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# Civil Aviation Ministry asks airports to make public announcements in local language too

(Gns. News), New Delhi  
The government Wednesday directed all airports to make public announcements in local language first, followed by Hindi and English, officials said.  
Officials said that the Airports Authority of India (AAI) has issued a directive to all aerodromes under its control to start making public announcements in the local language in addition to Hindi and English. The Civil Aviation Ministry has also sent out a communication to private airport operators regarding public announcements to be made in the local language. Mr. Prabhu has directed the AAI to take steps to make that all announcements on public address system at all the airports in the country should be in local language followed by Hindi and English, of-



**The latest move follows a directive from Civil Aviation Minister Suresh Prabhu.**

Officials said. The directions would not be applicable for silent airports, where public announcements are not made, they added. In 2016, the AAI had issued a circular asking airports under its control to make public announcements in the local language followed by Hindi and English. The Minister's decision came after representations from certain quarters that public announcements at airports should also be made in the local language, they added.

# Spat over gas leaves Indian diplomats in the cold

(Gns. News),  
India is not ruling out retaliatory measures in response to the Pakistan government's delays in sanctioning gas connections to the residential complex at its High Commission in Islamabad. The delay, officials said, were part of a series of measures aimed at "making life difficult" for Indian diplomats in Pakistan. This week, New Delhi again raised the problems caused by the lack of gas connections in the newly built residential section of the Indian High Commission complex in the diplomatic zone in Islamabad, just a kilometre from the Pakistan Foreign Ministry. According to External Affairs Ministry officials, who asked not to be identified, the original contract with the gas company in Pakistan — Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Ltd. — was signed in 2015, initial payments were made and pipelines laid and only the "gas tap remains to be opened". However, more than three years later, an endorsement of the connection application from the Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs has yet to be received. The problem is more acute now as winters in Islamabad often see sub-zero temperatures, and gas is the most popular means of heating in Pakistan. Instead, dozens of Indian diplomats are left using ineffective room heaters and gas cylinders for both heating and cooking in their apartments. The diplomats also reported frequent power outages and slow Internet connections. Pakistan and Indian officials confirmed to The Hindu that the gas connection issue



was being discussed in both capitals this week. In the absence of any resolution, an Indian official said the government would not "rule anything in or out" on retaliatory measures against Pakistan that could ensue. The officials said the situation over the gas connections was coming to a boil over the Christmas vacations, while Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan Ajay Bisaria is in Delhi, and Pakistan High Commissioner Sohail Mehmood is in Islamabad for consultations. A Pakistani official insisted that the claims by the Indian side were "not what is being reported", indicating that the issue was a procedural one. The Indian side did not respond to a request for a comment. The issue has also cast in the shade other goodwill gestures being carried out by both countries over the return of prisoners. After Pa-

kistan repatriated 33-year-old engineer Hamid Ansari last week, who had spent six years in a jail there, India is expected to repatriate two Pakistanis over the Wagah border on Wednesday. Imran Warsi has served a 10-year sentence in prison and 21-year-old Abdullah Shah is autistic and has been in a juvenile detention centre since May 2017 despite his illness. Activists working for the release of more such prisoners stuck in jails say they hoped the recent actions would help build a better atmosphere for bilateral ties. Instead, External Affairs Ministry officials accused the Pakistani government of vitiating ties. "Be it the gas connection or intrusive surveillance of officials or intruders entering [residential] premises, it seems efforts are to make the life of the High Commission officials difficult," a source said.

# Akhilesh lauds TRS chief for 'striving hard' to form federal front

(Gns. News), Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav Wednesday lauded TRS supremo and Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao for "striving hard" to form a federal front of regional parties ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. He also accused the BJP's Central and state governments of failing to fulfil their promises and claimed that the people are not happy with them. "I will soon go to Hyderabad to meet Rao, who is striving hard to bring the regional players together on a common platform," Mr. Yadav told mediapersons here. Lauding the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) supremo's efforts to form a federal front to take on the BJP in the general elections next year, he said, "I spoke to Rao and we were supposed to meet on December 25-26. But somehow it could not take place. Now I will see him in Hyderabad." The TRS chief, who is in Delhi since Monday night, plans to meet Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo Mayawati. Mr. Rao met his Odisha counterpart Naveen



Patnaik on Sunday and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday in Kolkata wherein he discussed with them, among other issues, the formation of a non-Congress, non-

BJP front ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. To a question on including the Congress in any alliance to take on the BJP unitedly, Mr. Yadav expressed displeasure over the Samajwadi Party's lone MLA in Madhya Pradesh not being made a minister in the Kamal Nath-led government. Though the Congress, with 114 seats, emerged as the single largest party in the 230-member Madhya Pradesh Assembly, it failed to cross the half-way mark (116) on its own and enlisted the support of the BSP and the SP, which have won two seats and one, respectively. However, no MLA from the Mayawati-led BSP or the SP was given place in the Cabinet. Responding to another question, the Samajwadi party chief said, "In the days to come, who all will join hands with the SP, who all want to come, all options are open." Hitting out at the saffron party, Mr. Yadav said, "The BJP has deceived the common people. Lauding the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) supremo's efforts to form a federal front to take on the BJP in the general elections next year, he said, "I spoke to Rao and we were supposed to meet on December 25-26. But somehow it could not take place. Now I will see him in Hyderabad." The TRS chief, who is in Delhi since Monday night, plans to meet Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo Mayawati. They only made tall promises but have done nothing on the ground for the people. Four-and-a-half years' rule of the BJP at the Centre too stands exposed now."

# Afghanistan postpones presidential election

(Gns. News),  
Afghanistan's presidential election, initially scheduled for April, will be postponed for several months to allow time to fix technical problems that surfaced during October's Parliamentary elections, officials said Wednesday. More time is needed to verify voter lists and train staff on a biometric identification system designed to reduce fraud, said Abdul Aziz Ibrahim, deputy spokesman for the Independent Election Commission. Parliamentary elections were fraught with delays after the few staff trained on the biometric system did not show up at the polling booths and countless registered voters could not find their names on voter lists. Polling had to continue for a second day after hundreds of polling stations opened several hours late. Several legal complaints have been filed to challenge the results. No new date for the Presidential election has yet been set. The last Presidential election, held in 2014, was mired in controversy and widespread allegations of fraud. The two leading candidates, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, fought a tight race that went to a second vote. But before the results of the runoff could be announced, Abdullah alleged massive vote fraud and warned of widespread protests. John Kerry, the then U.S. secretary of state, interceded and helped cobble together a unity government and convinced the election commission to hold off on announcing the results of the runoff, which Ghani seemed poised to win. Ghani was named president and Abdullah was given a newly created title of Chief Executive. The arrangement was intended to last only two years but has continued up to the present, resulting in a government marked by deep divisions that has struggled to combat a resurgent Taliban.



region several times since his appointment in September, reportedly meeting with the Taliban on several occasions. Khalilzad has said he would like to see the Taliban and the Afghan government devise a "roadmap" before the April vote. Both sides have said that was an unrealistic deadline.

