

Mamata Banerjee's protest in Kolkata, Day 3 - Mamata accuses BJP of 'distorting facts'

(Gns. News) West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee doing her official works from the protest site in Kolkata on Tuesday. Supreme Court asks Kolkata Police chief to cooperate with CBI, restrains agency from taking any coercive steps against him. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is on a sit-in in front of the Metro Channel at Esplanade in Kolkata from Sunday night after CBI officials tried to enter Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar's residence to allegedly question him in connection with the Saradha chit fund scam case.

Ms Banerjee said her agitation was to "save democracy, the Constitution and the country." She blamed the Central government, the BJP's leadership and the National Security Adviser, for "forcing" her to go on an agitation. Ms Banerjee has decided to skip the crucial Budget session of the Assembly. She even chaired a Cabinet meeting at a police outpost near the protest venue. "Some media are saying that Police Commissioner will have to face the CBI. This is nothing new. We are always ready to cooperate. The Kolkata Police chief will not face the CBI but will speak to the agency... please do not distort the truth. Everyone has the court order. Why are you saying that the Police Commissioner will face the CBI?" Ms. Banerjee said on the media reports. "We always cooperate," she noted. "In the past few days the BJP had conducted many meetings in Bengal and still they claim that they are not allowed to conduct a meeting? You conducted a meeting even while suffering from Swine flu, a vector-borne disease," said Ms. Banerjee referring to the recent Amit Shah's meeting Ms. Banerjee accused that Assam's Deputy CM Himanta Biswas Sarma is involved in the Saradha chit fund scam. "We will give you letter at 3 p.m. here [protest venue]... The letter, by one of the owners of the chit fund company, names Assam's Deputy CM..." "Why



can't the CBI figure out where Rabindranath Tagore's Nobel Prize is? What did the CBI do in Nandigram, and in Tapasi Malik death case?" Ms. Banerjee said criticising the CBI officials interference in the chit fund scam investigation. On the support from the Opposition parties, Ms. Banerjee said, "Deve Gowda ji called me and said that he was happy with the protest. He said he could join because of his health issues. A number of leaders of the Opposition have called us... many political parties of the Opposition are supporting us." Following the Supreme Court's order, the CBI has started a meeting in its CGO complex office in Kolkata. According to sources, the CBI is likely to form a team, which will be sent to Shillong.

Meanwhile, the central agency will also send notice to Kolkata Police chief Rajeev Kumar by the end of this week and call him to Shillong for questioning. The Supreme Court has ordered the CBI to question Mr.

Kumar at a neutral venue in Shillong. The BJP on Tuesday projected the apex court order directing Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar to make himself available before the CBI as a blow to the Mamata Banerjee-led government in West Bengal and a moral victory for the investigating agency. Welcoming the order, Senior BJP leader and Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said, it showed that nobody is above the law, including the police commissioner. BJP National General Secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya sought Ms. Banerjee's resignation. "The SC verdict is a victory of democracy. Mamata Banerjee should immediately tender resignation," Vijayvargiya told PTI. "The SC verdict is a victory of democracy. Mamata Banerjee should immediately tender resignation," Vijayvargiya told PTI. The State government and the State police have repeatedly created hurdles during the investigation, he al-

leged. "Mamata Banerjee is on dharna to stop CBI from questioning a police officer. The people of this country would have loved to see Banerjee holding dharna to return the money for chit fund investors," Mr. Vijayvargiya said. This isn't my victory, this is India's victory: Mamata on SC development. Mamata Banerjee welcomes Supreme Court order, says "we never said we will not cooperate. We know that it is all political vendetta." "I am not only pleading for Rajeev Kumar I am pleading for millions of people. Let me talk to my leaders on how long the dharna will continue. I will talk to other leaders of Opposition. I do not do anything in hurry, We have no quarrel with Central forces. We respect Central forces more than forces from Bengal. Jeet humko nahin mili, jeet desh ki Janata ko mili. Jeet constitution ko mili." My movement is for all it is not a Trinamool Congress movement. In 2019 Modi will not come back to power

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee doing her official works from the protest site in Kolkata

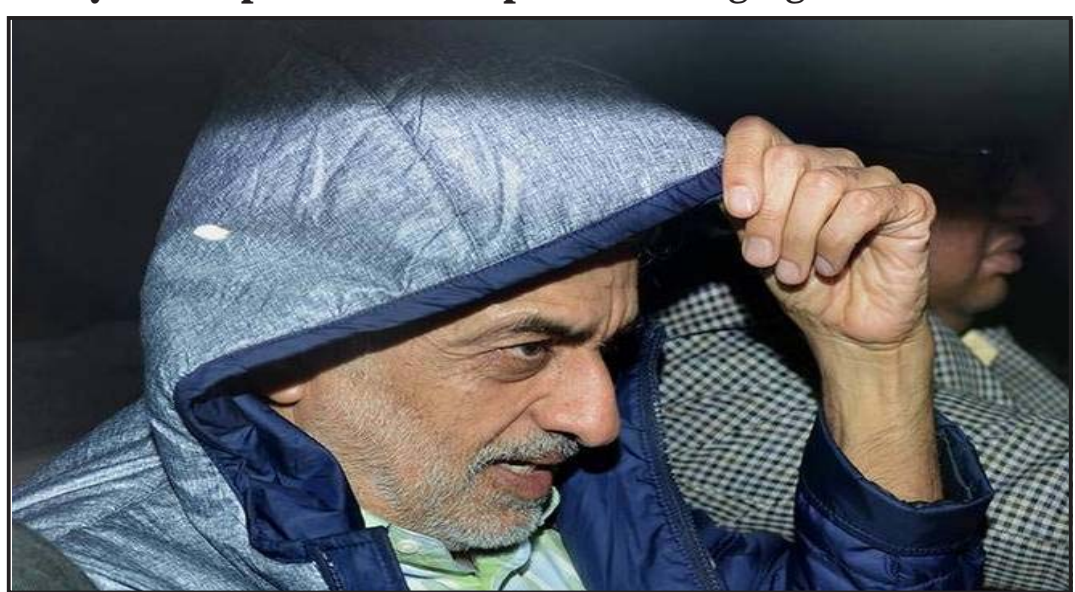
I have suffered this for long. There contempt petition is rejected. We had suggested a mutual place that court has agreed and Rajiv Kumar will be arrested today is not my victory, it is victory of Save India (Mamata protest stage is called Save India). Moral victory for people of the Bengal, moral victory for people of the country. These cases are not new but from 2012-13," she says. "We will strengthen the unity of Opposition forces. We will reply on the contempt of the court petition," she continues. Ms. Banerjee alleges that that they were the ones who "arrested Sudipta Sen owner of Saradha Group. We set up a Judicial Commission and returned Rs 300 crore. We will reply on the contempt of the court petition." On regrading the BJP leaders been denied permission to hold meetings in the State she said, Mr. Modi held two meetings and Mr. Rajnath Singh held two meetings, so how can they say they are denied permission," she says. "So many people are involved in chit funds. The Deputy CM of Assam took Rs 3 crore and Babul Supriyo (BJP leader) said that he is Rose of Rose Valley... they have not been arrested. I sat on dharna for a cause Save India. We will discuss with all concerned on calling off the protest. I was on hunger strike for 26 days here for farmers of Singur at this very place... Today also we got victory. Mr. Modi is also accused in Godhra case. Nobody is asking where is Haren Pandya. But I will ask they can kill me or take me to jail," she continues adding that it is "clear that Mr. Modi is not coming to power in 2019." Ms. Banerjee dismisses the allegation of being benefitted from selling the painting as alleged by the PM. She says, "CBI is yet to look out on whether money from

my painting went to Chief Minister Relief Fund." The Supreme Court, hearing on pleas of probe agency in Saradha chit fund scam case, restrained the CBI from taking any coercive steps against Kolkata Police chief Rajeev Kumar. The Bench also ordered Mr. Kumar to appear before the CBI and cooperate with the probe. The CBI will have to conduct the probe in a neutral venue in Shillong, the top court has ruled. Also read | CBI vs Kolkata Police: Mamata's open challenge keeps Kolkata awake Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Mr. Kumar, earlier informed the court that his client had informed the CBI authorities that he was willing to take questions at a neutral venue. He also alleged that the CBI's action was meant to score points. The top court also issued contempt notice to West Bengal Chief Secretary, DGP and Kolkata Police Commissioner. They have to file reply by Feb 18. Based on their replies, the Supreme Court Secretary General will intimate them on whether they have to personally appear in court on Feb 20. Meanwhile, Calcutta HC has adjourned the hearing in Kolkata Police chief Rajeev Kumar case till Thursday as the Supreme Court is seized of the matter. The Shiv Sena, in an editorial in party mouthpiece "Saamana", said what was happening in Kolkata was a "threat to democracy." The Sena said the Centre could have acted against the Kolkata Police chief two months back and the CBI should have carried proper summons before visiting his house to question him. "No one involved in the Saradha chit fund scam should be spared, but how does the CBI look at the 'cheat India' matter which has been going on for the last four-and-a-half years," the Uddhar Thackeray-led party remarked. Without elaborating its point, it said Narendra Modi should look in to the crisis in West Bengal as a prime minister of the country and not as a leader of the BJP. The Sena claimed that the BJP was going to fall short of 100 Lok Sabha seats from north India to Maharashtra (in the west)

