will be announced on January 23, 2019, on the birth anniversary of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

## **E-COMMERCE**

TRIBUNE, DEC 26, 2018

### **Govt tightens norms for e-tailers, bars exclusive deals**

Tightening norms for e-commerce firms having foreign investment, the government on Wednesday barred online marketplaces like Flipkart and Amazon from selling products of companies where they hold stakes and banned exclusive marketing arrangements that could influence product price.

The revised policy on foreign direct investment in online retail, issued by the commerce and industry ministry, also said these firms have to offer equal services or facilities to all its vendors without discrimination.

The revised norms are aimed at protecting the interest of domestic players, who have to face tough competition from e-retailers having deep pockets from foreign investors, the ministry said.

The policy would be effective from February 2019.

"The move would completely prevent influencing prices by e-commerce players. This will also ensure better enforcement of FDI guidelines in e-commerce companies," a senior official said.

The policy says a vendor will not be permitted to sell more than 25 per cent of its products on an online platform of a single e-marketplace firm.

"Inventory of a vendor will be deemed to be controlled by e-commerce marketplace entity if more than 25 per cent of purchases of such vendor are from the marketplace entity or its group companies," the commerce and industry ministry's press note said.

"An entity having equity participation by e-commerce marketplace entity or its group companies, or having control on its inventory by e-commerce marketplace entity or its group companies, will not be permitted to sell its products on the platform run by such marketplace entity."

E-commerce marketplace entity "will not mandate" any seller to sell any good "exclusively" on its platform "only", the note said.

Any service like logistics provided by e-commerce companies to vendors in which they have direct or indirect equity participation or common control stake, should be fair and non-discriminatory.

These services include logistics, warehousing, advertisement, marketing, payments, financing etc.

It said cashback provided by group companies of marketplace entity to buyers should be fair and non-discriminatory.

"For the purposes of this clause, provision of services to any vendor on such terms which are not made available to other vendors in similar circumstances will be deemed unfair and discriminatory," it added.

It further said these companies will have to file a certificate along with a report of statutory auditor to the RBI, confirming compliance of guidelines by September 30th of every year for the preceding fiscal.

The decision comes against the backdrop of several complaints being flagged by domestic traders on heavy discounts being given by e-commerce players to consumers.

According to the current policy, 100 per cent FDI is permitted in marketplace e-commerce activities. It is prohibited in inventory-based activities.

Welcoming the move, Snapdeal CEO Kunal Bahl tweeted that "Marketplaces are meant for genuine, independent sellers, many of whom are MSMEs. These changes will enable a level playing field for all sellers, helping them leverage the reach of e-commerce".

Amazon India spokesperson said: "We are evaluating the circular."

A senior e-commerce industry executive of another company said the move could adversely impact investments being made to bring new sellers on board.

Traders body CAIT said if the steps are implemented in proper spirit, mal-practices and predatory pricing policy and deep discounting of e-commerce players will be a matter of past.

The CAIT also demanded introduction of an e-commerce policy and a regulator to monitor the sector. - PTI

## **ELECTION**

PIONEER, DEC 24, 2018

### **Make false disclosure a ground for disqualification, EC to tell Law Min**

The Election Commission will make a fresh push for electoral reforms with the Government, including making filing of false declaration a ground for disqualification and putting a cap on expenditure by candidates in Legislative Council polls, in the coming days.

According to highly-placed sources in the poll panel, the EC top brass, at the planned meeting with Legislative Secretary G Narayana Raju after the end of the Winter Session of Parliament, will also ask the Government to make bribery during poll period a cognisable offence.

The Winter Session of Parliament will end on January 8. While the Law Ministry is the administrative Ministry for the EC, the Legislative Department is the nodal unit for issues related to the poll panel.

The sources said, the Commission would also ask the Ministry to take a call on its demand to extend constitutional protection to the two election commissioners on the lines of the Chief Election Commissioner.

The President appoints the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners after the Law Ministry initiates the file for their appointment.

A Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from the office only through impeachment by Parliament. The President can remove the ECs based on the recommendation of the CEC.

In its report on electoral reforms submitted in March, 2015, the Law Commission had proposed extending constitutional protection to the two ECs. The EC had been pushing to extend constitutional protection to the election commissioners.