# Focus on construction of ORR: Collector

(Gns. News), With the suggestion from Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, District Collector K. Dhananjaya Reddy is keen on the construction of Outer Ring Road and beautification of Srikakulam to ensure a new look for the district headquarters. The Chief Minister, who came to Srikakulam on December 22, reportedly directed the district administration to speed up the works in spite of the objections from a few public representatives. The proposal, which was mooted five years ago, has been shelved with the objection from many public representatives who feared about people's agitation and its political consequences. The district administration, which has successfully completed the land acquisition for Vamsadhara Project and Kovvada atomic power plan, is hopeful to complete the acquisition for ORR in a hassle-free manner. The administration feels that the property owners would come forward on their own for acquisition as they would get decent compensation and with the enhancement of value for their remaining portion of the property. As per the original plan, the proposed ring road would cover Ponnada Bridge-Collectorate-Kunikipeta-Khazipeta-Arasavalli-National Highway and Navabharat Junction. The total stretch would be around 12 km. The officials estimated that around ₹150 crore would be needed for the proposed project. However, the government is keen to spend up to ₹500 crore for ORR and beautification of the entire Srikakulam which was upgraded as corporation two years ago. Mr. Dhananjaya Reddy told The Hindu that district headquarters would have a beautiful look with the proposed ORR. "Currently, we are focussing on widening of all the

# We don't expect a secular govt. without Congress' participation', says CPI(M) leader K. Balakrishnan

(Gns. News), Reiterating that the objective of secular forces is to defeat the BJP-led NDA government in the upcoming Lok Sabha election, CPI(M) State secretary K. Balakrishnan has said that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's candidature for the Prime Ministerial post could be considered along with that of other contenders after the polls. In an interview on Tuesday, he said that the priority was to unite all secular forces in the country, and that other issues should not be allowed to affect this task. Excerpts: What kinds of problems do you think will arise if the Prime Ministerial candidate is announced before the election? The DMK has proposed Rahul Gandhi's name. The Congress has won the Assembly elections in three States, and there is hope that its prospects would be good in many other States as well. But we should not allow the BJP to politicise the candidature of Mr. Gandhi and prevent secular parties from coming together against it in the Lok Sabha polls. There is a perception that the Left parties are opposing Rahul

Gandhi's candidature because it will affect them in the States where they are a dominant force... I don't think that is an issue. The central committee of the party has already made it clear that we could come to an electoral understanding with the DMK even if the Congress is a part of it, as we are driven by the motive of defeating the BJP. Our leaders and cadre in the States where the Left parties are strong are fully aware that if there is a secular government after the election, it will include the Congress. We do not expect a government without the participation of the Congress. The BJP is the only party that has consistently gained ground in the country, despite the strategies devised by the secular parties to arrest its growth. How do you explain this? Is the appeasement of minorities by other political parties, as alleged by the BJP, responsible for its growth? You should keep in mind that though the BJP has formed the government at the Centre, its vote share has not crossed 31%. It was able to form the government because the votes of the Opposition parties in

many States got split. A strong Opposition could change this trend. I have the same answer for the allegation that the appeasement of minorities has paved the way for the BJP's ascendance in the country. Of course, the minorities would not have voted for the BJP. But the Hindus, who are a majority, have also not totally thrown their weight behind the BJP. Had they done that, the BJP would have witnessed a substantial spike in its vote share. Today is the day when 44 Dalits were burnt to death in Keezhavenmani. Some argue that the Communists view the incident as a class struggle rather than looking at it from a caste angle. They were massacred not because they were Dalits, but because they revolted against the landlord Gopalakrishna Naidu over issues relating to wages, leasing of land and the cruel treatment meted out to agricultural workers, including whipping and drenching them in cow dung. What Keezhavenmani witnessed was not a clash between Dalits and non-Dalits. In Keezhavenmani, it

# Magnitude 4.8 earthquake hits Sicily; 10 injured

A quake triggered by Mount Etna's ongoing eruption jolted eastern Sicily before dawn on December 26, slightly injuring 10 people and forcing villagers to flee their homes. Italy's Civil Protection officials said the quake, which struck at 3:19 a.m., was part of a swarm of some 1,000 tremors, most of them barely perceptible, linked to Etna's volcanic eruption this week. The quake struck north of Catania, the largest city in the eastern part of the Mediterranean island, but no injuries or damages were reported there. Italy's national seismology institute said it registered a magnitude of 4.8 and occurred at a relatively shallow depth, 1 kilometre (0.6 mile) under the mountain's surface. The tremor damaged some rural homes, including structures that had been abandoned years ago, toppled a Madonna



statue in a church in the town of Santa Venerina and opened up cracks on a highway, which was closed for inspection, Rai state radio said. "Etna remains a dangerous volcano, and this country of ours is unfortunately fragile," government undersecretary Vito Crimi said, adding there were no fatalities and 10 slight injuries. The quake was also felt in the upscale Sicilian resort town of Taormina. The Civil Protection agency said temporary shelters

were being set up for people whose houses were damaged or who were too alarmed to return to their homes. In recent days, Etna's latest eruption has been shooting volcanic ash, heavy smoke and lava stones into the air, coating roads and homes nearby with ash. The quake struck north of Catania, the largest city in the eastern part of the Mediterranean island, but no injuries or damages were reported there. Italy's national seismology institute said it registered a magnitude of 4.8 and occurred at a relatively shallow depth, 1 kilometre (0.6 mile) under the mountain's surface. A new fracture has opened near Etna's southeast crater and lava has been flowing down an uninhabited slope. Etna, the largest of Italy's three active volcanoes, has been particularly active since July.

