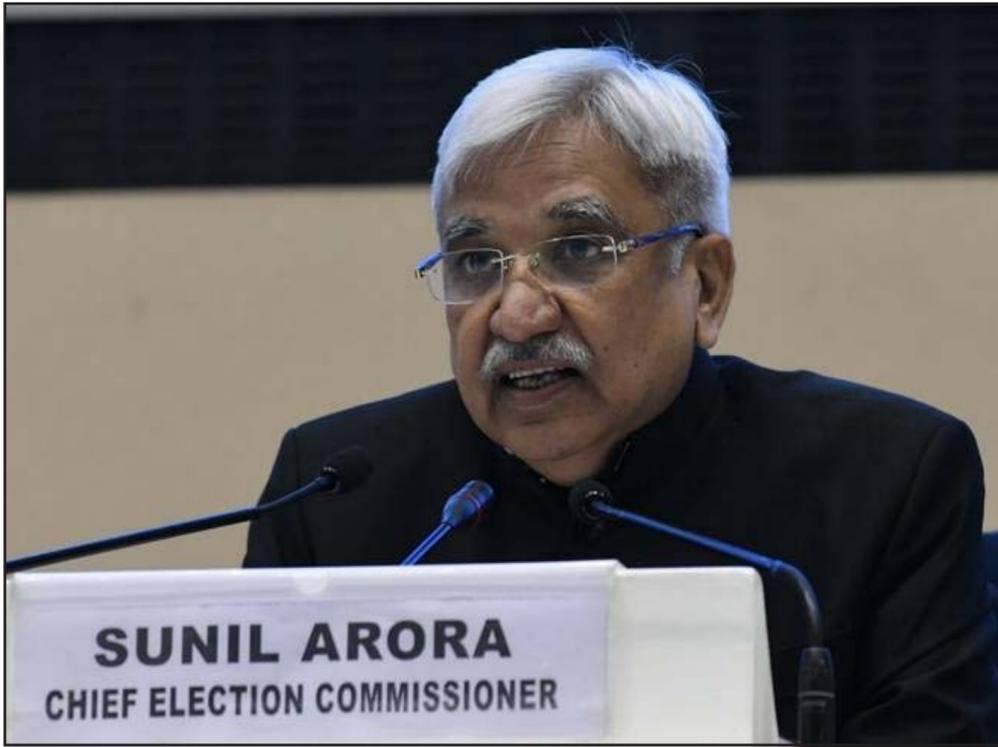




90 crore eligible to vote in 17th General Election; VVPATs in all polling stations

(Day Today) Chief Election Commissioner of India Sunil Arora addressing media to announce the dates for the General Elections 2019. Model Code of Conduct comes into effect; candidates with criminal antecedents need to announce their status thrice before poll date. The Election Commission is announcing the schedule for the high-voltage Lok Sabha elections. The term of the present Lok Sabha ends on June 3. The notification for the first phase Lok Sabha poll, which is likely to be spread over seven to eight phases in April-May, could be issued by the end of March for voting some time in early April, sources suggested. As soon as the elections, in which Prime Minister Narendra Modi will make his bid to return to power amid hectic parleys by several political parties to put a united front against the ruling BJP, are announced, the model code of conduct will come into force. The Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora and the two Election Commissioners Ashok Lavasa and Sushil Chandra have arrived at the Plenary Hall to announce the 17 Lok Sabha poll dates. The CEC is now making his introductory remarks. Recalls the first election and how it sur-



SUNIL ARORA
CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER

vived the cynicism of the world democracies then. He now appraises about the series of the meeting the ECI held in States about poll-preparedness. Nearly 90 million voters are eligible to vote in the polls. That is more than 84 million more than last polls. About 10 lakh polling station this time compared to 9 lakh in 2014 polls. Mr. Arora reiterates the announcement that the photo voter slip is no longer a standalone poll document. And the last button in the EVMs is the NOTA option. Photos of candidates will be displayed in EVMs for the first time. VVPATs to be used with EVMs at all stations. Stringent steps for transport and security of EVMs and VVPATs he says. Model Code of Conduct comes into effect today itself, he says.

Non-filing of revised Form 26 will result in rejection of candidature. The form seeks info on income of candidates, spouse, dependents, HuF and also assets located overseas and PAN, he says. Candidates with criminal antecedents need to announce their status thrice before the poll date in local newspapers. On Central observers, the ECI has decided to send sufficient number of senior officials to spending-sensitive States, he says. An app has already been introduced for extending facilities to persons with disabilities, Mr. Arora says. In 2014, the Lok Sabha poll announcement was made on March 5. The elections for the 16th Lok Sabha, along with the Assembly polls in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim, were held on nine different

dates, compared with the five-phase exercise in the 2009 elections. Have a look at Former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi's tweet: Dates for Odisha, Sikkim, A.P., Arunachal Assembly polls. There is a strong possibility that the EC may go by the precedent and hold Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh along with the Lok Sabha polls. Since the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly has been dissolved, the ECI is bound to hold fresh polls there as well within a six-month period, which will end in May. ECI presser at Plenary Hall, Vigyan Bhawan. The poll panel will be holding a press conference at 5 p.m. at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi. The term of the present Lok Sabha ends on June 3.

Report says 'no survivors' in Ethiopian Airlines flight crash



(News Track) Workers service an Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 737-800 plane at the Bole International Airport in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa. "There are no survivors on board the flight, which carried passengers from 33 countries," says state-run Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, quoting an unidentified source at the airline. NAIROBI - An Ethiopian Airlines flight to Nairobi crashed early on Sunday with 149 passengers and eight crew members aboard, a spokesman for the airline informs. "It is confirmed it happened 8:44 (a.m.)," says the spokesman who did not give his name. The Ethiopian prime minister's office offered its "deepest condolences" to the families. "The group CEO who is at the accident scene right now regrets to confirm that there are no survivors," the company says in a statement confirming the death toll. Meanwhile, eight Chinese passengers were on the crashed flight, Chinese state TV reports. CCTV says on a social media site that "eight Chinese citizens were aboard" the Flight ET 302 which crashed near the town of Bishoftu shortly after takeoff. Ethiopia's state broadcaster says all passengers on crashed Ethiopian Airlines plane are dead. "There are no survivors on board the flight, which carried passengers from 33 countries," says state-run Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, quoting an unidentified source at the airline. "Data from Flightradar24 ADS-B network show that vertical speed was unstable after take off." Swedish flight-tracking website flightradar24 says on its Twitter feed. Ethiopian Airlines has released the emergency hotline numbers: The Airlines says it would send staff to the accident scene to "do everything possible to assist the emergency services." Live: Report says 'no survivors' in Ethiopian Airlines flight crash. The crash occurred around Bishoftu, or Debre Zeit, about 50 kilometers (31 miles) south of the capital, shortly after taking off at 8:38 a.m. local time from Bole International Airport and "losing contact" six minutes later, says the airline's statement. Ethiopian Airlines has released the emergency hotline numbers: The Airlines says it would send staff to the accident scene to "do everything possible to assist the emergency services." Live: Report says 'no survivors' in Ethiopian Airlines flight crash. The airline has not issued a statement. The state-owned Ethiopian Airlines calls itself Africa's largest carrier and has ambitions of becoming the gateway to the continent. The crash comes as the country's reformist prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, has vowed to open up the airline and other sectors to foreign investment in a major transformation of the state-centered economy. The Ethiopian Prime Minister's office issued a statement on Sunday morning saying the Boeing 737 was on a regularly scheduled flight when it crashed. The statement has no further details.