in the Lok Sabha polls. "To fill the gap, the BJP has laid its hopes on states like West Bengal to win 10 to 15 seats... all this (the all-out war between the Centre and the Mamata Banerjee government) is being orchestrated with an eye on the Lok Sabha polls," said the Sena, which is an ally of the BJP at the Centre and in Maharashtra. Tensions between the Centre and the West Bengal government continued to simmer as Trinamool chairperson and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee continued her protest. "This demonstration will continue till February 8, because the board examinations will be starting soon and we will not be playing the loudspeakers," Ms. Banerjee said on Monday. She again targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said, "If we want to save the country, we have to defeat Mr. Modi." Jaitley hits out at Opposition Hitting out at the Opposition coming together in support of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Union Minister Arun Jaitley Tuesday said that a "kleptocrat's club" was aspiring to capture the reigns of power in the country. In a Facebook post titled "The Kleptocrat's Club", Jaitley said the West Bengal chit fund fraud was unearthed in 2012-13. Its investigations were handed over to the CBI by the Supreme Court. The court monitored these investigations. The CBI has interrogated and even arrested some people. Many have been granted bail. If a police officer is also required to be interrogated, how does it become a super emergency, assault on federalism, or destruction of institutions? Mr. Jaitley questioned. Stating that it would be a gross error to assume that Banerjee did this because of a routine investigation involving a police officer, Mr. Jaitley said she did it to defocus from other Opposition aspirants for the highest office and to project herself as the nucleus of India's Opposition. Today, the CBI is being brutally prevented by physical force and detention of its officer from investigating a

crime legally within its jurisdiction, in the state of West Bengal. It is a textbook illustration of a state government assaulting federalism, Mr. Jaitley said. He said Ms. Banerjee's decision to sit on a Dharna received support of many Opposition parties who aspire to be in power. Most of them, or their affiliates, are today being investigated, prosecuted and in some cases have also been convicted for crimes of corruption, he said. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a sit-in over the CBI's attempt to question the Kolkata Police commissioner in connection with chit fund scams, in Kolkata on Monday West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a sit-in over the CBI's attempt to question the Kolkata Police commissioner in connection with chit fund scams, in Kolkata on Monday Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Andhra Pradesh counterpart Chandrababu Naidu are expected to visit the dharna site at Metro Channel on Tuesday, sources told PTI. Prominent leaders such as DMK's Kanimozhi and RJD's Tejashwi Yadav visited the dharna venue on Monday to express solidarity with the firebrand Bengal leader. The dharna site, titled "satyagraha mancha", has been devoid of any political colour. The chief minister has been discharging her official duties, including signing of papers, from the dais. Sources close to Ms. Banerjee, who is also the Trinamool Congress chief, said she would continue to discharge her official duties from the protest site till the demonstration is called off. The West Bengal Chief Minister has described her protest as a non-political one and welcomed all anti-BJP parties into it. Prominent personalities, including poets and singers, have poured in to the dharna venue to lend support to Ms. Banerjee's protest. Actor Indrani Halder and senior ministers Arup Biswas and Indranil Sen were present Tuesday morning at the 'dharna mancha'.

VVIP chopper scam: Delhi HC seeks ED's response to lobbyist Deepak Talwar's plea challenging his detention



(Gns. News) A file picture of Deepak Talwar leaving the Patiala House Court in New Delhi. The court listed the matter for further hearing on February 12. The Delhi High Court on Tuesday sought a response from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to a plea by alleged lobbyist Deepak Talwar challenging his detention by Indian agencies after he was deported from the UAE last week. A Bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and Sangita Dhingra Sehgal issued notice to the ED and directed it to file a response to the petition by February 11. The court listed the matter for further hearing on February 12. Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Mr. Talwar, contended that his client was picked up from Dubai and handed over to the Indian authorities. "The Govern-

ment of India abducted my client. More so when there was summons for him to appear on February 4. There was no extradition and they picked him up," he argued. The ED was represented by Central government standing counsel Amit Mahajan, who sought time to respond to the plea. Mr. Talwar, who is in ED custody, was deported from Dubai on January 30 and was arrested by the agency after landing here. The ED earlier alleged before a trial court that Mr. Talwar acted as a middleman in negotiations to favour foreign private airlines, causing loss to national carrier Air India. The ED said it needed to interrogate Mr. Talwar to get the names of officials of the Ministry of Civil Aviation, National Aviation Company of India Ltd. and Air India, who

favoured foreign airlines, including Qatar Airways, Emirates and Air Arabia. The agency claimed that entities directly or indirectly controlled by the accused received exorbitant amounts from Qatar Airways, Emirates and Air Arabia and submitted a chart of total \$60.54 million received by firms directly or indirectly owned by Mr. Talwar between April 23, 2008 to February 6, 2009. He has been charged with criminal conspiracy, forgery and under various other sections of the FCRA (Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act) for allegedly diverting \$90.72 crore worth of foreign funds meant for ambulances and other articles received by his NGO from Europe's leading missile manufacturing company. His role in some aviation deals during the previous.

Will prefer to face polls if AIADMK government goes, says Stalin



(Gns. News) If SC disqualifies Deputy CM O. Panneerselvam and 10 AIADMK MLAs for defying party whip in February 2017 and voting against Edappadi Palaniswami govt in Assembly, government will collapse, he notes. DMK president M.K. Stalin on Tuesday said he would prefer to face elections rather than forming a government if the AIADMK government collapsed following a possible disqualification by the Supreme Court of Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam and 10 AIADMK MLAs for defying the party whip in February 2017 and voting against the Edappadi Palaniswami government in the Assembly. Addressing party booth agents of the Manamadurai Assembly constituency in Sivaganga, Mr. Stalin said the AIADMK government, which was already a minority one, was hinging on the support of few MLAs. "The DMK [then] has a possibility of forming a government. But we don't want it. We don't like it. Panneerselvam and 10 AIADMK MLAs for defying the party whip in February 2017 and voting against the Edappadi Palaniswami government in the Assembly. Addressing party booth agents of the Manamadurai Assembly constituency in Sivaganga, because our [late] president M. Karunanidhi has taught us to not make a backdoor entry into power. He always wanted us to apprise people about the DMK's policies and get their support to form a government with good majority. So get ready for fulfilling his wishes," he said.

Punjab National Bank Q3 net rises 7.12% to ₹246.51 crore



(Gns. News) Punjab National Bank (PNB) on Tuesday posted 7.12% increase in net profit at ₹246.51 crore for its third quarter ended December 31, 2018, driven by lower provisioning for bad loans. PNB, which was involved in a ₹14,356-crore scam by Nirav Modi, had reported net profit of ₹230.11 crore for the corresponding quarter a year ago. The bank's total income, fell by 2.64% to ₹14,854.24 crore for the quarter under review from ₹15,257.5 crore in the year-ago quarter. PNB managing director

and CEO Sunil Mehta said the company's financial numbers are back in black. "We have honoured all our commitments. Our bank, as on date, has provided all for that incident [Nirav Modi fraud]. We suffered because of the one-off incident which has now been absorbed by the bank," Mr. Mehta said. PNB's asset quality, the bank said, its gross non-performing assets (NPAs) as a percentage to total advances rose to 16.33% from 12.11% in the year-ago period. Its net NPAs, however,

came down to 8.22% from 8.90% at the end of December 2017, PNB said in a BSE filing. Total provisions, excluding for income tax, made during the third quarter of the current financial year were ₹2,753.84 crore as against ₹4,466.68 crore in the year-ago period. Out of which, provisioning for bad loans stood at ₹2,565.77 crore as against ₹2,996.42 crore reported during the third quarter of the previous fiscal. Shares of PNB were trading 1.98% higher at ₹74.60 apiece on BSE.