Another proposal that the EC would press for is making electoral law gender neutral for armed forces personnel.

As of now, an Armyman's wife is entitled to be enrolled as a service voter, but a woman Army officer's husband is not, according to the provisions in the electoral law. But a Bill pending before the Rajya Sabha proposes to replace the term 'wife' with 'spouse', thus making the provision gender neutral. Members of the armed forces, central armed police forces, personnel of State police forces posted outside their State and employees of the Centre posted outside India are eligible to be enrolled as service voters.

"Much depends on Parliament. The Bill has been passed by the Lok Sabha... It is a major electoral reform for service voters ahead of the Lok Sabha polls... We want Government to get it passed at the earliest," an EC official said. Referring to the issue of filing false declaration, the sources said, as of now, it attracts a six months' jail term. But the EC wants to make it into an "electoral offence", they said.

Conviction in an electoral offence is a ground for disqualification. “Jail term of six months does not instil fear. Disqualification would,” another official explained.

As of now, candidates contesting Legislative Council elections don’t have a bar on campaigning expenses, which, the EC wants to put a cap on.

The expenditure should be half of what is allowed for candidates contesting assembly polls. Every state has a different expenditure limit based on its size, number of voters and Assembly seats.

As of today, bribery in elections is a non-cognisable offence where an investigation cannot take place without a magistrate’s permission.

The EC wants to make it a cognizable offence and bring in the category of “serious” crimes like murder, dowry, death, and rape.

## **GST**

PIONEER, DEC 25, 2018

### **Sewa Bhoj Yojna: Par panel questions GST waive off**

A Parliamentary panel has questioned the Government's motive to waive off the GST under its six-month-old 'Sewa Bhoj Yojna' for the big religious institutions serving free meal to more than 5,000 people per month while depriving the smaller ones from similar financial benefits even though "they are more likely in need of it."

The Committee headed by Rajya Sabha MP, Derek O'Brien, has recommended that the eligibility criteria of serving free food to above 5,000 people should be reconsidered by the Union Culture Ministry.

The Modi Government had launched the Sewa Bhoj Yojana on June 1, 2018, exempting charitable organisations that provide free food from paying Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST)/ Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) on the raw materials used. The scheme followed demand from the BJP ally, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), in Punjab which had sought exemption of langar from GST.

While appreciating the scheme which reimburses the CGST/IGST for only those religious institutions that serve food to at least 5,000 people in a calendar month, the panel, which has submitted its report in Parliament recently said it fails to understand the reason for this

eligibility criterion since smaller religious institutions are more likely to be in need of this Scheme.

Moreover, ascertaining the number of people to whom food is served by a religious institution in a month is difficult and could lead to religious institutions in actual need of the support being left out.

The Committee also felt that instead of carrying out inspection every year at least in 5% of the cases as decided under the scheme, the Government should scrutinise at least 10% of the cases.

The Committee feels that the proper utilization of funds is very important in the implementation of all schemes and this scheme could be maliciously exploited for getting reimbursement of taxes by commercial food outlets. Considering this fact, the Committee feels that the minimum inspection limit of 5% of the cases seems very low and might not have a deterring effect on the organisations.

Introduced by the Culture Ministry, the scheme has a total outlay of Rs 325 Crore for Financial Years 2018-19 and 2019-20.

The scheme envisages to reimburse the CGST and IGST on purchase of raw items such as ghee, edible oil, atta/maida/rava/flour, rice pulses, sugar, burra/jiggery etc which go into preparation of food/Prasad/langar/bhandara offered free of cost by religious institutions. The objective of the scheme is to lessen the financial burden of such charitable religious Institutions who provide food/prasad/langar (Community Kitchen)/bhandara free of cost without any discrimination to public/devotees.

The charitable religious Institutions such as temples, gurudwara, mosque, church, dharmik ashram, dargah, matth, monasteries etc. which have been in existence for at least five years before applying for financial assistance/grant and who serve free food to at least 5,000 people in a month are covered.

## HEALTH SERVICE

PIONEER, DEC 24, 2018

### **Govt discusses globalisation of traditional medicine systems with WHO**

In a move that would help propel Indian traditional medicinal system on the global stage, the Government is in talks with the World Health Organisation (WHO) to include AYUSH terminology like ayurveda and Unani in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD)-11, a system that allows health professionals to share health information across the globe.