Working to get China's support on listing Masood Azhar: U.S. official



(News Track) The United States is working to convince China to allow the listing of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) Chief Masood Azhar by the UNSC 1267 Committee, a senior administration official, who did not want to be named, said, speaking exclusively to "We are working hard to convince China. It is not in China's interest to shield terrorist groups operating in Pakistan, and as a responsible global power, China should take a clear stand against terrorism. So we expect China to join in designating Masood Azhar as a terrorist," the official said. The official said that the U.S. felt India's frustration and that Pakistan has been isolated over the February 14 Pulwama attack and its aftermath. The U.S. was looking for permanent action by Pakistan to end its support for terror. Also read | Hamad Azhar's name new to intel agencies. Pakistan had, last week reportedly detained more than 120 individuals connected to terror groups, taken over madrasas and seized assets of terror groups including those of Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) — a sister organization of militant outfit Lakshar-e-Taiba (LeT) and its charity arm, Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation (FIF) both organizations of Hafiz Saeed, a U.N. designated terror-

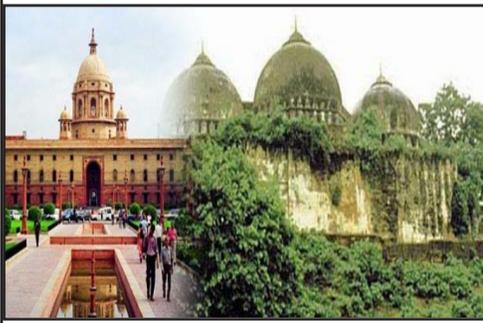
Centre cancels sixth, seventh rounds of coal mines auction



(News Track) However, the government did not specify the reasons for the cancellation. The Centre has cancelled the sixth and seventh rounds of coal mines auction under which it was planning to put on sale 19 blocks. The coal Ministry in a notice to the bidders said that "the 6th Tranche and 7th Tranche of auction stands cancelled." However, the government did not specify the reasons for the cancellation. The blocks were Brahmadaha, Choritand Tilaiya, Jogeshwar and Khas Jogeshwar, Rabodh, Rohne and Urtan North. The tender process under the sixth and seventh rounds was "initiated vide notice inviting tender dated October 25, 2018", the Ministry had said. A source had earlier said the successful allottees of the 19 coal blocks will be allowed to sell up to 25% of the actual production in open market at prices fixed by state-owned Coal India. The government had last month allowed sale of 25% of coal production from captive mines in the open market, a move aimed at increasing competitiveness and making future auction of blocks attractive. "Accordingly, the tender process of the coal mines...stands cancelled," the Ministry said. Under the sixth round, the government had earlier announced the auction of 13 blocks for the regulated sectors, including iron and steel, cement and aluminium. The mines were Brahampuri, Bundu, Gondkari, Gondulpara, Jaganathpur — A, Jaganathpur — B, Khappa and Extn. Bhaskarpara, Marki Mangli — IV, Sondaha, Chitarpur, Jamkhani and Gare Palma IV/1. While in the seventh tranche the coal ministry had said it would auction six coking coal blocks for iron and steel sector. The blocks were Brahmadaha, Choritand Tilaiya, Jogeshwar and Khas Jogeshwar, Rabodh, Rohne and Urtan North. The tender process under the sixth and seventh rounds was "initiated vide notice inviting tender dated October 25, 2018", the Ministry had said. A source had earlier said the successful allottees of the 19 coal blocks will be allowed to sell up to 25% of the actual production in open market at prices fixed by state-owned Coal India. The government had last month allowed sale of 25% of coal production from captive mines in the open market, a move aimed at increasing competitiveness and making future auction of blocks attractive. The decision was taken during a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an official release had said. The allottee of a coal mine for specified end use or own consumption was not permitted to sell coal in open market earlier.

Editorial

Strange turn: on SC's order regarding Ayodhya dispute



Mediation, especially when it is at the instance of a court, is a welcome option for those embroiled in protracted civil disputes. A compromise could indeed be preferable to an order that may leave one side aggrieved. However, it is questionable whether this principle can be applied to all disputes and in all situations. The Supreme Court's order appointing three mediators to find a solution to the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute is quite strange and incongruous, given that all such previous attempts have ended in failure. Further, the case is ripe for final hearing, and not all parties favoured mediation. The dispute over the site at Ayodhya, where a 16th century mosque stood until it was torn down by Hinduva fanatics in December 1992, has remained intractable since 1949. After the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the President referred to the Supreme Court the question whether there was a temple to Lord Ram before the mosque was built at the site. The court, in a landmark decision in 1994, declined to go into that question. More important, it revived the title suits and, thereby, restored due process and the rule of law. The present attempt by the Supreme Court to give mediation a chance within a narrow window of eight weeks goes against the spirit of the 1994 decision. After all, it was that verdict that made possible the 2010 judgment of the Allahabad High Court, which favoured a three-way split of the site among Ram Lalla, the Sunni Wakf Board and the Nirmohi Akhara, which is under appeal. A welcome feature of the court-mandated mediation attempt is that it will not consume much time; the same eight weeks are needed for preparation for the final hearing. The confidentiality rule will be helpful as none would want the atmosphere to be vitiated by premature disclosures when the country is in election mode. However, the inclusion of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar as one of the mediators is controversial. In the past, he has made remarks to the effect that Muslims ought to give up their claim and that the failure to find a negotiated settlement will result in "civil war". It is true that the prolonged problem has had an adverse impact on the body politic and some "healing" is required. But the injury to the country's secular fabric was caused by fanatical Hinduva groups that launched a revanchist campaign on the plea that some temples had been turned into mosques by invaders. The only way to heal this festering wound on the body politic is to render complete justice not only in the civil case, but also for the criminal act of the demolition. No one must be left with the impression that the exercise is aimed at privileging the faith-based argument that the mosque stood at the exact spot where Lord Ram was born over the legal question on who holds the title to the land.

North Korea had announced a complete freeze on nuclear



(Day Today) The abrupt end of talks between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Hanoi is clearly a setback to attempts to find a peaceful solution to the Korean nuclear crisis. Both sides cut short a two-day summit on the second day on Thursday without even signing a joint communiqué. They also gave conflicting versions on why the talks collapsed. Mr. Trump said Mr. Kim insisted on a full withdrawal of American sanctions in return for the closure of only one nuclear facility. However, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho later said Pyongyang had sought only partial sanctions relief in return for dismantling the Yongbyon nuclear site, the North's main facility. Whatever the actual reason, one thing is clear: the bonhomie between the two leaders after last year's Singapore summit was missing in Hanoi. After the Singapore meet, both sides had agreed to have "new U.S.-DPRK [North Korea] relations" and establish a "lasting and stable peace regime" on the Korean peninsula. Pyongyang had also promised to work toward "complete denuclearisation". No such comments about the future course of the peace process were issued this time. The North Koreans have ruled out any immediate plans for a future meeting between the two sides. A part of the problem was the failure of both Washington and Pyongyang in following up on commitments made in Singapore. A few weeks ahead of that summit in June, North Korea had announced a complete freeze on nuclear and missile tests as a reconciliatory gesture. It had asked the U.S. to reciprocate — its main demand was a formal declaration of an end to the 1950-53 Korean War, but the Trump

administration refused to do so. Lack of confidence-building measures too blunted the momentum created in Singapore. When U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo first visited Pyongyang, Mr. Kim refused to meet him. Later, the American intelligence community reported that North Korea continued its ballistic missile programme after the first Trump-Kim summit. With these problems still in place, the second summit between the leaders was announced. Any hopes of clinching a big agreement in Hanoi fell as both sides stuck to their respective demands. However, the setback need not necessarily bring the peace process to a halt. Mr. Trump himself has said denuclearisation is a long process. The freeze on nuclear and missile tests that Mr. Kim announced is still in place. The Korean peninsula has been calm, while inter-Korean relations have markedly improved. Before the Hanoi summit, there were reports that the U.S. would declare an end to the Korean war and that both countries would open liaison offices in each other's capitals as part of normalisation of ties. They also gave conflicting versions on why the talks collapsed. Mr. Trump said Mr. Kim insisted on a full withdrawal of American sanctions in return for the closure of only one nuclear facility. However, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho later said Pyongyang had sought only partial sanctions relief in return for dismantling the Yongbyon nuclear site, the North's main facility. They should go ahead with such measures and build confidence and mutual trust while also taking a phased approach to dealing with more contentious issues such as denuclearisation.

camp to search for a tigress cub.