## Editorial

## Chabahar tidings: on Indian taking over port operations in Iran



The opening of the first office of Indian Ports Global Limited at Iran's Chabahar and the takeover of operations of the Shahid Beheshti port is a milestone in India's regional connectivity and trade game plan. Chabahar port opens up a permanent alternative route for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia, given the hurdles in the direct route through Pakistan. It facilitates India's role in Afghanistan's development through infrastructure and education projects. And it gives India's bilateral ties with Iran, a major oil supplier and potential trade market for India, a big fillip. India has helped develop the Shahid Beheshti port with these outcomes in mind, and has been given the contract to manage it for 18 months. It will be important to operationalise the port quickly and smoothen the route to Afghanistan. The decision by India, Afghanistan and Iran to hold an international event in February 2019 to promote Chabahar and to study ways to make the route more attractive and decrease logistic costs is timely. About 500 companies have registered with the Free Trade Zone authority there. While keeping timelines and delivery of New Delhi's commitments will be key to the port becoming a regional hub for transit trade, steel and petrochemicals, it will be necessary to encourage Afghan companies to use the route more, in line with President Ashraf Ghani's desire to have a commercial fleet under the Afghan flag setting sail from Chabahar. Visions of Chabahar's immense potential as a game-changer for prosperity and stability in the region must, however, necessarily be tempered by the reality of geopolitical challenges. The Chabahar port has received a waiver from the U.S. sanctions on Iran for the moment, but these concessions could be withdrawn any time, given the constant upheaval in the administration. The possibility of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, after the pullout from Syria, will add to security concerns for Afghanistan and impact on the Chabahar route as well. Meanwhile, the reconciliation process with the Afghan Taliban is likely to see the regional powers, the U.S. and Russia engaging Pakistan more. This could give Islamabad space to play spoiler in Chabahar, which is seen as a rival warm water port to Pakistan's Gwadar. That the Afghanistan government is hedging its bets on trade via Chabahar too is clear: in recent months, special cargo corridors have been opened with China, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Europe, Russia, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, with more trade diverted through them than with traditional partners Pakistan and India. With Chabahar, India has done well to keep a place in the intricate connectivity network of the region. Given all the competing interests that criss-cross over Chabahar, it will require sustained and nuanced diplomacy to stay ahead in this game.

## Elections in an embattled democracy



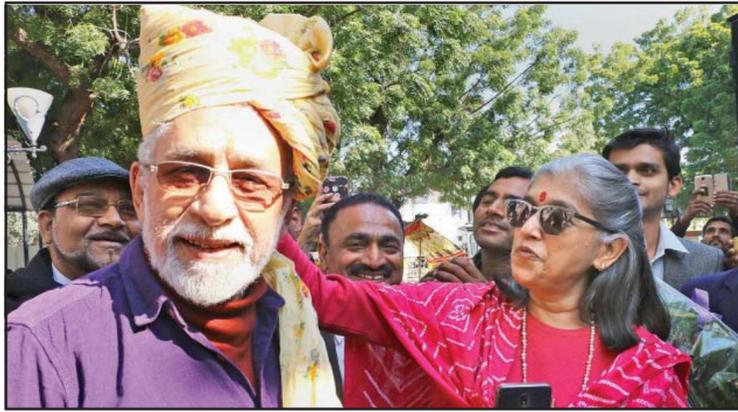
(Gns. News). Voters in Bangladesh face an imperfect choice: a heavy-handed incumbent versus a party that has stoked extremism. Elections in Bangladesh are famously a blood sport. During the campaigns virtually every constituency turns into its own bull ring, as party cadres treat rival banners like a matador's red cape. With polls slated for December 30, the first two weeks of canvassing have already seen eight deaths and dozens injured. Given our historic standards, though, these numbers are still pretty low.

With a first-past-the-post system, Bangladesh's elections come down to a choice between coalitions led by the two major political parties: the secular-centrist Awami League and the quasi-Islamist Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The Awami League has governed since 2009, delivering economic growth and rolling back extremist militancy. The country hit 7.86% GDP growth in 2017-18. Under the Awami League government, the country's power output has quadrupled in the last decade, and Bangladesh has topped regional rankings on many social indicators such as gender parity in primary education and maternal mortality. Yet, the much-beleaguered BNP still poses a threat to the Awami League. In addition to traditional anti-incumbency, a swathe of the public — especially sections of the intelligentsia and urban youth — has grown weary of the Awami League's heavy-handed rule, which was sorely on display during two rounds of student protests earlier this year. The Awami League also passed a needlessly harsh Digital Security Bill earlier this year. This has

not gone down well with an increasingly digitised populace. Ironically enough, it is the ruling party's own massive programme of "Digital Bangladesh" that has led to the mass adoption of tech and Internet services. Despite some just criticism of the Awami League's record on rights, critics who pretend that authoritarianism is a problem unique to the Awami League are being disingenuous. Not only did Bangladesh suffer military dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s, the country has struggled to establish a culture of political tolerance even since the advent of democracy in 1991. To understand why, a quick recap of pivotal moments of the past is unavoidable. The BNP won the first democratic polls in 1991, but refused to step down when their tenure ended in 1996. The Awami League led a mass movement to topple the BNP government and won the ensuing polls. In a contrast to the BNP, the Awami League voluntarily stepped down from power in 2001, and handed over the reins to an interim government as the Constitution required back then. The BNP went on to win the 2001 polls, raising hopes of more trust-building measures. Instead, the BNP celebrated its victory in October 2001 with a pogrom on Hindu minorities that left hundreds killed, raped or injured across many districts. The BNP also pivoted sharply to the right and gave political patronage to extremist outfits which carried out a series of fatal attacks. One attack, in August 2004, targeted Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina, killing 19 people and injuring hundreds. Among the dead was Ivy Rahman, head of the women's wing of the Awami League.