Editorial

Visa crackdown: On Indian students' arrest



The arrest of 129 Indians on the charge of wilfully violating immigration laws to stay and work in the United States sends a stark message to youth looking for better prospects abroad: their efforts should begin with due diligence and strictly follow the letter of the law. In the sting operation carried out by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which threatens to encompass many more Indians in the 'University of Farmington' case, the contentious issue is whether they fell victim to unscrupulous recruiters who offered to secure an I-20 student document that allowed them to undertake paid work using the provision for Curricular Practical Training, or knowingly engaged in fraud. Going by the indictment of eight recruiters of Indian origin, they knew they were violating U.S. immigration law when they enrolled students using fraudulent and unlawful means, and their profits included negotiated referral fees paid into their accounts by undercover agents. The prosecution has alleged that each student who enrolled in the 'university' was aware that there would be no classes, credit scores or academic requirements, and the intention was merely to "pay to stay" and gain access to employment. These statements are, of course, subject to scrutiny during the trial of the alleged recruiters. The Ministry of External Affairs has made the correct distinction between students who may have been duped and the recruiters. Students who are eligible to pursue studies at an authorised university in the U.S. should, therefore, get a further opportunity and not be subjected to summary deportation or humiliation. It must also not prejudice the prospects of such students who may apply in future for legal entry.

The University of Farmington case in Michigan is not the first instance of Indian students falling foul of U.S. immigration laws, although it stands apart as a racket exposed by a sting operation. Others such as Tri-Valley University and Herguan University were degree mills run by individuals that used false claims and documents to enable youth to unlawfully stay in the U.S. and, in many cases, pursue employment. These trends reinforce the need for good communication that would help students identify credentialed institutions that meet the requirements of the Student and Exchange Visitor Program, and highlight the serious nature of visa fraud. If the averments in the Michigan case are correct, the prospect of working in America attracted many of the 600 students who were recruited. This should serve as a reminder to India's policymakers that access to higher education, job-creation and raising of living standards to meet the aspirations of youth must receive priority. Talk of an impending demographic dividend is meaningless without creating opportunities at home.

A national register of exclusion

(Gns. News) There are few parallels anywhere else of the state itself producing statelessness in the manner that it is doing in Assam. By requiring long-term residents of Assam to prove their citizenship by negotiating a thicket made up of bewildering and opaque rules and an uncaring bureaucracy, the Indian state has for the past two decades unleashed an unrelenting nightmare of wanton injustice on a massive swathe of its most vulnerable people. The official presumption that they are foreigners has reduced several million of these highly impoverished, mostly rural, powerless and poorly lettered residents to a situation of helplessness and penury. It has also caused them abiding anxiety and uncertainty about their futures. They are required to persuade a variety of usually hostile officials that they are citizens, based on vintage documents which even urban, educated, middle-class citizens would find hard to muster. And even when one set of officials is finally satisfied, another set can question them. And sometimes the same official is free again to send them a notice, starting the frightening cycle afresh. On February 2 and 3, I was in Guwahati listening to heart-breaking accounts from 53 people from 13 districts of Assam. This was as part of a people's tribunal on the National Register of Citizens (NRC), along with Justice Venkate Gopala Gowda, Colin Gonsalves, Monirul Hussain and Sanjoy Hazarika. What emerged were numbing stories of unyielding official bias and arbitrariness, of the denial of elementary "due process" and, above all, the complete absence of public compassion. Even old men frequently broke down as they spoke of all that they had endured. It emerged that the names of many persons were dropped from the draft NRC only because of minor differences in the spelling of Bengali names in English in different documents. We encountered several instances where the variation of a single letter, for example between Omar and Onar, was enough to rule that a person is a foreigner. Likewise, the rural unlettered are typically vague



about their dates of birth. A person could be excluded from citizenship if she told the tribunal that she was 40 when her documents recorded her to be 42. Women are especially in danger of exclusion from the citizenship register. Typically, they have no birth certificates, are not sent to school, and are married before they become adults. Therefore, by the time their names first appear in voters' lists, these are in the villages where they live after marriage, which are different from those of their parents. They are told that they have no documents to prove that they are indeed the children of the people they claim are their parents. There were cases of being excluded from citizenship on this ground alone. Impoverished migrant workers often travel to other districts of Assam in search of work, as construction workers, road-builders and coal-miners. In the districts to which they migrate, the local police frequently record their names as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The police then mark them out as illegal immigrants. They receive notices from foreigners' tribunals located in districts where they might have worked years earlier, far away from their home

districts they have to travel to for every hearing, adding further to their costs. The NRC is not the only institution through which the state challenges them to prove their citizenship. A second process began in the mid-1990s when the then Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan, as a one-time measure, directed officials to identify "doubtful voters" by marking a "D" against their names on the voters' list. This would temporarily bar them from voting or standing for elections, until an inquiry was completed. But this temporary measure became permanent. The power was vested permanently with junior officials who could doubt the citizenship of any person at any time without assigning any reason. Those with the dreaded "D" beside their names had no recourse for appeal under the rules, with years passing without any inquiry. The "D" also debarred them from being included in the draft NRC. A third process empowers the Assam Police to identify anyone it suspects to be a 'foreigner'. Again, all that the police claim in most cases is that the person was unable to show them documents establishing his or her citizenship. People consistently

deny that the police even asked them from documents. Why would they not show them these, when they all know the dangers of not allaying the suspicions of the police? All cases referred by the police are heard by Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs). Earlier, retired judges were appointed to these tribunals. The Bharatiya Janata Party government has appointed many lawyers (often members of the ruling party or the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) who have never been judges. This was as part of a people's tribunal on the National Register of Citizens (NRC), along with Justice Venkate Gopala Gowda, Colin Gonsalves, Monirul Hussain and Sanjoy Hazarika. What emerged were numbing stories of unyielding official bias and arbitrariness, of the denial of elementary "due process" and, above all, the complete absence of public compassion. Even old men frequently broke down as they spoke of all that they had endured. It emerged that the names of many persons were dropped from the draft NRC only because of minor differences in the spelling of Bengali names in English in different documents. We encountered several instances where the

variation of a single letter, for example between Omar and Onar, was enough to rule that a person is a foreigner. Likewise, the rural unlettered are typically vague about their dates of birth. A person could be excluded from citizenship if she told the tribunal that she was 40 when her documents recorded her to be 42. Women are especially in danger of exclusion from the citizenship register. Typically, they have no birth certificates, are not sent to school, and are married before they become adults. Therefore, by the time their names first appear in voters' lists, these are in the villages where they live after marriage, which are different from those of their parents. They are told that they have no documents to prove that they are indeed the children of the people they claim are their parents. There were cases of being excluded from citizenship on this ground alone. Impoverished migrant workers often travel to other districts of Assam in search of work, as construction workers, road-builders and coal-miners. In the districts to which they migrate, the local police frequently record their names as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. The police then mark them out as illegal immigrants. They receive notices from foreigners' tribunals located in districts where they might have worked years earlier, far away from their home districts they have to travel to for every hearing, adding further to their costs. The NRC is not the only institution through which the state challenges them to prove their citizenship. There are now FTs in which not a single person has been declared an Indian citizen over several months. Many allege that both the police and presiding officers in FTs work to fulfil informal targets to declare people foreigners. Even if a person finds her name in the NRC, the police can still refer her case to an FT: an election official can even deem her to be a "D"-voter. Article 20 of the Constitution includes as a

fundamental right that "no person shall be prosecuted and punished for the same offence more than once". But this principle has been waived for FTs. We found that even after an FT had confirmed a person to be an Indian citizen, another FT and often the same FT can again issue notice to the same person to prove her legitimate citizenship once more. A person is never allowed to feel secure that the state has finally accepted that she is an Indian citizen. In this way, the sword permanently hangs low over their heads. Who will be challenged before which institution to prove that they are Indian citizens? Will they or their loved ones be stripped of their citizenship rights, and by processes that are opaque, unreasonable and discriminatory? No person in any one of the testimonies that we heard was given legal aid by the state, which is bound to deploy lawyers paid by the state to fight their cases in the FTs and higher courts. People instead spoke of panic spending, of enormous amounts of money to pay lawyers, as well as for costs of travel of witnesses who they bring with them to testify in their favour. For this, they have had to sell all their assets or borrow from private moneylenders. The large majority of them are poorly educated and very impoverished, doing low-paid work such as drawing rickshaws, or working as domestic work or farm labour. With the entire burden of proving citizenship on their shoulders and the arbitrary and opaque multiple forums to which they are summoned, people deprived of both education and resources are caught in a Kafkaesque bureaucratic maze from which they find it hard to emerge. Trapped at the crossroads of history, their destinies depend on institutions that treat them with undisguised hostility and bias. There are indeed few parallels anywhere in the world of the state itself producing statelessness on the scale and in the manner that it is doing in Assam.