(Gns. News) Missing from the discourse focussed on Avni however, is the story of how a rising tiger population is forcing the animal to seek out new hunting grounds, as tigers need a huge prey base. Sarati village in Yavatmal district, Maharashtra, was gripped by fear of Avni. Was the 'man-eating' tigress Avni that was killed in Maharashtra's Yavatmal district a casualty of rising man-animal conflict, or was some other dynamic at play? Serish Naniseti on how development projects in tiger habitats and the fragmentation of migration corridors call for a rethink of conservation policies. The modest stretch of forest that's visible from the roadside is flanked on either side by cotton fields and toor dal (split pigeon pea) crop. A few kilometres away, on the other side of this jungle, in Maharashtra's Vidarbha region, is National Highway 44 (NH 44). These fields are cultivated by the residents of Sarati village, where the Forest Department has set up a camp to search for a tigress cub. The cub belongs to the litter of T1, or Avni, the tigress that was killed on November 2, 2018 and caused a huge national outcry. The killing of the tigress may have slipped from public memory. But for many villagers in Wedshi, Vihirgaon, Pimpalshinde, Borati, Ralegaon, Loni, and other villages in Yavatmal district, the terror of the tiger remains real. The media had highlighted the Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary as a hunting ground for the tigress, which had been declared a man-eater. But the tigress, when it was killed, was several kilometres away, in a different forested tract. How the tigress sought out new territory, found a mate, and had a litter in the small deciduous forest surrounded by agricultural fields and villages is still a matter of conjecture for conservationists. "We began cultivating here in 2003. The forest was right till here [he points to the road]. We cleared it and began cultivating. That was the first time I ever saw a tiger, and I cannot describe the fear I felt," says Gautam Patil, recalling the day he caught a glimpse of Avni during the monsoons, at the height of the man-eater scare. Patil, a farmer, points to his five-acre field. "This might be a small forest, but we cannot see beyond a few metres during the monsoons. We cannot cultivate anything other than cotton, as wild boars and other animals raid the fields." The Pench Tiger Reserve has 30 tigers. While an adult tiger requires 25-40 sq km of forested area to enjoy sufficient quantity of prey, now there is one tiger for every 8-10 sq km, leading to spillage. Vinod Thakur Veterinary doctor and conservation activist. Just three lamp posts away is the house of Gajanan Shyamrao Pawar. He went to his cotton farm abutting the forest to check on his crop on October 24, 2018, and never returned. The 30-year-old's half-eaten body was later discovered in the jungle by his brother. "He had food at 10 a.m. and went to the farm. He didn't return for lunch. A goatherd called to say he was missing. We began a search, and his body was found far inside the jungle at around one in the afternoon," recalls his mother Indukala Pawar, sitting on the doorstep of their small house. Soon after killing Pawar, the tigress had disappeared from the area. According to the records of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests based in Nagpur, the tigress killed three other people — Gulab Mokashe of Wedshi village, Waghurao of Vihirgaon, and Nagarao Junghare of Pimpalshinde — in a span of 24 days in August 2018. The Pandharkawada Forest Department records the names of Avni's other victims: Sonabai Bhosale of Borati, Lakshmi Rampuchrey of Jira, Shankar Atram, Jira, and Chanduk Phutki of Adni. All these villages border the small forest which the tigress had made its territory. A few months later, the tigress was shot dead by the son of a hunter tasked for the job by the Forest Department. Missing from the discourse focussed on the 'man-eating' tigress is the story of how a rising tiger population is forcing the animal to seek out new hunting grounds, as tigers need a huge prey base. Not too long ago, there was a real fear of the big cat's extinction. Aided by excellent conservation efforts, more awareness, and forest management and control over poaching, the overall tiger population in the country has gone up. The 2006 tiger census by the National Tiger Conservation Authority had pegged the number of tigers at 1,411. Off-



cially involved with the 2018 tiger census operations say that the number is now closer to 2,600. "We have completed the tiger census that was begun in 2018, and the analysis is going on. We will release the information by the end of May," says Y.V. Jhala of the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India, which deployed about 15,000 camera traps spread over 400,000 sq km in 18 States for the census. India began a quadrennial scientific tiger census, discarding the old pug marking method, from 2006. In 2010, there were 1,706 tigers, and in 2014, the number jumped to 2,226, raising expectations of optimistic numbers for the 2018 census as well. The surging numbers have pushed the count of tigers to about 400 in Madhya Pradesh, made famous by Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. But is there land to keep up with this increase? One tiger was mapped travelling from Chandrapur district, bordering the Tadoba-Andhari National Park in Maharashtra, to the Satpura range near Hoshangabad district in Madhya Pradesh. Another tiger, fitted with a tracking collar, was found to have travelled 500 km in 72 days, starting from its habitat in the 138 sq km Bor Tiger Reserve in Wardha district. It travelled through Amravati and Nagpur before getting electrocuted on a farm in Wardha. The problem is that we haven't yet mapped the tiger corridor, or any of the well-defined routes that the tigers may be using for migration and resettlement. Adding to the confusion is that there are many forest tracts that abut the roads. Milind Pariwakam Wildlife Conservation Trust "He bag, waghache panje (see here, the pug marks of a tiger)," says Nilesh Gaddamvar in Marathi, pointing to large pug marks in the dust. Gaddamvar works as a guide at the Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary. Officials say that there are now 18 tigers in the Sanctuary. "We are getting visitors from Kolkata, Hyderabad, Pune and Mumbai. Most of them manage to spot the tiger in its habitat here and take photographs," says Gaddamvar. He adds that there were only five tigers here in 2011, when he began working as a guide. Safari visitors usually make a stop at the Hanuman temple located next to a small artificial lake on a ridge in Tipeswar. The luckier among them might get to see frolicking tigers and cubs a few yards away from the road and their protected vehicles. How the temple came into being and why it is now deserted is a success story of Indian conservation efforts: nearly 500 villagers of Tipeswar were evacuated and the population resettled outside the forest in Parva village in 2010. Another 140 villagers from Mihirgaon, inside the forest, were paid about 77 lakh per family and relocated outside the forest area in 2014. While these two villages have been pulled out of the forest and resettled, the hamlets on the fringes of the jungle have expanded rapidly. Sarati, which didn't exist before 2003, has 1,057 voters, Vihirgaon has 719 voters, and Lone, another village where Avni claimed a human life, has 417 voters. On February 2, the Field Director of Pench Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra issued a statement: "A road-hit case of a tiger has been reported near Devalapur, Harnakund, on NH 7, this evening between 7 to 7.30 pm. PTR teams, as well as the team of Nagpur division, have reached the spot. There is a trail