## The worried Indian: on Naseeruddin Shah expressing his opinion

(Gns. News). The intimidatory power of the mob made itself felt once again when the Ajmer Literature Festival abruptly cancelled veteran actor Naseeruddin Shah's keynote address. This followed the torrent of abuse heaped on Mr. Shah by a loose coalition of persons, ranging from anonymous trolls on social media to functionaries of the Bharatiya Janata Party, after he spoke about the dangerous amount of power that mobs wield in India. In a reference to the violence over allegations of cow carcasses found in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr district this month that led to the killing of a police officer and another person, he spoke of the growing insecurity over being targeted by vigilante groups. "There is complete impunity for those who take law into their own hands," said Mr. Shah. "I feel anxious thinking about my children." Unfortunately, in this climate of hyper-nationalism,



even an expression of anxiety is twisted out of context and portrayed as disloyalty to the nation. As Mr. Shah has explained, he was only speaking as a worried Indian about a country he loves. But amid the acrimonious

outburst against him, no one cares to listen. A fringe group in Uttar Pradesh has offered him a one-way ticket to Karachi. And State BJP chief Mahendranath Pandey suggested, outrageously, that Mr. Shah was grow-

ing into the character of the Pakistani agent he had played in a film. That a mere expression of anxiety about lawlessness and vigilantism could be fraught with such repercussions is deplorable in a democracy. In a reference to the violence over allegations of cow carcasses found in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr district this month that led to the killing of a police officer and another person, he spoke of the growing insecurity over being targeted by vigilante groups. "There is complete impunity for those who take law into their own hands," said Mr. Shah. "I feel anxious thinking about my children." Unfortunately, in this climate of hyper-nationalism, even an expression of anxiety is twisted out of context and portrayed as disloyalty to the nation. Three years ago, another actor, Aamir Khan, was hounded for expressing alarm about growing intolerance; pressure was even applied on a private company to dismiss him as its brand ambassador. With each such reaction, the message is sent out to the next celebrity to hush his or her intervention in the public sphere. Governments have often given in to the mob's dictates, either as

the easy way out or for political signalling. In this case, the Rajasthan Chief Minister did the right thing by tweeting his regret over the fact that Mr. Shah couldn't participate in the Ajmer event, saying his "administration was fully prepared to hold [the] festival peacefully"; some arrests of those who attempted to vandalise the festival venue have also been carried out. But his own record of standing up for free expression, like that of many other politicians, is marred by inconsistency and underwritten by expediency. In his previous stint as CM, Mr. Gehlot and his party were of a piece with those who pressured Salman Rushdie into pulling out of the Jaipur Literature Festival in 2012. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of those in power to support those who feel threatened for their views and to come down hard on those who attempt to silence them with intimidation and threats.

## Regardless of which government enhanced powers of surveillance

Last week, a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) notification authorising 10 Central agencies to intercept, monitor, and decrypt online communications and data caused a furore in both Parliament and the wider civil society. The notification was described as an incremental step towards a surveillance state. The government's defence was equally swift: it protested that the notification created no new powers of surveillance. It was only issued under the 2009 Information Technology Rules, sanctioned by the previous United Progressive Alliance government. The 10 agencies had not been given a blank check; rather, specific surveillance requests, the government contended, still had to be authorised by the MHA in accordance with law. But whatever one makes of the government's defence, the MHA notification lays bare the lopsided character of the surveillance framework in India, and highlights an urgent need for comprehensive reform. The existing surveillance framework is complex and confusing. Simply put, two statutes control the field: telephone surveillance is sanctioned under the 1885 Telegraph Act (and its rules), while electronic surveillance is authorised under the 2000 Information Technology Act (and its rules). The procedural structure in both cases is broadly similar, and flows from a 1997 Supreme Court judgment: surveillance requests have to be signed off by an official who is at least at the level of a Joint Secretary.



information available about the bases on which surveillance decisions are taken, and how the legal standards are applied. Indeed, evidence seems to suggest that there are none: a 2014 RTI request revealed that, on an average, 250 surveillance requests are approved every day. It stands to reason that in a situation like this, approval resembles a rubber stamp more than an independent application of mind. The illusion of a trade-off to arguments such as these, there is a stock response: the right to privacy is not absolute. Surveillance is essential to ensure national security and prevent terrorist threats, and it is in the very nature of surveillance that it must take place outside the public eye. Consequently, the regime is justified as it strikes a pragmatic balance between the competing values of privacy and security. This is a familiar argument, but it must be examined more closely. First, let us clear a basic misconception: it is nobody's case that privacy is absolute. The staunchest civil rights advocates will not deny that an individual reasonably suspected of planning a terrorist attack should be placed under surveillance. The debate, therefore, is not about "whether surveillance at all", but about "how, when, and what kind of surveillance". In this context, the evidence demonstrates clearly that a heavily bureaucratized and minimally accountable regime of surveillance does nothing to enhance security, but does have significant privacy costs. For example, while examining the U.S. National Security Agency's programme of mass surveillance, an American court found that out of more than 50 instances where terrorist attacks had been prevented, not even a single successful pre-emption was based on material collected from the NSA's surveillance regime. Indeed, such a system often has counterproductive effects: a government that is not checked in any meaningful way will tend to go overboard with surveillance and, in the process, gather so much material that actually vital information can get lost in the noise. In the famous "privacy-security trade-off", therefore, it is exceedingly important to assess the balance on the basis of constitutional principles and fundamental rights, rather than blindly accepting the government's rhetoric of national security. After the Supreme Court's 2017 judgment in *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* ("the right to privacy case"), the constitutional contours within which the questions of 'how, when, and what kind' have to be answered have been made clear. Any impingement upon the right to privacy must be proportionate. One of the factors of the proportionality standard is that the government's action must be the least restrictive method by which a state goal is to be realised. In other words, if the same goal — i.e., protecting national security — can be achieved by a smaller infringement upon fundamental rights, then the government is constitutionally bound to adopt the method that does, indeed, involve minimal infringement. Under these parameters, there is little doubt that on the three counts described above — its bureaucratic character, its vagueness, and its opacity — the existing surveillance framework is unconstitutional, and must be reconsidered. To start with, it is crucial to acknowledge that every act of surveillance, whether justified or not, involves a serious violation of individual privacy; and further, a system of government surveillance has a chilling effect upon the exercise of rights, across the board, in society. Consequently, given the seriousness of the issue, a surveillance regime cannot have the executive sitting in judgment over the executive: there must be parliamentary oversight over the agencies that conduct surveillance. They cannot simply be authorised to do so through executive notifications. And equally important, all surveillance requests must necessarily go before a judicial authority, which can apply an independent legal mind to the merits of the request, in light of the proportionality standards discussed above. Second, judicial review will not achieve much if the grounds of surveillance remain as broad and vaguely worded as they presently are. Therefore, every surveillance request must mandatorily specify a probable cause for suspicion, and also set out, in reasonably concrete terms, what it is that the proposed target of surveillance is suspected of doing. As a corollary, evidence obtained through unconstitutional surveillance must be statutorily stipulated to be inadmissible in court. And

last, this too will be insufficient if surveillance requests are opposed — it will be very difficult for a judge to deny a request that is made behind closed doors, and with only one side presenting a case. There must exist, consequently, a lawyer to present the case on behalf of the target of surveillance — even though, of course, the target herself cannot know of the proceedings. To implement the suggestions above will require a comprehensive reform of the surveillance framework in India. Such a reform is long overdue. This is also the right time: across the world, there is an increasingly urgent debate about how to protect basic rights against encroachment by an aggressive and intrusive state, which wields the rhetoric of national security like a sword. In India, we have the Supreme Court's privacy judgment, which has taken a firm stand on the side of rights. Citizens' initiatives such as the Indian Privacy Code have also proposed legislative models for surveillance reform. We now need the parliamentary will to take this forward.