The warning signs are loud and clear

Three militants were killed and their bodies were recovered on Sunday after a gunbattle between the Militants and the security forces on the outskirts of Srinagar, which stretched for over 18 hours, came to an end. Photo: Nissar Ahmad After remaining in suspended animation for five months, the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly was dissolved by Governor Satya Pal Malik last month. After the November-December 2014 elections to the State Assembly, which produced a fractured mandate, J&K had some years of a Peoples Democratic Party-BJP coalition government, interspersed with a spell of Governor's rule. In June 2018, the BJP pulled out of this alliance. In November, when the PDP, the Congress and the National Conference had almost reached an understanding to form a government, the Governor decided to dissolve the Assembly. Four years of mismanaged politics have plunged J&K into its worst ever cycle of violence and confusion. Kashmir today is not merely volatile, but is drifting inexorably into anarchy. Violence is the dominant factor. The numbers of militants and security personnel killed dominate newspaper headlines. Over the past three years, South Kashmir had been the main epicentre of violence, but more recently, North and Central Kashmir have also emerged as violence prone. This year has witnessed some of the highest levels of violence since 1989. Areas such as Srinagar which had previously been declared a 'militancy free zone' have again witnessed a series of militant attacks. In addition to escalating violence, a distinct feature of the situation in Kashmir today is the divide between the administration and the populace, which is possibly at its widest today. The turnout in local body elections in urban areas dropped to a negligible percentage. Retrieving the situation in J&K would thus prove extremely difficult. J&K appears to be at a tipping point and needs to be handled with extreme care. A series of miscalculations by governments in both J&K and at the Centre have led to the present impasse. The first was Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's belief that his brand of 'sleight-of-hand' politics (which he used to practise with the Congress) could be replicated with the BJP, and hope thereby to sustain his legacy as a consummate politician. The hope, however, proved short-lived. After his death in January 2016, daughter Mehbooba Mufti had to be persuaded to continue with the arrangement, but increasing levels of violence after her takeover witnessed the coalition partners viewing the situation from very different angles. In the wake of the growing political dissonance, other miscalculations have also occurred. One was a misplaced belief in the virtues of an 'unilateral ceasefire' during Ramzan 2018, replicating the Ramzan ceasefire during the period of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Atavistic reasoning is, however, no substitute for a carefully constructed and calibrated ceasefire. Militants used the ceasefire to regroup, just when the security forces seemed to gain the upper hand. Pakistan also acted as a spoiler, carrying out a series of border attacks during this same period. Compounding this situation was the controversy generated over Article 35A of the Constitution, accompanied by demands that it should be revoked. It led to widespread apprehension that the Centre was trying to undermine the special concessions granted to J&K which were embedded in the Constitution. A crisis of confidence in Delhi's intentions followed, precisely when the State was reeling under a wave of militant protests. The gravest miscalculation arose on how best to deal with the rising crescendo of violence engulfing the Valley. Absence of political guidance, belief in the virtues of a 'muscular policy' to stamp out militancy, eschewing of all softer options, and an irrevocable breakdown in communications led to a widening chasm between the people of Kashmir and the administration. Once the PDP-BJP coalition collapsed under the weight of its inherent contradictions, reintroduction of Governor's rule (that is, rule by the Centre) turned out to be a case of the remedy being worse than the disease. Even as 2018 turned out to be highly violence prone, militants adopted a variety of new tactics to create fear. They targeted the families of policemen, in addition to concentrating on off-duty policemen, especially when they went home on leave. This led to a fear psychosis. The year has turned out to be the worst for the J&K police, with nearly 50 policemen being killed. In many respects, the killing of militant Burhan Wani in mid-2016 has been a watershed in the troubled security situation in J&K. Additions to militant ranks went up, and 2018 has possibly seen the largest accretion of local youth into militant ranks. According to one estimate, every third day a youth took up arms in Kashmir. The profile of those joining the ranks of the militants is also changing, with many more educated Kashmiri youth (including engineering and other graduates) signing up.

An appeasement Budget

(Gns. News) Interim Budget 2019 has sought to make amends for all the wrongs of almost five years of the Narendra Modi government. For example, the debilitating impact of demonetisation on the informal sector that employs nearly 90% of the workforce had long been suspected on the basis of anecdotal evidence. The findings of the National Sample Survey Office's surveys — leaked last week after they were approved by the National Statistical Commission — show that unemployment rose to a 45-year high in the demonetisation year. The note ban, these findings suggest, has caused severe distress. To reach out to the segment worst hit, the Interim Budget announced the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Mandhan for unorganised sector workers with monthly incomes of less than ₹15,000. With a token allocation of ₹500 crore, a direct benefit transfer of ₹3,000 a month as old-age pension has been proposed. Pensioners will receive the payments once they attain the age of 60. To be eligible, workers will have to start contributing ₹55 every month from the age of 18. Those over 29 will have to contribute ₹100 every month. The government will match these contributions. The scheme targets workers in sectors such as leather, handloom and construction which took a body blow from demonetisation. A possible inference can be that the Modi government does not expect — nor is it promising — upward mobility for this class to better quality jobs over the span of their working lives. The Modi government's tenure has been marked by acute rural distress. Among the reasons to which it can be ascribed are legacy farm sector policy issues which no government has addressed in a meaningful way. In this, Mr. Modi's government has been no different. The minimum support prices and procurement policies it followed were more ineffective than is normal. In fact these policies reversed some of the corrections made by the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in the terms of trade for agriculture. The Modi government has also failed to respond adequately to the back-to-back droughts of 2014 and 2015. The import-export policy errors made added to the gluts caused by



bumper harvests in 2017 and 2018, which further depressed market prices and increased farmer losses. The non-farming classes did profit to an extent from these policy failures. Falling food prices spelt losses for farmers but benefited kitchen budgets in middle-class households that had suffered from severe inflation under the UPA. The Interim Budget offers farmers a peace offering in the form of income support of ₹6,000 a year, or ₹500 a month, financed fully by the Central government. The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) — inspired by Telangana's Rythu Bandhu — targets only landed farmers who own up to 2 hectares, while bypassing landless cultivators, the most vulnerable class in the agriculture sector.

In handing out these fiscal giveaways, Mr. Modi has bitten the bullet by reaching out to a class of voters who are traditionally not a constituency of the BJP. But these giveaways suffer from the same populist, rather than reformist, approach seen earlier with demonetisation which was planned as a big bang intervention to downsize the black economy, and the design and implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). These mea-

sures, which were not thought through properly, led to perverse consequences. In a similar way, the PM-KISAN scheme is likely to encourage further fragmentation of already much fragmented landholdings. Farming households holding larger land parcels will try to split holdings to try to qualify for the benefits under the scheme. Had the scheme been dovetailed with a replacement of the highly distortionary fertilizer subsidy with a direct benefit cash transfer, not only would a long-pending reform have been accomplished but the income support offered to farmers could have been nearly twice as much as has been announced. Bureaucrats had made a case for adding the fertilizer subsidy as a cash component to the income support, but Mr. Modi showed no appetite for the reform. Even so, the Interim Budget leaves no doubt about which class of voters Mr. Modi is most eager to please. The gifts showered on the middle class outstrip those to the poorer sections who have borne the brunt of demonetisation and an incompetently designed GST. The income tax rebate for individuals drawing incomes of up to ₹5 lakh will leave nearly ₹1,000 a month more in their wallets. This is twice the amount farmers will receive

from the PM-KISAN scheme. And, middle class Indians will not, unlike unorganised sector workers, have to wait till they are 60 to receive the rebate or the other tax benefits announced, such as on fixed deposits and two self-owned houses. The findings of the National Sample Survey Office's surveys — leaked last week after they were approved by the National Statistical Commission — show that unemployment rose to a 45-year high in the demonetisation year. The note ban, these findings suggest, has caused severe distress. To reach out to the segment worst hit, the Interim Budget announced the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Mandhan for unorganised sector workers with monthly incomes of less than ₹15,000. With a token allocation of ₹500 crore, a direct benefit transfer of ₹3,000 a month as old-age pension has been proposed. Pensioners will receive the payments once they attain the age of 60. To be eligible, workers will have to start contributing ₹55 every month from the age of 18. Those over 29 will have to contribute ₹100 every month. The government will match these contributions. The scheme targets workers in sectors such as leather, handloom and construction which took a body blow from