of blood, and we have also identified the vehicle. Teams reported that the tiger is nearby, and they have heard growling too. They are monitoring the situation, and a proper decision will be taken as per the local circumstances. The rescue team has left for the spot." Such reports of road accidents and electrocutions involving tigers are barely noticed beyond a small circle of tiger conservationists and observers. As a matter of fact, roadkill incidents are quite common on NH 44 (earlier known as NH 7), which passes through some of the most picturesque river valleys, ridges, and forested zones in central India. In this region, NH 44, which connects Srinagar to Kanyakumari, passes through small agricultural fields draped with rows of colourful saris to keep wild boar at bay. Wildlife conservationists have read the recent rise in the number of tigers as indicating the existence of a broad and long migration corridor — a tongue of land in central India that is changing the tiger story. This tiger corridor is crisscrossed by seasonal rivers such as the Godavari, Wainganga, Penganga, Dollara, and countless other smaller water channels and ravines. According to officials of the Wildlife Conservation Trust, about 24,000 km of roads cut through these corridors, and they have a deadly impact on tigers. About 16 tigers have been killed in road and train accidents over the past five years. Forty-two leopards have also come under wheels. And no one has been keeping track of the number of smaller mammals such as foxes, rabbits, deer, wolves, snakes, peacocks and other wildlife that die on these roads. "The problem is that we haven't yet mapped the tiger corridor, or any of the well-defined routes that the tigers may be using for migration and resettlement. Adding to the confusion is that there are many forest tracts that abut the roads. We want a problem-solving approach to linear intrusions and habitat fragmentation. It is important to work on conservation, but it is also important to work on maintaining connectivity between sub-populations," explains Milind Pariwakam of the Wildlife Conservation Trust. Pariwakam had drafted a report on the factors behind the fragmentation of the fragile tiger corridor. The report calls for a rethink of India's approach to infrastructure development, and recommends special pathways for wildlife so that their movement during migration or resettlement is not affected. "Tipeswar is one of the better-maintained forests which visitors can check out. There has been no man-animal conflict here ever since we evacuated the villages from the core area. Places where such conflict occur are more than 40-50 km from Tipeswar," says P.B. Panchabhai, District Forest Officer of Pandharkawada in Yavatmal district. "The threat to tigers is not due to the man-animal conflict. It is due to the large-scale projects that are coming up near the sanctuaries. Forest Department officials have trans-located a village called Agazari on the border of the Pench Tiger Reserve. But the resorts that cropped up there after changes in land use continue to operate. These use barbed wire and electrified fencing to keep animals at bay, leading to accidents," says Vinod Thakur, a veterinary doctor and conservation activist who was part of the tiger census

operation. He blames the 'four-laning' of the national highway running through the Pench Tiger Reserve and Kanha Tiger Reserve, and the widening of the railway line in central India from narrow gauge to broad gauge, for the fragmentation of the habitat. "Even Jai, the tiger which became famous as Asia's biggest feline, fell to this development juggernaut in the Umred-Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary. Jai's cub, Srinivas, died due to electrocution. Jai sired around 20 offspring, but now very few of them are in Umred-Karhandla in Maharashtra. The rest have mi-

grated," says Thakur. Big-ticket projects pose an even bigger threat. For instance, according to filings with the Bombay Stock Exchange, the Birla Cement Corporation is planning to set up a 3.9-tonne greenfield integrated cement plant with a 40 MW captive power plant in Yavatmal district's Mukutban village. Mukutban is on the southern side of the Pandharkawada Forest Department, where man-animal conflict has captured media attention. How a cement plant and the ancillary activities associated with it will affect the environment is anybody's

guess. Of the 50 designated tiger reserves in the country, the 16 in central India form a continuous tiger corridor. The Tipeswar Wildlife Sanctuary has about 18 tigers. Kawal, though designated as Kawal Tiger Reserve in 2012, has seen a tiger or two only in the last four years. This year, a tiger got electrocuted after it came in contact with an electrified wire trap set up by poachers. The Umred Karhandla Wildlife Sanctuary, on the other hand, is not a tiger reserve but is home to many tigers. "The Pench Tiger Reserve at present has 30 tigers. While an adult tiger requires 25-40 sq km of forested area to enjoy sufficient quantity of prey, now there is one tiger for every 8-10 sq km, leading to spillage. The tigers are moving out to other forests to find prey. This can be an opportunity to improve our record and practices in wildlife conservation," says Thakur. While the killing of Avni triggered celebrations among some villagers, there are also a few who see it differently. "I am unhappy that the tigress is dead. It is a big loss. When the tiger scare was at its peak, I was hopeful that this village would be shifted. The tiger was merely protecting the jungle, which was its home," says Gunawanat Tekam, who runs a small shop near the fields that border the jungle in Sarati. "I am saying this because I have seen the fear of the people as well as the changes in the landscape." The depredations of Avni may have grabbed the headlines. But of far greater significance, though missing from the mainstream discourse, is the changing dynamic of tiger migration and movement, which suggests that India needs to rework its conservation and forest settlement policies.

National Democratic Alliance government

(News Track) The idea of a universal basic income (UBI) is gaining ground globally. It has supporters among the political left and right, and among proponents as well as opponents of the free-market economy. A UBI requires the government to pay every citizen a fixed amount of money on a regular basis and without any conditionalities. Crucial to the appeal for such a demand — for a UBI — is that millions of people remain unemployed and are extremely poor, despite rapid economic growth in the last three decades. The National Democratic Alliance government has already unfolded a limited version of the UBI in the form of the Pradhanmantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana (PM-KISAN) which promises ₹6,000 per annum to farmers who own less than 2 hectares of land. Going by media reports, the election manifesto of the Congress Party may announce an even more ambitious version of the scheme. The UBI is neither an antidote to the vagaries of market forces nor a substitute for basic public services, especially health and education. Besides, there is no need to transfer money to middle- and high-income earners as well as large landowners. However, there is a strong case for direct income transfers to some groups: landless labourers, agricultural workers and marginal farmers who suffer from multi-dimensional poverty. These groups have not benefited from economic growth. They were and still are the poorest Indians. Various welfare schemes have also failed to bring them out of penury. A case in point is the access to institutional credit issued by banks and cooperative societies. According to National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data from the 70th round, institutional credits account for less than 15% of the total borrowing by landless agricultural workers; the figure for marginal and small farmers is only 30%. These groups have to borrow from moneylenders and adhatiyas at exorbitant interest rates ranging from 24 to 60%. As a result, they do not stand to benefit much from the interest rate subsidy for the agriculture sector. Likewise, the benefits of subsidised fertilizers and power are enjoyed largely by big farmers. In urban areas, contract workers and those in the informal sector face a similar problem. The rapid pace of automation of low-skill jobs and formalisation of the retail sector mean the prospects of these

groups are even bleaker. An income support of, say, ₹15,000 per annum can be a good supplement to their livelihoods — an amount worth more than a third of the average consumption of the poorest 25% households, and more than a fourth of the annual income of marginal farmers. This additional income can reduce the incidence of indebtedness among marginal farmers, thereby helping them escape moneylenders and adhatiyas. Besides, it can go a long way in helping the poor to make ends meet. Several studies have shown that at high levels of impoverishment, even a small income supplement can improve nutrient intake, and increase enrolment and school attendance for students coming from poor households. In other words, income transfers to the poor will lead to improved health and educational outcomes, which in turn would lead to a more productive workforce. It seems to be a good idea to transfer the money into the bank accounts of women of the beneficiary households. Women tend to spend more of their income on health and the education of children. The effect of an income transfer scheme on unemployment is a moot point. In principle, cash transfers can result in withdrawal of beneficiaries from the labour force. However, the income support suggested above is not too large to discourage beneficiaries from seeking work. In fact, it can promote employment and economic activities. For instance, income receipts can come in handy as interest-free working capital for several categories of beneficiaries (fruit and vegetable vendors and small artisans), thereby promoting their business and employment in the process. Moreover, such a scheme will have three immediate benefits. One, it will help bring a large number of households out of the poverty trap or prevent them from falling into it in the event of exigencies such as illness. Two, it will reduce income inequalities. Three, since the poor spend most of their income, a boost in their income will increase demand and promote economic activities in rural areas. Nonetheless, an income transfer scheme cannot be a substitute for universal basic services. The direct income support to the poor will deliver the benefits mentioned only if it comes on top of public services such as primary health and education. This means that direct transfers should not be at the expense of public services for primary

health and education. If anything, budgetary allocation for these services should be raised significantly. Programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme should also stay. With direct income support, the demand for the programmes will come down naturally. However, in the interim, it will serve to screen the poorest in the country and give them a crucial safety net. If basic public services are maintained, there is limited fiscal space for direct income support. It will have to be restricted to the poorest of poor households. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 can be used to identify the neediest. Groups suffering from multidimensional poverty such as the destitute, the shelter-less, manual scavengers, tribal groups, and former bonded labourers are automatically included. The dataset includes more than six crore landless labourers. It also includes many small farmers who face deprivation criteria such as families without any bread-earning adult member, and those without a pucca house. The other needy group, small farmers, missing from the SECC can be identified using the dataset from the Agriculture Census of 2015-16. Together, these two datasets can help identify the poorest Indians, especially in rural India. However, many households such as marginal farmers belong to both datasets. However, the income support suggested above is not too large to discourage beneficiaries from seeking work. In fact, it can promote employment and economic activities. For instance, income receipts can come in handy as interest-free working capital for several The Aadhaar identity can be used to rule out duplications and update the list of eligible households. As an approximation, the number of eligible households is 10 crore. That is, even in its basic form, the scheme will require approximately ₹1.5 lakh crore per annum. The PM-KISAN Yojana can be aligned to meet a part of the cost. Moreover, the tax kitty can be expanded by reintroducing wealth tax. Nonetheless, the required amount is beyond the Centre's fiscal capacity at the moment. Therefore, the cost will have to be shared by States. States such as Telangana and Odisha are already providing direct income support to their farmers. These States can extend their schemes to include the 'non-farmer poor'. The other States too should join in.