ICD-11 is the new classification of diseases released in June 2018 by the global health agency.

“In a recent meeting which was attended by ambassadors/ high commissioners of 15 nations, it was acknowledged that there was a need for diligent integration of traditional and complementary systems of medicines in the healthcare of people with respect to combating non-communicable diseases and promotion of health alongside the modern medicine across the world with very low cost.

“In this regard it was also felt that, induction of Indian Medical systems like Ayurveda, Unani and Siddha in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) of the WHO would be desirable,” said an official from the Union Ayush Ministry.

Chaired by Union Minister of AYUSH, Shripad Naik, the meeting on globalisation of traditional and alternative systems of medicine was attended by Ambassadors/High commissioners of Bhutan, UAE, Cuba, Iran, Ghana, Hungary, Trinidad, Oman, Equatorial Guinea, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Switzerland, Mauritius, Bangladesh and The United Kingdom, the official added.

There was consensus in the meeting that all stake holding countries should come together to work for the globalization of traditional medicine systems which are already finding wide acceptance.

Over the past few years, India has been aggressively promoting AYUSH on the domestic as well as international stage both for expanding its global influence and for a share of the estimated US\$50-billion global market.

Efforts are also on to ensure better manufacturing practices and scientifically validated herbal drugs are made available. For instance, CSIR's two labs-the Central Institute of Medicinal & Aromatic Plants (CIMAP) and the National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) have jointly developed anti-diabetes herbal drug BGR-34 which is being sold by the AIMIL Pharma across the country.

Similarly, research to develop cost-effective cannabis based drugs for treatment of pain in cancer, epilepsy and sickle cell anaemia is being conducted by Council of Scientific and Industrial Research - Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (CSIR—IIIM) in collaboration with Bombay Hemp Company (BOHECO).

Medical-tourism hotspots in India too are drawing foreigners in good number. India has established AYUSH chairs in more than two dozen cities to raise awareness about the AYUSH systems of medicine abroad. These countries include Malaysia, Trinidad & Tobago, Mexico, Cuba, Hungary, Russia (two cells), Indonesia (two cells), Mauritius among others.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

PIONEER, DEC 27, 2018

### **HRD Ministry clears backlog of scholarships**

Union HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar on Wednesday assured students that no one of them will face any difficulty in getting scholarship amount on time.

Addressing a Press conference, Javadekar said that Government has thoroughly reviewed the system and from the month of November the Ministry has started crediting each scholarship beneficiary account with the scholarship amount by 30th of each month.

He stated that a Special grant of Rs 250 crore has also been sanctioned to complete the backlog of scholarship amount and all backlog has been cleared now. He further announced that nearly 2.44 lakh students get benefit of various scholarships which are run by MHRD, AICTE and UGC. "Government is spending nearly Rs 4,000 crore amount on these scholarship schemes," said Javadekar.

He further named various scholarship schemes which are running successfully under MHRD, AICTE and UGC. National Means-Cum Merit Scholarship Scheme, Central Sector Scheme of Scholarship for College and University Students and Special Scholarship Scheme for Jammu and Kashmir under MHRD, Scholarship for Girls (PRAGATI), Scholarship for Differently abled Students under AICTE and "ISHAN

UDAY” Special Scholarship Scheme for North Eastern Region under UGC, JRF etc are some of the noteworthy scholarship schemes of HRD Ministry, he said.

The Union Minister also informed that Study in India programme has taken off well and nearly 2,000 students have got admission in selected 100 top Indian institutions for the first season. He said that we are expecting nearly 20,000 foreign students from 30 Asian, African, Middle East and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries under this program in next 3 years.

The Minister also shared details about ambitious ‘Study in India’ programme being conducted by the Centre. He termed it to be an innovative initiative to attract students from 30 partner countries in South Asia, South-East Asia, Middle East and Africa to come and experience the very best of academic learning at the top institutions in India. He said the target about Study in India programme is to get about 20,000 students during the next three academic years at the about 100 partners institutes which includes the IITs, IIMs and other prestigious academic and technical institutes.