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a 45-year high in the demonetisation year. The note ban, these findings suggest, has caused severe distress. To reach out to the segment worst hit, the Interim Budget announced the Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Mandhan for unorganised sector workers with monthly incomes of less than ₹15,000. With a token allocation of ₹500 crore, a direct benefit transfer of ₹3,000 a month as old-age pension has been proposed. Pensioners will receive the payments once they attain the age of 60. To be eligible, workers will have to start contributing ₹55 every month from the age of 18. Those over 29 will have to contribute ₹100 every month. The government will match these contributions. The scheme targets workers in sectors such as leather, handloom and construction which took a body blow from demonetisation. A possible inference can be that the Modi government does not expect — nor is it promising — upward mobility for this class to better quality jobs over the span of their working lives. The Modi government's tenure has been marked by acute rural distress. Among the reasons to which it can be ascribed are legacy farm sector policy issues which no government has addressed in a meaningful way. In this, Mr. Modi's government has been no different. The Interim Budget offers farmers a peace offering in the form of income support of ₹6,000 a year, or ₹500 a month, financed fully by the Central government. The Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) — inspired by Telangana's Rythu Bandhu — targets only landed farmers who own up to 2 hectares, while bypassing landless cultivators, the most vulnerable class in the agriculture sector. There was something for the rich too. The most positive, and the only reform-oriented announcement, was reserved for them — a promise of a complete digitalised experience in their dealings with the income tax department. This could end the excessive harassment and the tax terror that have been unleashed in the past couple of years. Finally, apart from making clear the class hierarchy in Mr. Modi's scheme of populism, the Interim Budget provides evidence, if any more was needed, that Indian electoral politics is dependent.

Jharkhand man reunited with family after seven years



(Gns. News) For over seven years, the family of 45-year-old Govind (name changed), who was suffering from mental illness, from Jharkhand thought he was dead after he went missing from his house. Now, due to the efforts of the State Crime Records Bureau (SCRB), he has been reunited with his family on Monday. It was an emotional scene at the East Eden Foundation in Namadhu Nagar, Kolapakkam, on Monday morning, when Govind's family arrived to take him back to his village in Jharkhand. "He does not remember how he landed in Chennai. We started searching for his family after his condition improved and he expressed his desire to go home," said A.S. Thahira, inspector, SCRB. It is suspected that Govind, developed mental illness reportedly due to problems at home. "Two years after marriage his wife left him. After this he does not remember when he left his house and landed in Chennai," added the inspector.

The staff of East Eden Foundation rescued him in 2015 and took care of him. Ms. Thahira, who visits various homes in the State to identify and reunite missing persons with their families, spotted him. Six months ago his condition improved and he expressed desire to go home. Based on instructions from SCRB, ADGP Seema Agarwal, the inspector started co-ordinating with the Jharkhand police. "We contacted Gola police station in Jharkhand, but there was little co-operation from the personnel there. Three months ago, a new inspector took charge of the same station and he helped us find the family," Ms. Thahira said. When the family came to know he was alive, they were happy. On Monday, his brother and other relatives came to Chennai to take him back. "He says he will take up farming in his village," added Ms. Thahira. In the last two years, the SCRB has helped reunite 200 persons with their families. About 140 of them were from other States. Most of them are from Uttar Pradesh and are aged above 25 years.

Storage in city lakes to improve after desilting



(Gns. News) The three major lakes that supply drinking water to the city would soon have better storage capacity. After many deadlines, the long-pending project to desilt the waterbodies and carry out improvement work is set to begin in two months. Following a recent government order, bids would be called next week for executing civil works in the lakes, including strengthening of the lake bund and improving channels that bring inflow to the waterbodies. The Water Resources Department has already started similar work in Cholavaram lake. The lakes in Red Hills, Poondi and Chembarambakkam would be desilted perhaps for the first time in many decades. Though the four water bodies are said to have a combined capacity of 11,257 million cubic feet (mcf), they are able to store only 80% of water due to siltation during monsoon, said sources in the WRD. Chembarambakkam reservoir, spread over 2,551 hectares, has been able to store 20% less than its original capacity due to silt deposits. Besides loss of the precious resource that would ensure drinking water supply for one or two additional months, a shallow reservoir also leads to inundation of surrounding areas. Officials of the WRD said two supply channels — Bangaru channel bringing water from Kosasthalaiyar and Cooum rivers and eight-km-long Chowdrikal channel would be desilted by May. The vulnerable portions of these channels would be repaired. The State government has sanctioned 74 crore towards the project. Similarly, supply channels of Poondi reservoir from Nandhi and Nagari arms and Kesavaram anicut would also be improved apart from laying approach roads at a cost of 711 crore. The department plans to execute a revenue generation model wherein the contractor would be allowed to sell silt removed from the four lakes. The project to be implemented over a period of four years is expected to generate about 700 crore. Of this, silt cleared from Chembarambakkam reservoir would generate a revenue of 180 crore. According to an earlier estimate, silt up to seven feet, or 5.39 crore cubic metres, is expected to be cleared from the reservoirs. Meanwhile, residents of Red Hills demand that measures must be taken to arrest release of sewage from places, including West Balaji Nagar, Ambattur.

BMC gets 12% boost

(Gns. News) The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) on Monday presented a budget of 30,692.59 crore, which was an increase of 12.60% over the last fiscal. This was the fourth time that Municipal Commissioner Ajay Mehta was presenting the budget before the standing committee. In its budget 2019-20, the civic body has set aside 20% more funds for capital expenditure despite a drop in revenue income from property tax and development plan departments. The civic body also has to make provision for implementing the 7th Pay Commission. Mr. Mehta, in his two-hour budget speech, elaborated on the civic body's financial health and future plans. He attributed the hike to big-ticket projects such as reconstruction of hospitals, and construction of the coastal road and sewage treatment plants. For the first time, Mr. Mehta had slashed the budget from 37,052 crore in 2016-17 to 25,151 crore in 2017-18 to make it more realistic.



He said, "The reforms implemented to prepare a transparent and realistic budget... are now showing a positive impact." He pointed out that before 2016-17, the BMC spent only 65% of the budget, but now expects to spend 86% by March 31. The BMC has made a provision of 211,480 crore for capital expenditure. Mr. Mehta said while capital expenditure is rising (32.31% to 37.41%), revenue expenditure is decreasing (67.69% to 62.59%). This fiscal,

India vs New Zealand: Time for Pant to make strong case in New Zealand T20s

(Gns. News) Rishabh Pant, who was not part of the ODIs, returns hungrier and has a big opportunity to stake a claim for a World Cup spot in the upcoming three T20s. File The two teams will play the first of 3 T20s, starting at Wellington on Wednesday. They have hit the homestretch of a memorable three-month tour and a rampant India will be fancying another series win when they clash with under pressure hosts New Zealand in the opening T20 International here on Wednesday. While regular skipper Virat Kohli is getting the much-needed rest, the Rohit Sharma-led squad will be hoping it has enough left in the tank to record a maiden T20 series win in New Zealand, following a record 4-1 result in ODIs and a historic tour of Australia. "We too are humans and our bodies need a bit of rest. Of course, we would be looking to win the series and carry the momentum back home for the Australia series," opener Shikhar Dhawan said on the eve of the game. The preceding ODI series solved a part of the puzzle as India look to finalise their 15 for the World Cup. But there are still a few spots up for grabs and the T20 series can help the team management zero in on the squad for the mega event in England in May-July. Young wicket-keeper batsman Rishabh Pant, who was not part of the ODIs, returns hungrier and has a big opportunity to stake a claim for a World Cup spot in the upcoming three T20s. Veteran Mahendra Singh Dhoni is back in the T20 mix after being omitted from the series against Australia last year and his performance will also be keenly followed. He last played a T20 in July. Following the high of the Test series Down Under, another stellar showing might just convince the selectors to



include Pant in the final 15. The series is also an opportunity for Dinesh Karthik, who has done well as a finisher but is still not a sure starter in the eleven. Ambati Rayudu grabbed his chance with a match-winning 90 in the fifth ODI, probably enough to seal a place in the middle-order. Nine-year-old Shubman Gill showed glimpses of his much talked talent in the final two ODIs but did not allow himself to settle in his debut series. In Kohli's absence, he might get to bat at number three again. Besides Pant, the others who have joined the team are spin all-rounder Krunal Pandya and Punjab pacer Siddharth Kaul. In the absence of seniors like Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammad Siraj and Khaleel Ahmed have not made much of an impact and they will