Brains behind Pulwama terror attack identified -- 23-year-old electrician: officials



(Day Today) Suicide attacker Adil Ahmed Dar, who blew his explosive-laden vehicle next to a bus in a CRPF convoy on February 14, had been in constant contact with Khan, they said. Lesser-known Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist Mudasar Ahmed Khan, alias 'Mohd Bhai', has been identified as the brains behind the audacious terror strike in Pulwama that left 40 CRPF personnel dead on February 14, officials said on Sunday. Piecing together evidence gathered so far, security officials said that 23-year-old Khan, an electrician with a graduate degree hailing from Pulwama district, arranged the vehicle and explosives used in the terror strike. A resident of Mir Mohalla of Tral, Khan joined

the Jaish-e-Mohammed sometime in 2017 as an overground worker and was later drawn into the JeM fold by Noor Mohammed Tantrey, alias 'Noor Trali', who is believed to have helped in the revival of the terror outfit in Kashmir Valley. After Tantray was killed in December 2017, Khan disappeared from his home on January 14, 2018 and has been active since then. Suicide attacker Adil Ahmed Dar, who blew his explosive-laden vehicle next to a bus in a CRPF convoy on February 14, had been in constant contact with Khan, they said. After completing his graduation, Khan did one-year diploma course as electrician from an Industrial Training Institute (ITI). The eldest son of a labourer, Khan is also believed

to be involved in the terror strike at the army camp in Sunjawan in February 2018, in which six personnel and a civilian were killed. His role has also come under lens in the Lethpora attack on a CRPF camp in January 2018 that left five CRPF personnel dead. The National Investigation Agency (NIA), which is probing the February 14 terror attack, had carried out searches at the residence of Khan on February 27. A Maruti Eeco minivan was used in the Pulwama terror attack and it was bought by another Jaish-e-Mohammed operative just 10 days before the strike. The JeM operative, identified as Sajjad Bhat, a resident of Bijbehara in south Kashmir, has since been on the run and is believed to have become an active militant now, they said.

'Brexit in peril' as PM May faces heavy defeat



(Gns. News) Just 19 days before the United Kingdom is due to leave the EU on March 29, Ms. May is scrambling - so far unsuccessfully - to secure last-minute changes to an EU exit treaty before parliament votes on Tuesday on whether to approve the deal. Brexit could be reversed if lawmakers reject the government's exit deal, British foreign minister Jeremy Hunt said on Sunday after two major eurosceptic factions in parliament warned that Prime Minister Theresa May was facing a heavy defeat. Just 19 days before the United Kingdom is due to leave the EU on March 29, Ms. May is scrambling - so far unsuccessfully - to secure last-minute changes to an EU exit treaty before parliament votes on Tuesday on whether to approve the deal. If she fails, lawmakers are expected to force Ms. May to seek a delay to Brexit which some fear could see the 2016 decision to leave the bloc reversed. Others argue that without a delay Britain faces an economic shock if it leaves without a deal. "We have an opportunity now to leave on March 29 or shortly thereafter and it's important we grasp that opportunity because there is wind in the sails of people trying to stop Brexit," Mr. Hunt told the BBC. "We are in very perilous waters." The United Kingdoms labyrinthine crisis over EU membership is approaching its finale with an extraordinary array of options including a delay, a last-minute deal, no-deal Brexit, a snap election or even another referendum. The ultimate outcome remains unclear, though most diplomats and investors say Brexit will define the United Kingdom's prosperity for generations to come. The government has previously tried to use the risk of Brexit being reversed as a way to convince eurosceptics to back May's deal despite their deep reservations about it. "If you want to stop Brexit you only need to do three things: kill this deal, get an extension, and then have a second referendum. Within three weeks those people could have two of those three things... and quite possibly the third one could be on the way." Nigel Dodds, deputy leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) which props up Ms. May's minority government, and Steve Baker, a leading figure in the large eurosceptic faction of her Conservative party, warned "the political situation is grim". "An unchanged withdrawal agreement will be defeated firmly by a sizeable proportion of Conservatives and the DUP if it is again presented to the Commons," they wrote in the Sunday Telegraph. The Sunday Times said Ms. May was battling to save her job as aides were considering persuading her to offer to resign in a bid to get the deal approved. The newspaper also said cabinet ministers have spoken about whether to insist she goes as early as this week. Parliament rejected May's deal by 230 votes on Jan. 15, prompting the British leader to return to Brussels in search of changes to address the so-called Irish backstop - an insurance policy designed to prevent the return of a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. Many British lawmakers object to the policy on the grounds that it could leave Britain subject to EU rules indefinitely and cleave Northern Ireland away from the rest of the country. But, Ms. May's attempts to get the clause rewritten have so far failed to yield any result, with EU negotiators unwilling to meet her demands, and Britain rejecting a compromise offer. Mr. Hunt said on Tuesday's vote would definitely go ahead, and that it was too soon to say that negotiations with the EU had "run into the sands". He said realism and a lot of work was needed from both Britain and the EU to get a deal. If lawmakers reject Ms. May's deal on Tuesday, she has promised to let them vote the next day on whether to leave without a deal on March 29. If they reject that, then on Thursday they are due to vote on a "limited" delay. "In the event of this vote on Tuesday not going through, nobody knows what would happen. In everything that followed there would be total uncertainty - that would be the only certainty," health minister Matt Hancock told Sky News. Britain's opposition Labour Party should support staying in the EU if there is a second referendum, the party's Brexit spokesman, Keir Starmer, said on Sunday. However, Mr. Starmer said the party would not be seeking to secure support in parliament for a second referendum on Tuesday. Amid the political chaos, many company chiefs are aghast at London's handling of Brexit and say it has already damaged Britain's reputation as Europe's pre-eminent destination for foreign investment. "Business is holding its breath ahead of the votes in parliament this week, knowing that if Brexit has taught us anything, it is to expect the unexpected," said James Stewart, head of Brexit at KPMG UK. "Companies are now split on whether an extension to the Brexit timeline is a good thing. Some of those who prepared early are locked into March specific contingency plans. Those carrying additional inventory know an extension will squeeze their cashflow for longer."

Pakistan violates ceasefire at 4 places in Poonch; targets army posts, villages



(News Track) The frequent ceasefire violations have caused panic among the border residents. Pakistani troops on Sunday resorted to unprovoked ceasefire violations targeting forward posts and villages at four places along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district, officials said. The firing was intense in the Krishna Ghati sector, where the Pakistani troops resorted to mortar shelling and firing by small arms from around 04:30 a.m., which was retaliated befittingly by the Indian Army, a defence spokesman said. He said the cross-border shelling between the two sides continued till 07:30 a.m.. There was no report of any casualty on the Indian side, he said. Officials said firing and shelling by Pakistan were also reported from the Balnoi and Mankote (both in Mendhar sector), besides from Shahpur sector, all in Poonch district, for a brief period in the early hours of Sunday. The firing was mild in nature and lasted for a brief period without causing any harm,

they added. On late Saturday as well, the Pakistani army had targeted Indian positions in Sunderbani sector of Rajouri district for several hours. There has been a spurt in ceasefire violations by Pakistan after India's preemptive air strike on a Jaish-e-Mohammed terror camp in Balakot on February 26 following the February 14 Pulwama terror attack in which 40 CRPF personnel were killed. Four civilians, including three members of a family, were killed and several others injured as Pakistan targeted over 80 villages in more than 100 incidents of ceasefire violations along the LoC in the state since then. The frequent ceasefire violations have caused panic among the border residents, forcing authorities to close down educational institutions within five km radius from the zero line in the twin districts of Poonch and Rajouri as a precautionary measure. However, most schools reopened a few days back after the intensity of the cross-border firing decreased.