“The programme includes setting-up of a large portal, call centre, social media campaign, branding, event management and setting up of a facilitation centre to attract more and more foreign students towards Indian Institutions,” said the HRD Minister.

## **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

PIONEER, DEC 25, 2018

### **India, Afghanistan, Iran agree on routes**

A crucial trilateral meeting of officials from India, Afghanistan and Iran on the strategically-important Chabahar port was held on Monday during which they agreed on the routes for trade and transit corridors between the three countries.

The first meeting of the follow-up committee for implementation of the trilateral Chabahar agreement between India, Afghanistan and Iran at the level of Joint Secretary or Director General was held in the Iranian port city of Chabahar, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

On the occasion, India Ports Global Limited company opened its office and took over operations at the Shaheed Behesti port at Chabahar.

“Positive and constructive discussions were held between the three sides on full operationalisation of the Trilateral Transit Agreement for international transit and transport through the Chabahar Port. They agreed on the routes for the trade and transit corridors between the three countries,” the MEA said.

It was agreed to finalise at the earliest, the protocol to harmonise transit, roads, customs, and consular matters.

During the meeting, it was agreed to allow cargo movement at Chabahar using Transports Internationaux Routiers Convention provisions, the MEA said.

It was decided to hold an event to promote and popularise the potential of Chabahar on February 26, 2019.

A study would also be initiated for determining measures to make the route attractive, decrease logistic costs and pave the way for smooth operationalisation of the Chabahar Agreement.

The next Follow-up Committee meeting, followed by the second Coordination Council Meeting at the level of secretaries or deputy ministers, will held in India.

In May 2016, India, Iran and Afghanistan inked a pact which entailed establishment of Transit and Transport Corridor among the three countries using Chabahar Port as one of the regional hubs for sea transportation in Iran, besides multi-modal transport of goods and passengers across the three nations.

The port in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich nation's southern coast is easily accessible from India's western coast and is increasingly seen as a counter to Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which is being developed with Chinese investment and is located at distance of around 80 km from Chabahar.

The Chabahar Port is considered a gateway to golden opportunities for trade by India, Iran and Afghanistan with central Asian countries besides

ramping up trade among the three countries after Pakistan denied transit access to India.

TRIBUNE, DEC 27, 2018

## **Bhutan PM on maiden state visit to India**



India and Bhutan will seek to reaffirm their friendship and review bilateral issues, foreign policy and regional focus when Prime Minister Lotay Tshering arrives on his maiden state visit to Delhi on Thursday, less than two months since he assumed office.

The three-day state visit will be the first high-level exchange between the two sides since Tshering and his Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) party won surprise victory in the recently concluded third general elections in the Himalayan nation.

Tshering will be accompanied by his foreign affairs and economic affairs ministers when he holds formal talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday.

Speaking at a conference on ‘India-Bhutan relations-The road ahead’ earlier this month, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale underlined, “At the heart of India-Bhutan friendship is the belief that we have each other’s interest at heart. We have vital stakes in each other’s progress and well-being and in peace and prosperity in the region.”

“It is a goodwill visit. As a new PM he is coming to express appreciation for India. We are not working on any specific agreements per se. We receive assistance from India and are confident of assistance for our 12th plan,” said a Bhutanese official.

The official talks and joint statement to be issued later is expected to focus among others on issues of economic assistance, hydropower cooperation, visas, possible revival of the BBIN (Bhutan-Bangladesh-India-Nepal) Motor Vehicles Agreement rejected by Thimphu, border security against backdrop of the 2017 Doklam confrontation with Chinese PLA.

“As Bhutan enters its 12th Five Year Plan, India stands firmly committed to partner Bhutan in its quest for bringing greater prosperity and happiness to its people,” Gokhale said at the conference.

The flagship 720 MWs Mangdechhu hydro-power project is expected to be commissioned during the visit. Bhutan has concerns about India's revised policy on cross-border trade of electricity (CBTE) that is expected to impact Thimphu's ability to sell power to India. Tshering is likely to raise the matter to seek changes in the policy.

India and Bhutan are currently commemorating the golden jubilee year of establishment of formal diplomatic relations.

Tshering will be accorded a ceremonial welcome and will call on President Ram Nath Kovind and Vice President Venkaiah Naidu on Thursday.