be aiming for a breakthrough performance. Dhawan did not do well in the last three ODIs against New Zealand and is eager to finish the tour on a high. Ahead of the game, he was also seen practising with a tennis ball to counter the bounce and swing generated by the home team's pacers. New Zealand will be desperate to turn things around after a 1-4 drubbing. They do hold an upper hand over India in the shortest format. They beat India 2-0 in the 2008-09 in the sole bilateral series played on New Zealand soil till date. New Zealand edged the sub-continental side 1-0 in a two-match away series in 2012 before losing 1-2 in India in 2017-18. The ball swung initially at the Westpac Stadium on Sunday and New Zealand pacers will be itching to

exploit that but they won't have the services of premier fast bowler Trent Boult, who has been rested. It will be interesting to see what rookie all-rounder Daryl Mitchell and pacer Blair Tuckner do in their debut series. Kane Williamson (c), Doug Bracewell, Colin de Grandhomme, Lockie Ferguson, Scott Kuggeleijn, Colin Munro, Daryl Mitchell, Mitchell Santner, Tim Seifert, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor, Blair Tuckner, James Neesham, Rohit Sharma (c), Shikhar Dhawan, Rishabh Pant, Dinesh Karthik, Kedar Jadhav, MS Dhoni, Krunal Pandya, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Bhuvne shwar Kumar, Siddharth Kaul, Khaleel Ahmed, Shubman Gill, Vijay Shankar, Hardik Pandya, Mohammad Siraj.

TDP govt presents vote-on-account budget with a proposed expenditure of nearly 2,26,178 crore

(Gns. News) Andhra Pradesh Finance Minister Yanamala Ramakrishna presented the vote-on-account budget for 2019-20 in the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday with a proposed expenditure of nearly 2,26,178 crore, estimated revenue expenditure of about 21,80,369 crore and capital expenditure of approximately 29,597 crore. The 2019-20 budget estimates entail an overall increase of around 18.38% over the 2018-19 estimates. The estimated revenue deficit is around 72,100 crore and the fiscal deficit is estimated at 32,391 crore. The fiscal deficit will be around 3.03% of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) whereas the revenue deficit would be around 0.20% of the GSDP. Total liabilities of the State have increased from 1,48,744 crore in 2014-15 to 2,23,706 crore in 2017-18, which correspond to 28.33% of GSDP in 2014-15 and 27.83% of the GSDP in 2017-18. The finance accounts for 2017-18 showed a revenue deficit of roughly 16,152 crore and a fiscal deficit of 32,373 crore for 2017-18. For 2018-19, the revised estimates of revenue expenditure stood at 21,58,859 crore, whereas for capital expenditure it is 25,021 crore. Revenue deficit for 2018-19 is estimated to be 2,494 crore, whereas the fiscal deficit for the same period is estimated to be 29,142 crore. The expenditure



on State development schemes has gone up from 49,103 crore in 2018-19 to 76,548 crore in 2019-20. The Scheduled Castes component went up from 71,229 crore to 74,367 crore. The ST component has gone up from 24,176 crore to 25,385 crore. A new scheme called 'Annadata Sukhibhava' with an allocation of 25,000 crore has been introduced. A sum of 2500 crore has been earmarked to take up land

acquisition for house sites and 2400 crore for promotion of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Besides, the budget contained an allocation of 2150 crore for the proposed Drivers' Sathikara Samstha, 2100 crore for creation of infrastructure in urban local bodies under the Comprehensive Infrastructure Investment Scheme and 250 crore for the welfare of Kshatriyas. The Finance Department got the highest allocation of 46,254 crore followed by Panchayat Raj and Rural Development 31,209 crore, Secondary Education 28,524 crore, Agriculture and Marketing 24,585 crore and Water Resources 21,486 crore. The total allocation to all departments as per the revised estimates for 2018-19 was 21,96,949 crore and in the 2019-20 budget, it has gone up to 22,26,178 crore.

After a good start, DDA set to launch Phase-II of housing scheme

(Gns. News) Over 200 flats in two locations to go on sale from Thursday. The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) is set to launch the second phase of the housing scheme on Thursday, senior officials said. Over 200 flats in two locations will be offered for sale from 3 p.m. on February 7. "While 150 flats in Lok Nayak Puram will be offered for sale, around 75 flats in Rohini Sector-4 will be put up for consideration. The flats in the first location are all one-bedroom flats while in Rohini they are janta flats," said DDA Housing Commissioner Rajiv Gandhi. All the flats being offered under the scheme are the ones which were returned by allottees under the 2017 housing scheme, citing issues with the size of the flats, said senior DDA officials. The urban body had launched the first phase of the housing scheme in January this year. While initially over 1,200 flats in Ramnagar Colony, Seerapur and Narela were put up for sale, more flats were added later. "We got a good response to the first phase and added more under Phase-I. Out of the total 1,800



flats up for consideration, 1,150 have already been booked. They are all one-bedroom flats," said Mr. Gandhi. He added, "The online portal for the first phase is continuing and interested flat buyers can book the flats. It is on a first come first served basis. However, booking for the flats being put up for consideration under the second lot will be available only from Thursday evening." While the DDA

did not launch any housing scheme in 2018, DDA Vice-Chairman Tarun Kapoor had earlier said that this year, it will be launched in phases. With the flats under the current scheme being ones which were returned under the 2017 scheme, senior officials had said that services in the various areas, including last-mile connectivity, have been improved to facilitate buyers.

Media should improve public understanding of cancer: N. Ram



(Gns. News) Justice M. Govindaraj, Madras High Court and Dr. V. Shanta, chairman, Cancer Institute (WIA) at the event on Monday. Sensitisation programme held at Cancer Institute. The media needs to allot more space in the newspaper and more time on television or radio to report on cancer. N. Ram, chairman of The Hindu Group of Publications, said on Monday. Speaking at a sensitisation programme for media personnel on 'World Cancer Day', organised by Cancer Institute (WIA), he said the media needs to put out messages that improve public understanding of cancer. "The risks of misinformation in this area are very high and it doesn't matter whether that misinformation was deliberate or unintended. You have the trust of a lot of people and it could cause a great deal of harm," he said. There is the trap of sensationalism to grab the audience's attention, he added. "If you [report] without exercising conscience, information will be mixed with misinformation; there has been research to show the impact this has, on the public's behaviour," Mr. Ram said. V. Shanta, chairman, Cancer Institute (WIA), said a majority of cancers are preventable and curable, if detected early. Media should help in getting rid of the stigma of the patient, she said. "Stigma is the worst thing for a patient. Highly educated people don't want to say they have cancer; this kind of a stigma needs to be eradicated. We can create an impact [that cancer is curable] if [the efforts] are continuous. We should inculcate this education at school level," she added. M. Govinda Raj, judge, Madras High Court, and E. Mariappan, Additional Director General, Press Information Bureau, also spoke during the occasion.

IIT-D alumnus pledges financial aid to help fight pollution



(Gns. News) Contributes 75 crore to Centre of Excellence for Research on Clean Air, inaugurated in February last year. To understand better the source of air pollution through systematic data generation and help come up with interventions to address these sources of pollution, Arun Duggal, an alumnus of IIT Delhi, has made a financial contribution to IIT Delhi's Centre of Excellence for Research on Clean Air (CERCA). The institute said Mr. Duggal has pledged 75 crore for CERCA, which was inaugurated in February last year, to assist policy makers in the government dealing with air quality issues by providing scientific information and objective feedback on various pollution control measures. Director of IIT Delhi, V Ramgopal Rao said the institute has taken many steps to address the air quality problems in Delhi by understanding the sources of air pollution through systematic data generation and validation. "Through the efforts of Mr. Duggal and the institute, we are now able to put a team together and connect them with the key government agencies to come up with technological and policy interventions to address the sources of pollution, whether it is the paddy straw burning issue in neighbouring states or addressing the vehicular pollution levels in Delhi," Mr. Rao said. According to CERCA's annual review report, in order to improve the air quality in Delhi-NCR, stringent measures are required in all the sectors in addition to the already planned strategies. These include substantial investments in renewable energy, electric mobility, public transportation, particularly electric buses, expanded use of gas for power generation and industry including brick kilns. IIT Delhi also said that it was in the process of installing sophisticated Beta Attenuation Monitoring (BAM) equipment for continuous monitoring of ambient air quality in IIT campus to enable further research on air quality as well as for calibrating of other air quality monitoring equipment.