India vs Australia 4th ODI scorecard



(News Track) Indian captain Virat Kohli warming up along with team mates during the practice session on the eve of the first T20 cricket match India and Australia in Visakhapatnam on Feb 23, 2019. Indian captain Virat Kohli won the toss and opted to bat in the fourth ODI against Australia at Mohali on Sunday. For India, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, K.L. Rahul, Rishabh Pant and Yuzvendra Chahal came in for Mohammed Shami, Ambati Rayudu, M.S. Dhoni and Ravindra Jadeja. Marcus Stoinis made way for Ashton Turner in the Australian XI. In the third, it was Australia all the way in spite of Kohli doing his bit

to change the script. The hosts will have to bring out their best to clinch the series. Clearly, Australia can again be expected to come hard against the frontline batsmen. Though Australia is worried about losing wickets in a bunch in the middle overs, it can take heart from the showings in the first and third PowerPlays. Overall, India continues to look vulnerable once the top-order, particularly Kohli, departs. No doubt, the Australians know how to hurt India. Unless the Indian top-order comes up with a fitting counter-attack, Australia can be expected to ride on the gains of Ranchi.

'Rafale: Modi's Nemesis?' — N.

Ram in conversation with P. Sainath



(News Track) "Almost everyone will agree that corruption in India is pervasive, omnipresent and multifarious," says Mr. Ram. The third edition of Mumbai Collective began on Sunday and features sessions on Rafale deal, distortion of history and rise of the surveillance state. R. Ramakumar, chief organiser, had said that they wanted a mass collective, and different kinds of protests, not just speeches, talks, but also cultural forms of resistance: songs, poetry, paintings, photographs. "We wanted our festival to be more a 'pol' fest than a lit fest," he had said. The platform took shape in 2016, its first edition a two-day event, entirely volunteer-run with crowd-sourced funds. The Mumbai Collective 2019 is being held at Y. B. Chavan centre in Nariman Point, Mumbai. Our Resident Editor Vikas Dhoot updates from the venue. N. Ram in conversation with veteran journalist P. Sainath. Highlights from Mr. Ram's speech: "In 2014, the BJP came to power after pillorying the congress, painting it as corrupt, and offering Narendra Modi and BJP as the clean alternative. Now the compliment is being returned [by the Opposition]. "Almost everyone will agree that corruption in India is pervasive, omnipresent and multifarious. It is to be encountered especially in the nexus between the politics and business. "Defence is a prime example... When we were doing the Bofors investigation, we were trying to understand if all these commissions

being paid out were normal or not. "We got an informal tip from former President R. Venkataraman, who had earlier held the portfolios of Finance and Defence Ministries. I can share this now... The Mumbai Collective 2019 is being held at Y. B. Chavan centre in Nariman Point, Mumbai. Our Resident Editor Vikas Dhoot updates from the venue. N. Ram in conversation with veteran journalist P. Sainath. Highlights from Mr. Ram's speech: "In 2014, the BJP came to power after pillorying the congress, painting it as corrupt, and offering Narendra Modi and BJP as the clean alternative. Now the compliment is being returned [by the Opposition]. "Almost everyone will agree that corruption in India is pervasive, omnipresent and multifarious. It is to be encountered especially in the nexus between the politics and business. "Defence is a prime example... When we were doing the Bofors investigation, we were trying to understand if all these commissions

charging the NDA government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of bypassing institutions and compromising national security in the deal that is worth 7.87 billion euros [for the aircraft and weapons packages together]. "The story is not over... Offsets need to be looked into. "This is an area that is being investigated, especially the role of the joint venture of Anil Ambani and Dassault, what it will make and what other offset partners will do. "Grand corruption is not just about bribes but arbitrary decision making, crony capitalism, doing favours, lobbying in the corridors of the ministry, using commission agents to try to fix the deal. "The Indian Opposition, particularly Rahul Gandhi, has been on an offensive on the [Rafale deal], charging the NDA government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The money trail of commission payments is yet to be established. But why on earth would one do away with the anti-corruption clauses? Ramakumar welcomes the gathering Chief organiser of the "Mumbai Collective 2019" Ram Kumar speaking at inaugural Chief organiser of the "Mumbai Collective 2019" Ram Kumar speaking at inaugural Chief organiser R. Ramakumar, who teaches economics at the Centre for Study of Developing Economies, School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, gives a welcome speech inaugurating the "Mumbai Collective 2019" in Mumbai on March 10.

General Election 2019: Full schedule with phases, dates and State-wise list of seats



(News Track) Elections to Assemblies of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Odisha, and the bypolls to 21 Assembly seats in Tamil Nadu will follow the Lok Sabha election schedule in their respective States. The 17th Lok Sabha elections will be held in seven phases beginning April 11 and the votes will be counted on May 23, the Election Commission announced on March 10. Elections to Assemblies of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Odisha, and the bypolls to 21 Assembly seats in Tamil Nadu will follow the Lok Sabha election schedule in their respective States. Here's the phase-wise schedule, the number of seats in each phase and their State-wise break-up: A.P. (all 25), Arunachal Pradesh (2), Assam (5), Bihar (4), Chhattisgarh (1), J&K (2), Maharashtra (7), Manipur (1), Meghalaya (2), Mizoram (1), Nagaland (1), Odisha (4), Sikkim (1), Telangana (17), Tripura (1), U.P. (8), Uttarakhand (5), W.B. (2), Andaman and Nicobar Islands (1), Lakshadweep (1) Assam (5), Bihar (5), Chhattisgarh (3), J&K (2), Karnataka (14), Maharashtra (10), Manipur (1), Odisha (5), T.N. (all 39), Tripura (1), U.P. (8), West Bengal (3), Puducherry (1) Assam (4), Bihar (5), Chhattisgarh (7), Gujarat (all 26), Goa (all 2), J&K (1), Karnataka (14), Kerala (all 20), Maharashtra (14), Odisha (6), U.P. (10), West Bengal (5), Dadra and Nagar Haveli (1), Daman and Diu (1)-Phase 4, April 29, 71 seats, 9 States (Ihar (5), J&K (1), Jharkhand (3), M.P. (6), Maharashtra (17), Odisha (6), Rajasthan (13), U.P. (13), West Bengal (8)-Phase 5, May 6, 51 seats, 7 States (Bihar (5), Jharkhand (4), J&K (2), M.P. (7), Rajasthan (12), U.P. (4), West Bengal (7)-Phase 6, May 12, 59 seats, 7 States (Bihar (8), Haryana (10), Jharkhand (4), M.P. (8), U.P. (14), West Bengal (8), NCR (all 7)-Phase 7, May 19, 59 seats, 8 States (Bihar (8), Jharkhand (3), M.P. (8), Punjab (all 13), West Bengal (9), Chandigarh (1), U.P. (13), Himachal Pradesh (all 4)