## JUDICIARY

HINDU, DEC 26, 2018

### **‘Law Minister’s comment amounts to dictating SC’**

#### *Seeking early hearing in Ayodhya case improper: Kumar*

Former Law Minister Ashwani Kumar on Wednesday said Ministers talking about early hearing in the Ram Janmabhoomi case was improper and tantamount to “dictating” the Supreme Court.

Referring to a statement by Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, Mr. Kumar said, “The Law Minister’s unsolicited advice regarding early hearing of the Ram Janmabhoomi case by the Supreme Court is a gross act of impropriety as it seeks to suggest to the Supreme Court the ordering of its roster in a subjudice matter.”

On Monday, Mr. Prasad requested the Supreme Court to “fast-track” the hearing of the Ayodhya title suit, saying it was the “expectation of the country.”

Interacting with reporters in Lucknow, the Minister said he was speaking as a “common man” and not as Law Minister.

“Surely, the unrestrained public utterances of the Minister in this regard breach established conventions and tantamount to a wholly unacceptable attempt to dictate to the court,” Mr. Kumar said in a statement.

The BJP's ally Shiv Sena and other organisations like the VHP and the RSS have suggested that the government bring an ordinance to build a Ram temple in Ayodhya. The government and the BJP have said that they would wait for the top court's order and expect an early hearing. "The court has already set in motion the process of hearing the case. In the circumstances, the Law Minister's public comments disclose a political agenda. Yet another assault on institutions of our constitutional democracy," Mr. Kumar said.

## MINORITIES

TRIBUNE, DEC 27, 2018

### **Triple talaq: Congress issues whip in Lok Sabha**

Anticipating a debate on the contentious triple talaq bill, the Congress on Thursday issued a whip to all its MPs in Lok Sabha.

According to sources, all Lok Sabha members have been asked to be present throughout the day for participation should the debate come up.

The Congress has maintained a cautious approach on the legislation banning instant triple talaq and criminalising the offence.

Party leaders have argued against criminalisation and have also sought amendments to the bill to ensure the financial protection of women through a maintenance package by the state.

The Congress has said it is not against the legislation but certain provisions in the bill presented and has sought amendments.

HINDU, DEC 27, 2018

**Parliament Live | Lok Sabha passes triple talaq Bill**  
*Congress issues whip to all its MPs in the LS, anticipating a debate on the contentious triple talaq Bill*

The Winter session of **Parliament** opened on Thursday after a prolonged holiday for Christmas. Parliament proceedings for much of the session was washed out over a variety of issues, including the latest snooping row, the Rafale jet deal and Cauvery dam.

On Thursday too, the scene in the Rajya Sabha was no different as the House adjourned for the day without transacting any business. There was ruckus in the House over issues ranging from construction of a dam on the Cauvery River to violence in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr district.

Meanwhile, the Lok Sabha was adjourned twice over protests by the AIADMK on the Mokedatu issue and the Congress, which wanted a JPC probe into the Rafale deal. The triple talaq Bill was passed after the Congress and AIADMK members walked out protesting the government's refusal to send the Bill to a Joint Select Committee for scrutiny.

## MINES

TRIBUNE, DEC 27, 2018

### *15 trapped in Meghalaya mine for 2 weeks, kin look for miracle*

Rescue workers were trying to reach 15 coal miners trapped underground for 13 days on Wednesday as families prayed for their safe return, but chances of survival looked slim after floodwaters rushed through the illegal "rat-hole" pit.

The 15 went to work at the mine in the northeastern state of Meghalaya on December 13 and have been underground ever since.

"Only God's grace and some miracle can help them to be alive," Kyrmen Shylla, Meghalaya's disaster management minister, told Reuters by telephone from capital Shillong.

The rescue operations was suspended on Sunday following flash floods from a nearby river, officials said.

A team of about 100 National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) experts have been camping at the mine site but their operations have been hampered by lack of sophisticated equipment, S.K. Shastri, NDRF commandant leading the operations, said.

The mine is an old, illegal so-called rat-hole mine, common in Meghalaya but dangerous as the coal is pulled out from narrow, horizontal seams.

Workers, including children, descend hundreds of feet on bamboo ladders to dig out the coal, often leading to accidents at such mines.