Efforts to sabotage federal system alleged



(Gns. News) Jose K. Mani, MP, during his 'Kerala Yathra' in Ernakulam district. The developments in West Bengal involving the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the police were an example of efforts to sabotage the federal system in the country, said Jose K. Mani, MP, here on Monday. He was speaking at the conclusion of 'Kerala Yathra' in the district on Monday. The 'Yathra' is being organised by the Kerala Congress (M) focussing on protection of farmers, a secular India and a new

Kerala. He said that the CBI could not take action without the consent of the State government and these developments were a violation of the State's rights. The 'Yathra' entered the district on Monday morning and meetings were held at Paravur and Aluva before it ended for the day at the Kerala High Court Junction in the city. The 'Yathra' will continue on Tuesday and tour Kunthunadu, Moovattupuzha and Kothamangalam before it ends in the State capital on February 15.

Jayaram case: suspect tried sham accident



(Gns. News) Victim was killed in Hyderabad and body taken in car towards Vijayawada Rakesh Reddy, prime suspect in the murder of Chigurupati Jayaram (55), managing director of the defunct Telugu news channel, Express TV, made vain bid to recreate accident-like scene to cover up his involvement in the crime. Highly placed police sources in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana confirmed that Reddy wanted to go scot-free, as he was much aware of Jayaram's programme to Vijayawada on January 31. They also maintained that Reddy, who confined Jayaram since January 30 afternoon, had no intention to kill him, but the murder occurred on the spur of the moment, following an altercation between them.

"The offence took place between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. on January 31 at Reddy's residence on Road No. 10 of Jubilee Hills, where he forcefully confined Jayaram for almost 24 hours," an officer associated with the investigation said. Police said that Jayaram borrowed ₹4.5 crore from Reddy and paid interest for a few months, but failed to return the amount. In an attempt to get back his money, the suspect, confined Jayaram and managed to get ₹60 lakh from the latter's associates on the intervening night on January 30 and January 31. "When he failed to get more money, Reddy entered into an argument with Jayaram, following which he smothered him to death. He told us that he had no plans to kill the victim," the officer said. Hours after killing Jayaram, Reddy shifted the body into a car, took Hyderabad-Vijayawada highway, only to recreate an accident scene, but in vain, the investigator said. "Reddy, who knew about Jayaram's Vijayawada tour, tried to recreate accident scene with the help of his friends. After leaving the car on the highway, he took a bus to Hyderabad," he said.

SC orders Kolkata Police chief to make himself available before CBI for questioning

(Gns. News) Rajeev Kumar-CBI meet to happen in 'neutral' Shillong; the apex court also bars the CBI from taking coercive steps against him: In a decision to defuse the tension between the Mamata Banerjee government and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the Supreme Court on Tuesday walked the middle path by ordering Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar to make himself "available" for questioning by the agency, which has in turn been barred from taking any coercive steps against the senior police officer, including his arrest. "We direct the Rajeev Kumar to appear and make himself available to the CBI and faithfully co-operate with the CBI at all times... No coercive steps, including arrest, should be taken against the Kolkata Police Commissioner," Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi ordered as the head of a three-judge Bench. To avoid trouble or mud-slinging, the court went to the extra length of scheduling the meeting between Mr. Kumar and the CBI at "neutral" Shillong and not anywhere in West Bengal, least of all in politically-charged Kolkata, where Ms. Banerjee is still holding a dhama claiming the attempt to arrest of Mr. Kumar on January 3 night as an instance of high-handedness by the Narendra Modi government. The court, however, issued notice on a contempt petition filed by the CBI against the West Bengal Chief Secretary, DGP and Mr. Kumar. The court asked them to file their reply on or before February 18. If found necessary, the trio will have to be personally present in the Supreme Court on February 20, the next date of hearing. The case was taken up on priority basis by the court on Tuesday.



Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal, appearing for the CBI, informed the court that Mr. Kumar was the "functional head" of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) formed by the West Bengal government which investigated the chit fund cases, including the multi-crore Saradha and Rose Valley scams, before they were transferred by the Supreme Court to the CBI on May 9, 2014. Mr. Venugopal said the chit fund scams were connected to powerful persons in the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) party. "We found that some of the documents handed over to the CBI by Mr. Kumar was doctored. They were not all there. We summoned him, but he did not come. We wrote the DGP, there was no response. The cell phone of Mr. Sudipto Sen

[main accused in Saradha scam] was returned to him by the SIT. Call records were not complete. Discrepancies were seen in the number of calls. Information on who called and to whom are missing... The call records were doctored," Mr. Venugopal submitted. Reacting to this, Chief Justice Gogoi observed orally that "there should be no difficulty for the Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar to co-operate". "Yes, that is all we want," Mr. Venugopal said. Mr. Venugopal said the CBI has also filed a contempt petition. The charges made in it are "far more serious". Pushing for the court to take immediate cognizance, Mr. Venugopal described how the CBI officers were "pushed around, bundled into a bus and illegally confined in a police station for hours. The

Joint Director's house was laid siege". "On whose orders were the police acting on? Who is behind all this?" the Attorney-General asked. Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta added that CBI officers have been harassed by the local police ever since they took over the probe. He said Calcutta High Court had not given Mr. Kumar any protection. Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi countered that an attempt was under way to humiliate Mr. Kumar. The "secret operation" happened on the last day in office of interim CBI Director M. Nageshwar Rao. "What is the problem in co-operation with the CBI? Besides, none of you parties have any effect on us. We will direct the Police Commissioner to make himself available... We will issue contempt notice," said Chief Justice Gogoi.

What's her contribution to Mandya, asks Kumaraswamy



(Gns. News) Close on the heels of Sumalatha, wife of actor-politician the late M.H. Ambareesh, saying that she is firm on contesting the Lok Sabha elections from Mandya or not at all, Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy, whose party is keen to keep this seat, questioned her contribution to the district. "What is Ms. Sumalatha's contribution to Mandya? Even when her husband was representing Mandya (in Parliament and later in Assembly), what was her contribution to the district?" Mr. Kumaraswamy wondered during an informal interaction with journalists in Bengaluru on Monday. He said that it was the tragedy of her husband's recent death that had suddenly brought her to the media limelight and political arena. The issue of Ms. Sumalatha's candidature for Mandya came up when he was asked if his action of often publicly shedding tears would not go against him in politics. He argued that it could, on the contrary, go in his favour as it has done in the case of Ms. Sumalatha. "In fact people, especially in rural areas, sympathise with me," he said. He said that "tragic heroes" are not only accepted by people but also get their sympathy. "What is Ms. Sumalatha's contribution to Mandya? Even when her husband was representing Mandya (in Parliament and later in Assembly), what was her contribution to the district?" Mr. Kumaraswamy wondered during an informal interaction with journalists in Bengaluru on Monday. He said that it was the tragedy of her husband's recent death that had suddenly brought her to the media limelight and political arena. The issue of Ms. Sumalatha's candidature for Mandya came up when he was asked if his action of often publicly shedding tears would not go against him in politics. "People accept tragic heroes. In our culture, tragedy earns sympathy," he said, adding that this is true in the field of politics as well.

Trump has solid U.S. economy for SOTU, but threats remain

(Gns. News) Mr. Trump will likely tout the latest signs of strength- Friday's jobs report showed that employers added the most jobs in January in nearly a year. President Donald Trump will enjoy the backdrop of a mostly solid economy as he delivers his second State of the Union address on Tuesday night, though questions about its sustainability linger. Mr. Trump will likely tout the latest signs of strength- Friday's jobs report showed that employers added the most jobs in January in nearly a year. The proportion of Americans working or looking for work reached a roughly five-year high. And a separate report showed that factory output rose at a healthy clip in December. Those figures, however, haven't fully erased concerns about an array of headwinds facing the U.S. economy this year. Several challenges loom- Overseas growth is stumbling, led by weakness in China, the world's second-largest economy. Europe is hamstrung by a recession in Italy and the potential for an unruly Brexit. A trade war between the U.S. and China and higher U.S. mortgage rates, partly engineered by the Federal Reserve, remain threats. The impact of the administration's tax cut may fade. And a 35-day partial government shutdown will likely trim official measures of growth for the first quarter, economists say. U.S. businesses are defying those headwinds, for now. Many analysts attribute the economy's current health to Mr. Trump's tax cuts in late 2017 and a jump in government spending last year, as part of a budget deal between the administration and Congress. "No other major economy in the world did what we did," said Ethan Harris, global economist at Bank of America Merrill Lynch. "The stimulus did a very good job of covering up all the blemishes of the economy, including the risks of the trade war." Economic growth reached 3.8 percent last spring and summer, the fastest six-month pace in four years. It also accelerated job gains at a time when many economists expected hiring to slow. With the unemployment rate already low, analysts figured that companies would have fewer unemployed people to hire. Yet employers stepped up their hiring and drove the unemployment rate down to 3.7 percent in November, the lowest in five decades. It has since ticked up to 4 percent, partly because of government workers who were temporarily unemployed because of the shutdown. White House officials say the good