2 Pakistani-origin ISIS brides lose British citizenship: report

(News Track) Reema Iqbal and her sister, Zara, have five boys under the age of eight between them and are being held in a Syrian detention camp. Two Pakistani-origin sisters from London are believed to be the latest set of mothers to lose their British citizenship for marrying into the Islamic State (ISIS) terrorist group in Syria. Reema Iqbal and her sister, Zara, have five boys under the age of eight between them and are being held in a Syrian detention camp. Reports of them losing their right to return to the UK after losing their citizenship rights come as it was confirmed that Bangladeshi-origin Shami ma Begum lost her three-week-old baby in a Syrian refugee camp days after her British citizenship was similarly revoked. "The Sunday Times" quoted legal sources to say that the Iqbal sisters, from east London, have had their British nationality rights revoked for marrying into an ISIS terrorist cell. Their parents are from Pakistan, so the UK Home Office would argue they are eligible for Pakistani nationality instead. Their five sons, however, are likely to remain British citizens. The newspaper report says the two women headed to Syria from London in



2013 after marrying into a six-man cell of ISIS recruits with close links to the filmed murders of western hostages by British Arab ISIS fighter Mohammed Emwazi, dubbed Jihadi John for his UK connection. The sisters' husbands were later killed in fighting. Zara (28), already had a son when she made the journey and was heavily pregnant with her second child, to whom she gave birth in Syria. She later had a third boy under the so-called ISIS caliphate. The family is believed to be in either Al Hol camp or another facility at Ain Issa in Syria. Her older sister, Reema (30),

has two sons, one of whom was born in Britain. They are in Roj camp, to which Shamima Begum was reportedly recently transferred. There is growing pressure on UK home secretary Sajid Javid since it was confirmed that 19-year-old Begum had lost her child, Jarrah, to pneumonia in the refugee camp on Thursday. Diane Abbott, the UK shadow home secretary, said the baby's death was a stain on the conscience of this government. Mr. Javid's own Conservative Party colleague and former justice minister, Phillip Lee, urged the moral to "reflect" on its "moral responsibility" for the tragedy.

General Election 2019: Full schedule with phases, dates and State-wise list of seats



(News Track) An Ethiopian Airports Enterprise fire engine drives to the scene of the Flight ET 302 plane crash, near the town of Bishoftu, southeast of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on Sunday. Reuters There were no immediate details on what caused the crash of the Boeing 737-8 MAX plane, which was new and had been delivered to the airline in November. An Ethiopian Airlines flight crashed shortly after takeoff from the capital on Sunday morning killing all 157 thought to be on board, according to statements from the airline and the state broadcaster. There were no immediate details on what caused the crash of the Boeing 737-8 MAX plane, which was new and had been delivered to the airline in November. The state-owned Ethiopian Airlines, widely considered the best-managed airline in Africa, calls itself Africa's largest carrier and has ambitions of becoming the gateway to the continent. The airline's statement said 149 passengers and eight crew members were thought to be on the plane that crashed six minutes after departing Addis Ababa on its way to Kenya's capital. The crash occurred around Bishoftu, or Debre Zeit, some 50 km south of Addis Ababa, at 8-44 a.m. While the airline said "search and rescue operations are in progress and we have no confirmed information about survivors or any possible casualties," a separate statement by the Ethiopian prime minister's office offered its "deepest condolences" to families. State broadcaster EBC reported all passengers were dead and that the passengers included 33 nationalities. An Ethiopian Airlines spokesman said 32 Kenyans and 17 Ethiopians were among

the victims. James Macharia, Kenya's transport minister, told reporters that Kenyan authorities had not yet received the passenger manifest. He said an emergency response had been set up for family and friends. "My prayers go to all the families and associates of those on board," Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta said, as many Kenyans braced for the worst. Records show that the plane was new. The Planespotters civil aviation database shows that the Boeing 737-8 MAX was delivered to Ethiopian Airlines in mid-November. In October, another Boeing 737-8 MAX plunged into the Java Sea just minutes after taking off from Jakarta, Indonesia's capital, killing all 189 people on board. The cockpit data recorder showed that the jet's airspeed indicator had malfunctioned on its last four flights, though Lion Air initially claimed that problems with the aircraft had been fixed. The last deadly crash of an Ethiopian Airlines passenger plane was in 2010, when the plane crashed minutes after takeoff from Beirut killing all 90 people on board. Sunday's crash comes as the country's reformist prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, has vowed to open up the airline and other sectors to foreign investment in a major transformation of the state-centered economy. Ethiopian Airlines has been expanding assertively, recently opening a route to Moscow and in January inaugurating a new passenger terminal in Addis Ababa to triple capacity. Speaking at the inauguration, the prime minister challenged the airline to build a new "Airport City" terminal in Bishoftu where Sunday's crash occurred.

More blackouts hit Venezuela as Opposition, government rally



(News Track) Venezuelans take part in a protest against the government of Nicolas Maduro on March 9, 2019 in Caracas, Venezuela. Power and communications outages continues to hit Venezuela. The Venezuelan Opposition and government loyalists held rival demonstrations in Caracas on Saturday, as both sides prepared for what some fear could be a protracted power struggle. The rallies unfolded as power and communications outages continued to hit Venezuela, intensifying the hardship of a country paralysed by economic and political crisis. The blackouts heightened tension between the bitterly divided factions, which accused each other of being responsible for the collapse of the power grid. "Hard times are ahead," said Opposition leader Juan Guaido, who addressed crowds with a loudspeaker after security forces earlier dismantled a speakers' stage that the Opposition had erected. He said he planned to tour Venezuela to seek support and lay the groundwork for a massive rally in Caracas. The 35-year-old leader of the National Assembly said he anticipated more government efforts to sideline and intimidate the Opposition. However, President Nicolas Maduro's government has not moved directly against Mr. Guaido since he returned to Venezuela from a Latin American tour Monday. Mr. Guaido earlier speculated that Mr. Maduro was effectively ignoring him in an

attempt to sap the energy of the Opposition, whose hopes of ousting the government have so far been stymied. But on Saturday, Mr. Maduro stepped up verbal attacks on Mr. Guaido, calling him "a clown and puppet" in a speech to supporters outside Miraflores, the Presidential palace. He scoffed at Mr. Guaido's claim in late January to be interim President of Venezuela, a declaration supported by the United States and about 50 other countries. "Not a President, not anything," said Mr. Maduro, who accused Mr. Guaido and his U.S. allies of sabotaging Venezuela's Guri Dam, one of the world's largest hydroelectric stations and the cornerstone of Venezuela's electrical grid. The Venezuelan Opposition and U.S. officials say Mr. Maduro's attempts to pin blame on his political adversaries is absurd, and that government corruption and mismanagement over many years caused the blackout and wider deterioration of the economy. In another blow to Venezuela's infrastructure, an explosion occurred at a power station in the country's Bolivar state on March 9, according to local media. Video posted on social media showed fire and smoke billowing from the site. Venezuelan authorities have not commented. A man tries to extinguish a motorcycle on fire during a protest against the government of Nicolas Maduro on March 9, 2019 in Caracas, Venezuela.

man tries to extinguish a motorcycle on fire during a protest against the government of Nicolas Maduro on March 9, 2019 in Caracas, Venezuela. Getty Images et blocks, a non-government group based in Europe that monitors internet censorship, said Saturday that the second outage had knocked out almost all of Venezuela's telecommunications infrastructure. Earlier, it referred to online connectivity data indicating that the initial outage that began Thursday and eased about 24 hours later was the largest on recent record in Latin America. Managers of the Caracas subway said they were waiting for the electricity supply to stabilise before resuming service, and the power grid problems quickly became only another issue that galvanised Venezuelans to take to the streets. Hyperinflation and shortage of basic necessities Opposition protesters who converged on Avenida Victoria in Caracas vented anger over the country's problems, including hyperinflation and shortages of basic necessities. The rallies unfolded as power and communications outages continued to hit Venezuela, intensifying the hardship of a country paralysed by economic and political crisis. The blackouts heightened tension between the bitterly divided factions, which accused each other of being responsible for the collapse of the power grid. "Hard times are ahead," said Opposition leader Juan Guaido, who addressed crowds with a loud-