## Many miles to Mecca



(Gns. News). The Central government's proposal to ferry Haj pilgrims between Mumbai and Jeddah calls for a serious rethink, notwithstanding its laudable intention of providing an opportunity for poorer pilgrims to travel to Mecca. On the face of it, the move looks ill-conceived and appears to be an exercise in anachronism. The current arrangement for the Haj pilgrimage by the Haj Committee of India has worked well ever since sea voyages were phased out in 1995 and the Haj administration was decentralised. Flights from 21 cities in India take pilgrims to Jeddah in 6-8 hours. Pilgrims have to spend a maximum of six days in and around Mecca to carry out the core rituals of the Haj. Most pilgrims also stay for 10 days in Medina, the Prophet's adopted city. The Haj Committee schedule stretches across 40 days. It is doubtful whether any sea voyage would take less than eight days for an average pilgrim between Mumbai and Jeddah. The most modern vessels travel at a speed of 20 nautical miles an hour. Given this speed, the journey between Mumbai and Jeddah (2,400 nautical miles) would require at least five days if weather conditions are favourable, which is not always the case. Normally, a passenger vessel carries 4,000-5,000 people. This means pilgrims at both ends will require a day to complete the formalities of customs and immigration. Add to this a day's journey by train to Mumbai from the pilgrim's point of origin. In contrast to flight arrangements, the sea route entails centralisation of Haj arrangements. It presupposes that all pilgrims will be clustered in Mumbai for embarkation. Flights from provincial capitals had drastically eased the rigours of passage to the holy cities. Haj houses had come up in State capitals and were taking care of regional clusters. Besides being anachronistic, sea voyages were discarded as they were misused by cartels in Mumbai. Children were ferried from States such as West Bengal, Bihar and Assam for organised begging in holy places. Some of them were passed on to unscrupulous elements to be used in camel races. There were also instances of poor women being lured by persons posing as their mehram (blood relative or guardian for the journey) who instead trapped them in domestic servitude work in West Asia. The restoration of ships would reopen the floodgates for misuse yet again. The authorities need to assess the cumbersome formalities involved in reintroducing sea voyages. In Malaysia and Indonesia, Haj Boards mobilise savings, invest them in profitable ventures, constantly add dividends to deposits, and charter flights through open bidding. Such measures could be thought of as alternatives to sea travel, which has outlived its utility.

## On a shaky foundation

(Gns. News). The Union Home Secretary, last week, promulgated an order authorising 10 Central agencies to monitor, intercept and decrypt information which is transmitted, generated, stored in or received by any computer. Under the order, an individual who fails to assist these government agencies with technical assistance or extend all facilities can face up to seven years of imprisonment or be liable to be fined. The notification was reportedly issued in pursuance of powers stipulated in Section 69 of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which enables government agencies to intercept personal information of citizens under certain conditions. The Ministry, in response to flak from the Opposition, has issued a clarification that the authorisation is in conformity with the process stipulated in the IT Rules, 2009. The clarification assumes the legitimacy of Section 69 of the IT Act, the basis on which the IT Rules were framed. The IT Rules in turn form the source of power behind the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) notification. On the basis of this

assumption, the clarification justifies the notification without examining the validity of its source. All that the MHA clarifies is that since the notification conforms with the IT Rules, there is no reason for eyebrows to be raised. This, argument, however, is fallacious since it fails to take a step back and peruse Section 69 of the IT Act, which after *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* — "the right to privacy case", in 2017 — seems to fail the litmus test of constitutionality. Let us explain how. Why is Section 69 unconstitutional after *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India*? The nine-judge bench in *K.S. Puttaswamy* declared that there is a fundamental right to privacy flowing from inter alia Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution. In order for a restriction such as Section 69 allowing for interception of personal data on a computer to be constitutionally valid, it would not only have to pursue a legitimate state aim (say, for instance, national security) but also be proportionate, so that there is a rational nexus between the means adopted (i.e., authorisation of interception) and the aim.

Section 69 of the IT Act is so broadly worded that it could enable mass surveillance to achieve relatively far less serious aims such as preventing the incitement of the commission of a cognisable offence. Such surveillance could be justified to achieve relatively far less serious objectives such as a Facebook post expressing dissent against government policy which, in the state's opinion, is offensive. The state, through the powers under Section 69, can therefore justify authorising surveillance, purporting this to be a grave concern. The language of Section 69, therefore, speaks abundantly of doublepeak, allowing for disproportionate state action, antithetical to the right to privacy. Under Section 69, the government can intercept personal information under any of the following conditions: when it is necessary in the interest of Indian sovereignty or integrity; security of the state; friendly relations with foreign states; public order; and for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognisable offence related to these.

## CMRL mulls extending line to Tirumazhisai



(Gns. News), "It is at a very nascent stage now. But we will see how far it is feasible to carry out the plan. In the future, when the satellite township comes through, perhaps the link to Chennai Metro will be useful," an official said. Work on the satellite township — announced two decades ago to give the poor and the middle class access to affordable housing — has not begun yet. Planned at an estimated cost of ₹2,160 crore, the township will have 12,000 flats on 311 acres of land of the Tamil Nadu Housing Board. As the township lies in the flood plains, a controversy had erupted after the 2015 floods. The township as of now remains largely on paper due to problems with land acquisition. If the township does come up in the future, CMRL will take an extension from the Poonamallee station till Tirumazhisai, as part of the phase II project. This stretch would cover areas like Nazarethpet and Chembarambakkam, CMRL officials added. It would also be beneficial to students, as it would go past engineering colleges like Rajalakshmi Institute of Technology, Panimalar Engineering College and Sree Sastha College of Engineering, officials added. Planned at an estimated cost of ₹2,160 crore, the township will have 12,000 flats on 311 acres of land of the Tamil Nadu Housing Board. As the township lies in the flood plains, a controversy had erupted after the 2015 floods. The township as of now remains largely on paper due to problems with land acquisition. The Poonamallee Metro station is the terminal station on the Light House-Poonamallee stretch, one of three stretches planned under the phase II project of the Metro.