times will continue. Kevin Hassett, a top administration economist, forecasts that growth will clock in at 3 percent a year for the next decade. He predicts that the administration's corporate tax cuts will entice businesses to invest more in machinery, software and buildings, which will make workers more productive and generate longer-term growth. So far there is little evidence that that is happening, economists say. After a burst of investment in the first half of last year, companies have since pulled back on spending. Some economists attribute their caution to the administration's trade war with China. "They're willing to add more people that's good," said Diane Swonk, chief economist at Grant Thornton, referring to U.S. businesses. But "right now they're not willing to pull the trigger and bet on building more capacity. That undermines your foundation for future growth." Most economists expect the impact of the tax cuts and extra government spending to fade as the year progresses and for the rate hikes the Fed has already imposed to hold back growth somewhat. Inevitably, too, a prolonged global slump would weaken the U.S. economy as well. Exactly how the U.S. economy is faring is harder than usual to judge because many data reports, including the quarterly figures on growth, are still delayed from the shutdown. The government hasn't yet said when it will release its first estimate of

gross domestic product the broadest gauge of the economy for the final three months of 2018. Trends that had looked alarming a month or two ago now appear benign, perhaps even supportive of growth. The stock market, having plunged nearly 20 percent late last year, rose 8 percent in January, its best monthly performance since 2015. Americans who are invested in stocks typically cut spending when market indexes fall steadily. That is now less likely to happen. And suddenly the Fed under Chairman Jerome Powell looks like an economic ally. The central bank had raised its benchmark short-term interest rate four times last year action that helped make mortgages and other consumer and business loans costlier. In December, the Fed's policymakers said they envisioned raising rates twice more this year. But this week, the Fed held its benchmark rate steady and sent its strongest signal to date that it saw no need to raise rates in the coming months perhaps even for the rest of the year. Its message ignited a rally on Wall Street, which cheered the prospect of continued modest borrowing rates for the near future. At the same time, Swonk points out that home and auto sales are declining, suggesting they have peaked. A slowdown in such major purchases could weigh on growth in the coming months.

Parliament live updates: Modicare is bigger than Obamacare, says BJPMP as Lok Sabha discusses Motion of Thanks to the President's address

(Gns. News) BJP member Hukumdev Narayan Yadav speaks in Lok Sabha on Tuesday. Rajya Sabha proceedings washed out as opposition members protest Both Houses of Parliament witnessed adjournments due to repeated disruption over the political situation in Kolkata, where Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is on a sit-in against what she calls the Centre's high-handedness. Almost every Opposition party, barring the Left, have extended support to the Trinamool Congress in Parliament. "Modicare is bigger than Obamacare," BJP member Jagdamika Pal says. The Modi government, through the Ayushman Bharat, has ensured no one dies due to lack of money to pay for treatment. For the first time an Indian Prime Minister inaugurated the World Economic Forum plenary. "It is the pride of every Indian," Mr. Pal says. Every party had promised reservation to the poor, in their manifesto, but only the Modi government fulfilled the promise. Jagdamika Pal (BJP) is the next speaker. He recalls how Prime Minister Narendra Modi vowed that his government would be pro-poor. The President's address reflects Mr. Modi's thoughts, he says. Mr. Pal recalls scams such as coalgate, 2G and CWG scams that surfaced during the UPA regime and says no such scams happened in the NDA rule. Targetting the protesting parliamentarians, Mr. Pal says constructive Opposition is one that points the shortcomings of the government and not the one that merely protests. He lists out the pro-poor schemes of the government such as free LPG connection, rural electrification and the recent announcement of Rs. 6000 to small farmers. Mr. Pal says the government is pro-farmer too. As many as 26 farm produce have come under the MSP (minimum support price) regime. The MSP has been fixed at 1.5 times the production cost. Procurement has upped by 13 times today, he claims. The House resumes. Hukumdev Narayan Yadav continues his speech. Opposition members continue sloganeering. You are likening the Prime Minister to a thief, but the Prime Minister ensured the country is not looted, Mr. Yadav says. Mr. Yadav says he comes from a humble background, a son of a farmer. This government has conferred Padma award to me, and to many humble people like me, Mr. Yadav says. Mr. Yadav says the upcoming elections is a bi-



polar contest between Narendra Modi and others. He says the youth of India will once again take Mr. Modi to the Red Fort. Hukumdev Narayan Yadav targets the Opposition in his speech. He says those who oppose the government are living in bungalows, they don't know the pains of a poor person. As he continues his speech, Samajwadi Party member Dharmendra Yadav protests, seeks some portions of his speech to be expunged. More members join him. House is adjourned till Lok Sabha reassembles. Hukumdev Narayan Yadav kickstarts the debate on Motion of Thanks to the President's address. Opposition members continue with sloganeering. A woman member tries to obstruct Mr. Yadav from speaking. Speaker Sumitra Mahajan warns her. Ms. Mahajan also allows Mr. Yadav to make his speech sitting down in his place, considering his age. But he rises to speak. Mr. Yadav was recently conferred Padma Bhushan. The veteran socialist quotes Ram Manohar Lohia in his speech. He lauds the Jan Dhan Yojana and the direct benefit transfer schemes of the Union government. Mr. Yadav says over 98 per cent homes now have at least one toilet. It not only improves hygiene, it also empowers the women, bridges the gap between rich and poor, he says. B. Narendra Modi government is striving to provide roti, kapada and makaan to every Indian, Mr. Yadav says. He claims the direct benefit transfer has eliminated middlemen and that is why these "middlemen" are against the government. Rajya Sabha reas-

sembles. Deputy Chairperson Harivansh is in the Chair. He takes up the Motion of Thanks to the President's address. He invites Bhupender Yadav to speak. Opposition members led by Trinamool Congress members raise slogans. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vijay Goel accuses Trinamool Congress of disrupting the House and not allowing the CBI to carry its duties. Mr. Harivansh appeals for calm, but in vain. House is adjourned for the day. Nishikant Dubey (BJP) raises the issue of Mamata Banerjee's sit-in. He accuses her of stopping an independent probe and seeks the House to call it unconstitutional. Members protest. Shashi Tharoor (Congress) says "irresponsible political parties" are hijacking the genuine protests of devotees in Sabarimala. He seeks a legislature to protect religious freedom. Konda Vishveshwar Reddy (TRS) accuses Ola and Uber of monopolising the radio taxi market. He says these firms are harassing and exploiting drivers. Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma (BJP) seeks immediate release of funds to undertake pending railway projects in his constituency in Uttar Pradesh. Opposition members continue with sloganeering. A woman member tries to obstruct Mr. Yadav from speaking. Speaker Sumitra Mahajan warns her. Ms. Mahajan also allows Mr. Yadav to make his speech sitting down in his place, considering his age. But he rises to speak. Mr. Yadav was recently conferred Padma Bhushan. The veteran socialist quotes Ram Manohar Lohia in his speech. He lauds the Jan Dhan Yojana and the direct benefit transfer schemes of the Union government. Mr. Yadav says over 98 per cent homes now have at least one toilet. It not only improves hygiene, it also empowers the women, bridges the gap between rich and poor, he says. B. Narendra Modi government is striving to provide roti, kapada and makaan to every Indian, Mr. Yadav says. House is adjourned till 2 pm. Lok Sabha members chant slogans and enter the Well of the House. Speaker Sumitra Mahajan proceeds with the Question Hour but the question and answer are barely audible. The Speaker addresses the protesting members. "The Supreme Court is hearing the case. The CBI is taking action. But you all don't want to believe in any institution. Please go back to the seat," she says but members don't yield. House is adjourned till 12.00 noon. Parliament live updates: Modicare is bigger than Obamacare, says BJPMP as Lok Sabha discusses Motion of Thanks to the President's address Rajya Sabha assembles. Rajya Sabha Chairperson M. Venkaiah Naidu is in the Chair. He informs the House that three former members of the House and a sitting member have been conferred with Padma Awards. Bharat Ratna awardees Pranab Mukherjee and Nanaji Deshmukh were also part of the upper House. Kuldeep Nayyar, Hukumdev Narayan Yadav, and Sardar Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa were also part of the House. The House appreciate the services of these distinguished people and congratulates them, the Vice President says.