## **POLITICS & GOVERNMENT - RAJASTHAN**

PIONEER, DEC 24, 2018

Seeking to balance caste and regional factors, the Rajasthan Cabinet was on Monday expanded with as many as 23 Ministers — 13 Cabinet and 10 Ministers of State — being sworn in, a week after Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and Deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot took oath,

Eighteen legislators including Subhash Garg of RLD are first time Ministers, while the other five have held ministerial posts earlier, as efforts were made to have a mix of young faces and experienced legislators from both Gehlot and Pilot camps.

The Cabinet includes one woman, Mamta Bhupesh, and a Muslim face, Saleh Mohammad.

Portfolios of the Ministers are yet to be allotted.

Pilot said the formation of the Cabinet reflects a balance between age and experience, caste and different geographical regions.

"It is a balanced Cabinet. We have a lot of people who are being given chance for the first time and also some who got experience in earlier Congress Governments. So it is a balance between geographical regions, different communities, and between experience and age," Pilot told PTI.

"It is a forward looking, fully charged energetic Cabinet. We have added 23 Ministers to our existing strength and the Government is fully

equipped to deal with the challenges and expectations people have from us,” he said.

Of the 23 newly inducted Ministers, Shanti Kumar Dhariwal, Master Bhanwar Lal Meghwal, Pramod Jain Bhaya and Parsadi Lal Meena were Ministers in former Congress Government (2008-13) while BD Kalla was the Minister in Congress Government (1998-2003).

Both these Governments were led by Ashok Gehlot, who has now become the chief minister of the State for a third time.

Apart from the member of the erstwhile royal family of Bharatpur and influential Jat leader of eastern Rajasthan Vishvendra Singh, Harish Choudhary, Lalchand Kataria and Govind Singh Dotasara are Jat leaders who have found a place in the Council of Ministers.

# TERRORISM

TRIBUNE, DEC 26, 2018

## **NIA busts ISIS-inspired module; 10 arrested from UP, Delhi**

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) today claimed to have busted a “highly radicalised” suspected IS-inspired terror module “Harkat-Ul-Harb-e-Islam” (war for the cause of Islam) allegedly planning suicide attacks on vital installations, sensitive locations and crowded places in and around Delhi and NCR.

The agency arrested 10 suspects in early morning searches across 17 locations in New Delhi and Uttar Pradesh with support of the Anti-Terrorism Squad besides Delhi Police and their UP counterparts. Six persons reportedly associated with the module are being interrogated.

“The members were in an advanced stage of preparation. They were just waiting for the successful assembly of bombs and wanted to hit multiple locations using remote-controlled IEDs, fidayeen attacks using suicide vests and pipe bombs,” Alok Mittal, NIA spokesperson and Inspector General, told mediapersons.

A homemade rocket launcher, material for suicide vests, 100 alarm clocks (to be used as timers), 25 kg of bomb-making material like potassium nitrate, potassium chlorate and sulphur were recovered during the raids. A cache of handmade weapons, 12 pistols, hundreds of live

bullets rounds, 100 mobile phones, 135 SIM cards and Rs 7.5 lakh in cash were also seized, said Mittal.

Of the 10 arrested, five are from Amroha and the rest from Seelampur and Jafrabad localities of northeast Delhi.

The alleged mastermind, 29-year Mohammed Sohail, alias Hazrath, was arrested from Amroha in western Uttar Pradesh on December 20 and a case was registered under sections of the Explosive Substances Act and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act against him.

“He (Suhail) was presently staying at Jafrabad, Delhi, and had tasked other team members with procuring arms, explosives and other accessories to prepare IEDs and pipe bombs,” said the NIA in its statement.

Others arrested include an engineering student of a private university in Noida, a third-year graduation student in humanities, an auto-rickshaw driver, two brothers who worked as welders and two garments businessman.

Saqib Iftekar, a native of Hapur and Imam in Jama Masjid, Baksar, Uttar Pradesh, has also been arrested for helping Suhail procure weapons.

“So far, no criminal record of any of the arrested members of the module has surfaced. It seems they were self-trained and self-motivated through Internet,” Mittal said, alleging the agency had in its possession a video of Sohail demonstrating how to complete a bomb circuit.