speaker after security forces earlier dismantled a speakers' stage that the Opposition had erected. He said he planned to tour Venezuela to seek support and lay the groundwork for a massive rally in Caracas. The 35-year-old leader of the National Assembly said he anticipated more government efforts to sideline and intimidate the Opposition. However, President Nicolas Maduro's government has not moved directly against Mr. Guaido since he returned to Venezuela from a Latin American tour Monday. Mr. Guaido earlier speculated that Mr. Maduro was effectively ignoring him in an attempt to sap the energy of the Opposition, whose hopes of ousting the government have so far been stymied. But on Saturday, Mr. Maduro stepped up verbal attacks on Mr. Guaido, calling him "a clown and puppet" in a speech to supporters outside Miraflores, the Presidential palace. He scoffed at Mr. Guaido's claim in late January to be interim President of Venezuela, a declaration supported by the United States and about 50 other countries. "Not a President, not anything," said Mr. Maduro, who accused Mr. Guaido and his U.S. allies of sabotaging Venezuela's Guri Dam, one of the world's largest hydroelectric stations and the cornerstone of Venezuela's electrical grid. The rallies unfolded as power and communications outages continued to hit Venezuela, intensifying the hardship of

a country paralysed by economic and political crisis. The blackouts heightened tension between the bitterly divided factions, which accused each other of being responsible for the collapse of the power grid. "Hard times are ahead," said Opposition leader Juan Guaido, who addressed crowds with a loudspeaker after security forces earlier dismantled a speakers' stage that the Opposition had erected. He said he planned to tour Venezuela to seek support and lay the groundwork for a massive rally in Caracas. They pushed against the shields of riot police who avoided a clash by withdrawing from the area. Some protesters elsewhere in the city said police tried to block them from reaching the rally, creating a sense of confusion as power and communications outages plagued the country. "This is chaos," said Jorge Jaimes, a physician frustrated with the decline of a country that was once the wealthiest in Latin America. At the pro-government rally, people danced and waved flags on what organisers labelled a "day of anti-imperialism" in a show of defiance toward the United States, which has imposed oil sanctions on Venezuela in an attempt to oust Mr. Maduro. Many showed up wearing red caps and shirts in support of the self-proclaimed "socialist revolution" of leader Hugo Chavez, who died six years ago and was succeeded by his protégé, Mr. Maduro.

Narendra Modi tweets: 'NDA seeks your blessings again'

(Day Today) 'We may belong to different parties but our aim must be the same - the development of India and empowerment of every Indian' While the Election Commission of India announced the schedule for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi started his campaign on Twitter. "Best wishes to the Election Commission, all those officials and security personnel who will be on the field, across the length and breadth of India assuring smooth elections. India is very proud of the EC for assiduously organising elections for several years," he tweeted. "In 2014, the people comprehensively rejected the UPA. There was unprecedented anger over the UPA's corruption, nepotism and policy paralysis. India's self-confidence was at an all-time low and the people of India wanted to rid the nation of such decay and pessimism. "Wishing all political parties and candidates the very best for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. We may belong to different parties but our aim must be the same - the development of India and empowerment of every Indian! "The last five years have shown that with the blessings and participation of 130 crore Indians, what was earlier deemed impossible has now become possible. 2019 polls are about a spirit of confidence and positivity with which India is fulfilling the aspirations of its people. "Today, the people of India know that it is possible to: Become the fastest growing economy. Give a befitting reply to terror. Eliminate poverty at a record pace. Make India Swachh. Remove corruption and punish the corrupt. Ensure inclusive and extensive development. "Today: 50 crore Indians have access to good quality and free healthcare. 42 crore people of unorganised sector have access to old-age pension. 12 crore farmer households get yearly monetary support of Rs. 6000. Crores of middle class families are exempt from income tax. "India is proud that: 2.5 crore families have electricity for the first time. 7 crore households have smoke-free kitchens. 1.5 crore Indians got their own homes. These, and many other instances show that with the



right approach and futuristic policies, nothing is impossible!" the Prime Minister tweeted through the @narendramodi handle. "Guided by 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', NDA seeks your blessings again. We spent the

Colombia plane crash kills 14: police source

(News Track) The plane, which is owned by Laser Aereo airlines, was en route from the southern city of San Jose del Guaviare to central Villavicencio. Fourteen people were killed in a plane crash in the Colombian plains province of Meta on Saturday, the country's civil aviation agency said. The Special Administrative Unit of Civil Aeronautics said there were no survivors of the crash, which occurred after the DC-3 aircraft made a distress call at 10:40 a.m. local time (1540 GMT). The plane, which is owned by Laser Aereo airlines, was en route from the southern city of San Jose del Guaviare to central Villavicencio, the agency said. It crashed about midway through its flight, in San Carlos de Guaroa municipality. The airline said it had no immediate



comment. In a later statement posted on the Special Administrative Unit of Civil Aeronautics said there were no survivors of the crash, which occurred after the DC-3 aircraft made a distress call at 10:40 a.m. local time (1540 GMT). The plane, which is owned by Laser Aereo airlines, was en route from the southern city of San Jose del Guaviare to central Villavicencio, the agency said. It crashed about midway through its flight, in San Carlos de Guaroa municipality. The airline said it had no immediate

Palestinian president has chosen longtime adviser Mohammed Ishtayeh as his new prime minister

(Day Today) Ishtayeh will succeed Rami Hamdallah, who had overseen a unity government formed nearly five years ago with the goal of reaching a conciliation deal with Hamas. The Palestinian president has chosen longtime adviser Mohammed Ishtayeh as his new prime minister, officials said on Sunday, a step that further deepens the rift with the rival Hamas group. President Mahmoud Abbas was expected to announce the appointment later in the day, the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity pending a formal announcement. Mr. Ishtayeh, a British-educated economist, is a top official in

pending a formal announcement. Mr. Ishtayeh, a British-educated economist, is a top official in Abbas' Fatah movement. He is a former peace negotiator and strong proponent of a two-state solution with Israel. He also is a strong critic of the Islamic militant group Hamas, which seized control of the Gaza Strip from Fatah forces in 2007. The Hamas takeover has left the Palestinians torn between rival governments in Gaza and the West Bank, where Abbas' Palestinian Authority administers autonomous areas. Repeated attempts at reconciliation have failed. Mr. Ishtayeh will succeed Rami Hamdallah, who had overseen a unity government formed nearly five years ago with the goal of reaching a conciliation deal with Hamas. President Mahmoud Abbas was expected to announce the appointment later in the day, the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity

pending a formal announcement. Mr. Ishtayeh, a British-educated economist, is a top official in Abbas' Fatah movement. He is a former peace negotiator and strong proponent of those attempts made little headway, and collapsed a year ago when Mr. Hamdallah's motorcade was almost struck by a roadside bomb in Gaza. Mr. Ishtayeh, who is in his early 60s, has a Ph.D. in economic development from the University of Sussex, according to his website. He has held a number of senior positions, including Public Works minister and a past peace negotiator with Israel. He currently is head of the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction, a body that works with international donors on economic development projects in the Palestinian areas.



'You hunted the hunter': IAF praises Wing Commander Abhinandan

(Day Today) Posting a poem on its official Twitter handle @IAF_MCC, 'Sabke Bass Ki Baat Nah', written by Bipin Allhabadi, the IAF described the fighter pilot's feat as something that is not possible for everyone. Continuing with its poetic praise on its personnel, the Indian Air Force on Sunday described Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman as someone who "hunted the hunter". Posting a poem on its official Twitter handle @IAF_MCC, 'Sabke Bass Ki Baat Nah', written by Bipin Allhabadi, the IAF described the fighter pilot's feat as something

that is not possible for everyone. What Abhinandan Varthaman did is not everyone's cup of tea. He hunted the hunter, the Hindi poem read. Tensions between India and Pakistan flared up after a suicide bomber of Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terror group killed 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel in Kashmir's Pulwama district on February 14. India launched a counter-terror operation in Balakot on February 26. After his capture and subsequent release, the Air Force pilot became an overnight sensation across the country. On Friday, the IAF had tweeted another poem by the same poet 'Haddi Sarhad Ki', whose lines can be construed as a jibe at Islamabad.

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