## Second Guatemalan child dies in immigration custody: U.S.

An 8-year-old boy from Guatemala died in government custody in New Mexico early Tuesday, U.S. immigration authorities said, marking the second death of an immigrant child in detention this month. The death came during an ongoing dispute over border security and with a partial government shutdown underway over President Donald Trump's request for border wall funding. U.S. Customs and Border Protection said the boy — identified by the Guatemalan consul in Phoenix as Felipe GuDB76uDD7A Alonzo — had shown "signs of potential illness" on Monday and was taken with his father to a hospital in Alamogordo, New Mexico. He was diagnosed with a cold and a fever, prescribed amoxicillin and ibuprofen, and released Monday afternoon after being held 90 minutes for observation, the agency said. The boy was returned to the hospital Monday evening with nausea and vomiting and died there just after midnight, CBP said. CBP has not yet confirmed when or where the father and son entered the United States or how long they were detained, saying only in its statement that the boy had been "previously apprehended" by its agents. The agency said the cause of the boy's death has not been determined and that it has notified the Department of Homeland Security's inspector general and the Guatemalan govern-

ment. A 7-year-old Guatemalan girl died earlier this month after being apprehended by border agents in New Mexico. The body of the girl, Jakelin Caal, was returned to her family's remote village Monday for burial Tuesday. The White House referred questions about the latest case to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, CBP's parent agency. CBP officers and the Border Patrol remain on the job despite the shutdown. According to Guatemala's foreign ministry, the father and son entered the U.S. at El Paso, Texas, on Dec. 18, then were taken to the Border Patrol's Alamogordo station Sunday. Alamogordo is about 90 miles (145 kilometers) from El Paso. Oscar Padilla, the Guatemalan consul in Phoenix, said he was told by the boy's father in a telephone interview that the two had been traveling from their home in Nenta village about 280 miles (450 kilometers) from Guatemala City. They were planning to go to Johnson City, Tennessee. The consul identified the father as 47-year-old Agustin Gomez, and said he remains in U.S. Border Patrol custody. CBP typically detains immigrants for no more than a few days when they cross the border before either releasing them or turning them over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement for longer-term detention. Agency guidelines say immigrants generally shouldn't be



detained for more than 72 hours in CBP holding facilities, which are usually smaller and have fewer services than ICE's detention centers. Parents and children together are almost always released quickly due to limited space in ICE's family detention facilities. A CBP spokesman on Tuesday did not respond to questions about the ministry's statement. The hospital, the Gerald Champion Regional Medical Center, declined to comment, citing privacy regulations. CBP promised "an independent and thorough review of the circumstances." The Guatemalan foreign ministry called for an investigation "in accordance with due process." Democratic members of Congress and immigration advocates sharply criticized CBP's handling of Jakelin's death and questioned

whether border agents could have prevented it by spotting symptoms of distress or calling for an evacuation by air ambulance sooner. CBP has said that it took several hours to transport Jakelin and her father from a remote Border Patrol facility to a larger station, where her temperature was measured at 105.7 degrees Fahrenheit (40.9 degrees Celsius). Emergency medical technicians had to revive her twice. She was ultimately flown to an El Paso hospital, where she died the next day. Large numbers of Guatemalan families have been arriving in recent weeks in New Mexico, often in remote and dangerous parts of the desert. Jakelin and her father were with 161 other people when they were apprehended in Antelope Wells, about 230 miles (370 kilometers) southwest of Alamogordo.

## Heritage highs and lows



(Gns. News), It was exactly 500 years ago in 1518 that Sultan Quli Qutb-ul-Mulk constructed the Safa Masjid or Jama Masjid at the foothills of the Golconda hillock to begin his reign. His descendants would rule for 150 more years, with one of them, Muhammad Quli building Hyderabad. For any city, five centuries would have meant a year of celebrations and stock-taking. But in Hyderabad, the event was just glossed over except for a seminar at the Maulana Azad National Urdu University. But a little away from the Golconda fort, the first phase of the restoration/conservation of Qutb Shahi Tombs complex was completed a few months ago. The monuments, which were cordoned off for the safety of visitors, are now accessible. Visitors are getting a good look at how the monuments might have looked in the glory days of the first rulers of Hyderabad. But then 2018 was a year of disaster for built heritage as the massive hangar of the Gowliguda central bus station collapsed on a day when there was no rain or wind. Now, workers are dismantling the structure which is closely associated with the rise of public transport in the closing years of Nizam's rule and the success of networking distant areas in the State by the Road Transport Corporation. How the hangar was allowed to collapse is a simple story of neglect, indifference with the elements pitching in. The same state of affairs continue at the grand Osmania General Hospital where major portions of the old building have been abandoned after protests by doctors and nurses. While heritage activists led by Intach's Anuradha Reddy and Sajjad Shahid have raised the issue about neglect, nothing has changed on the ground. This was also the year when one of the facets of Charminar Pedestrianisation Project was completed, albeit with structural hiccups. As vehicular traffic has been restricted near the monument, visitors are able to get better and more leisurely views than were possible earlier. However, an army of vendors and hawkers presently occupy the area around Charminar, ruining the experience.

## Police block Chinese court where rights lawyer is to be tried



(Gns. News), About two dozen plainclothes police were stationed outside a courthouse in northern China on Wednesday as the trial of a prominent human rights lawyer was expected to unfold. Reporters, foreign diplomats and supporters were prevented from approaching the municipal court in Tianjin city where lawyer Wang Quanzhang was to be tried. Mr. Wang is among more than 200 lawyers and legal activists who were detained in a sweeping 2015 crackdown. A member of the Fengrui law firm, among the best known in the field broadly known in China as "rights defending," he was charged with subversion of state power in 2016. He has been held without access to his lawyers or family for more than three years. Fengrui has pursued numerous sensitive cases and represented outspoken critics of the ruling Communist Party. Mr. Wang represented members of the Falun Gong meditation sect that the government has relentlessly suppressed since banning