Mittal said the suspects had done a reconnaissance of vital government installations and planned to target political figures and other important persons.

“The level of preparation showed they were planning to carry out fidayeen attacks in the near future,” Mittal said, adding the module, founded four months ago, was communicating through encrypted messaging apps WhatsApp, Telegram.

The NIA believes the module has foreign-based handler(s) but their identity and location is still being probed.

The officials refused to comment on media reports quoting other agencies involved in the operation that RSS headquarters and Delhi Police headquarters were also on the hit list. “They (other agencies) can say whatever they feel like. But being the probing agency of this case... we can’t make any such claim unless we have some corroborative material to support it,” an NIA officer said. The accused would be produced before the court on Thursday.

The members were in an advanced stage of preparation. They wanted to hit multiple locations using remote-controlled IEDs Rs — **Alok Mittal, NIA Spokesperson**

## **WILD LIFE**

PIONEER, DEC 25, 2018

### **ITA to mull ways to resolve crisis**

Concerned at the increasing human-elephant conflicts (HEC) in Assam — nearly 800 lives have been trampled by wild jumbos between 2006 and 2016 — tea estate firms have come together under the umbrella of Indian Tea Association (ITA) to explore ways to mitigate the crisis in the Northeastern State and West Bengal.

In this regard, said Dr Dipankar Ghose, Director, Species and Landscapes programme, WWF-India, a first-of its kind meet was organised by the ITA in Kolkata to plan an industry- wide collaboration to address HEC faced by the tea gardens of Assam and West Bengal.

The WWF-India is implementing 'The Sonitpur Model' in two districts of Assam in collaboration with the State Forest Department where locals are trained and equipped to form 'Anti Depredation Squads' that can drive the wild elephants back using searchlights, firecrackers and kunki elephants. Kunkis are trained elephants that can help the Anti Depredation Squad members in driving back wild elephants..

In fact, Apeejay Tea, a tea firm and WWF-India have partnered (2015-18) to implement HEC management measures in its tea plantations in Sonitpur.

Dr Ghose said, "Through intensive conflict management strategy in the conflict prone plantations, a range of initiatives have been implemented which were found to be successful in reducing losses related to HEC in four of Apeejay Tea estates namely Borjuli, Ghoirallie, Dhulapadung and Sessa Tea Estates.

Under the project, low cost solar power fences were installed across the tea estates, a scalable bio fence, using thorny bamboo was also introduced to prevent the entry of wild elephants into vulnerable areas of the tea garden when ready. Regular village level meetings and interaction were held to create awareness on elephants and HEC management.

"We believe that we will be able to scale up these initiatives in Assam with the ITA's participation in effectively managing HEC along with other stakeholders," he added.

Karan Paul, Chairman of Apeejay Tea and member of ITA who had initiated the meeting said that they were perhaps the first tea company to fund an intensive conflict management strategy in Sonitpur because four of our gardens were in the hot zone.

Vivek Goenka, ITA Chairman added, "The ITA has studied the Project Outcomes of Apeejay Tea - WWF collaboration and is sensitive to the issue. I believe that a multi-stakeholder collaboration including the Government will aid implementation of large scale interventions across the tea sector. This was our first meeting involving tea companies and we are hopeful of a collaborative approach emerging to take this forward."

According to Government data, Assam with an elephant area (15,050 square km) is the country's prime elephant range State, having 5,719 jumbos, the highest population of wild elephants after Karnataka.