it as an "evil cult" in 1999. Group leaders have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms and ordinary followers locked up as alleged threats. Mr. Wang's wife Li Wenzu told on Tuesday that state security agents in Beijing were preventing her from going to Tianjin for her husband's trial. At the time, there were five cars stationed outside her house, said Ms. Li, who was informed of the trial just two days prior by a government lawyer. The trials of Chinese human rights figures are often scheduled during the Christmas period, when many Western diplomats and journalists are on holiday. She and Wang Qiaoling, the wife of another rights lawyer who was detained, described in a statement posted to Twitter their encounter with state security at 5.30 a.m. on Wednesday. A state security officer offered to drive them to Tianjin, but he said that the trial proceedings were not public and that they would not be allowed to attend. Ms. Li and Ms. Wang wrote that they declined the

officer's offer and tried to leave Ms. Li's apartment complex, only to find that all six gates out of the complex had police parked outside. Ms. Li has campaigned tirelessly for her husband's release. Earlier this month, she and other wives of detained lawyers shaved their heads in an act of protest. In Chinese, the words for "hair" and "law" are near-homophones. "We can be hairless, but you can't be lawless," they chanted. Diplomats from the U.S., Swiss, U.K. and German embassies were outside the Tianjin courthouse. They said they had requested access to attend the trial but were denied. A man shouted his support for Wang Quanzhang before he was shoved into a car by plainclothes officers. "A frail scholar, and you all torment him like this," Yang Chunlin yelled, referring to Mr. Wang. "Wang Quanzhang is the greatest person in China. I demand political reform, I demand civil rights, I demand elections within the party, respect for human rights," Mr. Yang said before he was taken away.

## BMC inspection of Kamala Mills reveals gross illegalities



(Gns. News), The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), in its inspection of the Kamala Mills Compound premises, has found gross illegalities, including rampant FSI misuse, and amalgamation and alterations without permission in many units. The final report of the inspection, carried out jointly with the State Industries Department, will be ready in a month. The fire in Mojo's Bistro and 1Above restaurants inside the compound on December 29 last year claimed 14 lives. Municipal Commissioner Ajay Mehta submitted a detailed report to the CM with recommendations to prevent a relapse of such an incident. One of the recommendations was a thorough inspection of the compound for FSI violations. The time of redevelopment, Kamala Mills Compound was given an incentive FSI of 1.33 over and above the zonal FSI, since it opted for development of Information Technology and IT-enabled services. The developers were allowed extra FSI only if they used 80% of it for IT purposes, with only 20% area allowed for commercial use. Based on Mr. Mehta's recommendations, the BMC formed teams of officers from the Building Proposal Department, G South ward and experts. The teams inspected the premises in November, along with officials from the Industries Department. While the BMC is looking at FSI and construction violations, the Industries Department is looking at the change of use (IT to non-IT). The officers are now tabulating the data. "There are instances of FSI violations where non-FSI components have been used for construction," Vinod Chithore, director (engineering services and projects), who is heading the committee, said. In building plans, certain areas are kept free of FSI, while no construction is allowed. This

includes common passages, compulsory open space, flower beds and parapets. Many such areas, mostly common passages, were found to be encroached upon in Kamala Mills. The BMC has also found amalgamation and alteration — changes to the premises contrary to the approved building plans — without permission. "Once the tabulation is done, we will submit the report to the additional commissioner and municipal commissioner in around one month. After that, inspection reports will be made and notices will be issued," Mr. Chithore said. The teams have also found non-conformity to the IT use, but that is the purview of the Industries Department. The inspection is separate from the action taken against irregularities in the compound soon after the incident. Besides, ahead of the anniversary of the fire, the BMC has carried out inspections and removed illegal structures. This week, civic officials will patrol the party areas of Lower Parel and Worli at night.

## Japan to resume commercial whaling



Japan on Wednesday said it is withdrawing from the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and will resume commercial whaling next year, in a move expected to spark international criticism. The announcement had been widely expected and comes after Japan failed in a bid earlier this year to convince the IWC to allow it to resume commercial whaling. "We have decided to withdraw from the International Whaling Commission in order to resume commercial whaling in July next year," top government spokesman Yoshihide Suga told reporters. "Commercial whaling... will be limited to Japan's territorial waters and exclusive economic zones. We will not hunt in the Antarctic waters or in the southern hemisphere," Mr. Suga added. Tokyo has repeatedly threatened to pull out of the body, and has been regularly criticised for catching hundreds of whales a year for "scientific research" despite being a signatory to a moratorium on hunting the animals. Mr. Suga said Japan would officially inform the IWC of its decision by the end of the

year, which will mean the withdrawal comes into effect by June 30. Leaving the IWC means Japanese whalers will be able to resume hunting in Japanese coastal waters of minke and other whales currently protected by the IWC. But Japan will not be able to continue the so-called scientific research hunts in the Antarctic that it has been exceptionally allowed as an IWC member under the Antarctic Treaty. The withdrawal means Japan joins Iceland and Norway in openly defying the IWC's ban on commercial whale hunting. Japan has hunted whales for centuries, and the meat was a key source of protein in the immediate post-World War II years when the country was desperately poor. But consumption has declined significantly in recent decades, with much of the population saying they rarely or never eat whale meat. Whale hunting has become a rare thorny subject in Japan's otherwise largely amiable foreign policy, with international opposition only serving to make conservatives dig in deeper in support of the tradition.

Many members of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's conservative Liberal Democratic Party are supporters of whaling, and he himself comes from a constituency where whale hunting remains popular. Tokyo argues that whaling is an important part of Japan's traditions, and Mr. Suga said the withdrawal would allow fishermen to "pass our country's rich whaling culture onto the next generation." In September, Tokyo sought to convince the IWC to allow it to resume commercial whaling, arguing that stocks of certain species were now sufficient to support renewed hunting. But the bid failed, with strong opposition from anti-whaling nations — led by Australia, the European Union and the United States. Activist groups slammed the decision, with Greenpeace calling it a "sneaky" announcement. "The declaration today is out of step with the international community, let alone the protection needed to safeguard the future of our oceans and these majestic creatures," said Sam Annesley, executive director at Greenpeace Japan. The IWC, established in 1946 to conserve and manage the world's whale and cetacean population, introduced a moratorium on commercial whaling in 1986. Tokyo has long exploited a loophole allowing whales to be killed for "scientific research" and says it is trying to prove the population is large enough to sustain a return to commercial hunting. It makes no secret of the fact that meat from the expeditions ends up on dinner tables. "There have been no concessions from countries who only place importance on the protection of whales," Mr. Suga said. "At the IWC general meeting in September this year, it became evident once again that those supporting the sustainable use of whale stocks and those supporting protection cannot co-exist, leading us to this conclusion."