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PIONEER, DEC 25, 2018

## **'260 leopards poached in India since 2015'**



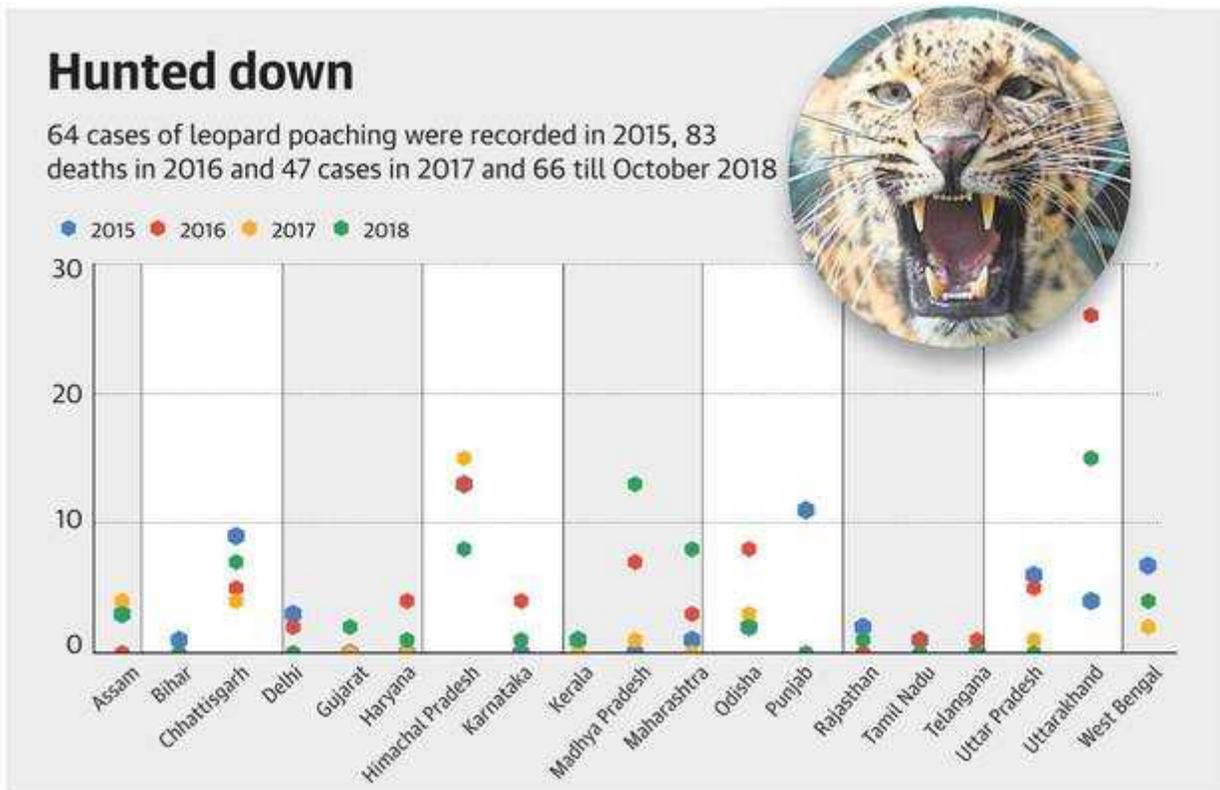
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*Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh account for the largest number of cases, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change tells Parliament.*

At least 260 leopards were poached in the country between 2015 and 2018, according to information given to Parliament by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

Of this, 64 cases were recorded in 2015, 83 in 2016, 47 in 2017 and 66 till October 2018, the data tabled in the Lok Sabha earlier this month show.

Of the total, Uttarakhand accounted for 60 cases and Himachal Pradesh 49. Central Indian States like Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh also recorded a high number of cases in the past four years, at 25 and 21 respectively. Poaching of leopards was reported by 19 States, including Assam and West Bengal in the East, Punjab in the North and Telangana and Tamil Nadu in the South.



Source: Lok Sabha unstarred question no. 844

Replying to a question by BJP MP Rattan Lal Kataria, the MoEFCC said the figures had been compiled from data furnished by State enforcement agencies as the management and protection of **wildlife**, including leopards, is primarily the responsibility of States and Union Territories. It added that information on the killing of leopards by villagers was not collated by the ministry.

Wildlife organisations, however, estimate leopard poaching to be at a much higher level based on the seizures of body parts. According to the Delhi based Wildlife Protection Society of India, 163 cases of poaching and seizures of body parts were recorded in 2018, an increase from 159 in 2017.

Experts point out that since leopards live in close proximity to human habitation and are found all across the country, the cases of leopard poaching too are spread countrywide with a significant number of such incidents not showing up in government records. There are also several incidents of leopard deaths on account of road kills, particularly in States such as Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Vidya Athreya, an ecologist at Wildlife Conservation Society who has worked on the human-leopard conflict, stresses on the need to evolve proactive policy measures for ensuring the protection of wild animals like leopards that live outside protected areas.

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**For Limited Circulation**

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