## Waqf Board mulls full-time replacement for CEO

(Gns. News), The Telangana State Waqf Board (TSWB) is mulling a full-time replacement for in-charge Chief Executive Officer Shah Nawaz Qasim. The Muslim endowments panel is likely to bring up the issue at the next board meeting. Mr. Qasim, an IPS officer, is also serving as Commissioner, Minorities Welfare. He was appointed as CEO, replacing Abdul Mannan Farooqui last April. Senior board member Syed Akbar Nizamuddin Hussaini said the Waqf Act mandates a full-time CEO. "Section 23 says that there should be a full-time CEO who should be appointed by the government by a gazette notification. It is likely that we are going to pass a resolution during the upcoming board meeting, or the one after that, and suggest two other names for a full-time CEO, out of



which one will be chosen. The names are yet to be finalised," he said. Other sources said that there are informal deliberations about the replacement of current board chairman Mohammed Saleem who is a Member of Legislative Council since March 30, 2013 is to come to an end early next year. Explaining the issue,

the source said, "Apart from Mutawalli category and others, the composition of Waqf Board is such that Muslim members of the State Legislature — MLAs or MLCs — are members, apart from a Muslim parliamentarian. Mr. Saleem is an MLC whose term will soon end. So, we will soon need a new chairman," the source said and added that two members, who were not a part of the previous board, are in the race for the next CEO. Meanwhile, reacting to reports in certain sections of the media about a no objection certificate to alienate a land parcel being allegedly issued, Mr. Saleem on Tuesday said, "There can be no NOC issued. The NOC is fake and we will get to the bottom of this and not spare anybody involved, irrespective of seniority or position."

## Safety concerns: homeless spend sleepless nights

(Gns. News), The nights of homeless people are marked with thefts and scuffles whether sleeping on the streets, in scores, in front of Bangla Sahib Gurdwara or in the confines of the government-run night shelter nearby. The Hindu visited the area on Tuesday evening to speak to the locals. Kuldeep Singh was tucked into his makeshift bed on the footpath by 7 p.m. He lay on top of a thick blanket spread over a plastic sheet and wrapped a thinner blanket around him which he kept adjusting under his feet while he

spoke. "It's to make sure no one steals it at night," he explained. Fear of theft was also why he did not use the thick blanket to cover himself. "It can be very dangerous here. Look at this scar I got, from being cut with a blade, when I first came here," he said, outlining a faint line near his temple. "Drug addicts, drunkards steal your things in the middle of the night." But he does not want to stay at the government-run night shelter a few metres away, currently run by Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses (SYPM)

which has a capacity of about 300 beds, according to a caretaker at the site, because he has been robbed there too. "I stayed there for a couple of days but someone stole my watch and some money. And the staff there did nothing about it." Pura, who also slept on the footpath said he left the facility after three days because it was infested with bugs and the sheets were not maintained. "A person sleeping next to me vomited on my blanket and the staff just threw it back into a pile. I just could not sleep there,"

# Govt.'s draft rules to regulate social media echo SC orders

(Gns. News), The draft rules proposed by the government to curb "unlawful content" on social media that make it mandatory for intermediaries to trace the "originator" of such content have drawn strong criticism from the Opposition. The latter contend that the state is expanding the scope for surveillance of citizens. However, a close look at the draft Information Technology (Intermediaries Guidelines) Amendment Rules, 2018, shows that the proposed changes are largely in line with developments on this front in cases before the Supreme Court in recent months. While the Centre itself has been informing the court since October about its intentions, the court has also voiced its concern over irresponsible content on social media. In fact, in a July 17, 2018 judgment in the Teheen S. Poonawalla case, the court gave the government a virtual carte blanche to stop/curb dissemination of "irresponsible and explosive messages on various social media platforms, which have a tendency to incite mob violence and lynching of any kind." For instance, Rule 3 of the draft speaks about the "due diligence" to be observed by online platforms that have over 50 lakh users. It proposes the publication of rules, a privacy policy and user agreement for access to a social intermediary's resource. Clause (1) of Rule 3 mandates that a user cannot host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, update or share information, for example, which is pornographic, paedophilic, racially



or ethnically objectionable, invasive of another's privacy, harms minors in anyway, etc. Now consider this. On December 6, a Supreme Court Bench, led by Justice Madan B. Lokur, mentioned online giants Google, YouTube, Facebook, Microsoft and WhatsApp and recorded that "everybody is agreed that child pornography, rape and gang-rape videos and objectionable material need to be stamped out." The same order also noted submissions by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for WhatsApp, that "they have an end-to-end encryption technology, due to which it will not be possible to remove the content". Subsequently, on December 11, the Bench ordered the Centre to frame the necessary guidelines/Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and implement them within two weeks to

"eliminate child pornography, rape and gang rape imagery, videos and sites in content hosting platforms and other applications". The court then listed the case for February 2019. The draft rules have come within two weeks of the Supreme Court order. These two orders came on a suo motu case being heard in the Supreme Court from 2015 to curb online sexual abuse. Past orders in the case show that since October, the government has been trying hard to convince the court that it really wants to make social media safe. Thus, a Supreme Court order of October 22 records that the Centre has already prepared a SOP "for taking action by the security/law enforcement agencies under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act. A November 28 order records the submission of Solicitor-General Tushar

Mehta indicating that "certain actions were required to be taken by the intermediaries". These included setting up of proactive monitoring tools for auto-deletion of "unlawful content" and setting up a 24x7 mechanism for dealing with requisitions of law enforcement agencies. All these mechanisms can be found in the various clauses of the draft rules. The draft rules require the intermediary to trace the "originator of information" for authorised government agencies. The intermediary has to produce the information in 72 hours, but only if the request is based on a lawful order, in writing and concerns State security or investigation or prosecution or prevention of an offence, which may include lynching or mob violence. Besides, the draft rules put the onus on social media giants to "take all reasonable measures" to protect individual privacy as required under the Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Information) Rules of 2011.

## Four held for JD(S) worker's murder



The arrested are Shivaraj, Yogesh, Hemant, and Swamy, all residents of Thoppanahalli. Four more persons are still at large. Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy visited the house of the slain leader and met his family members. He termed the incident as "shocking and unfortunate" and said justice would be delivered. The Chief Minister was told by the family that Prakash's murder was planned by some local persons and executed by "supari" killers. However, the police said they are

investigating all angles. Speaking to presspersons, the Chief Minister clarified that he had not ordered the police to "mercilessly kill the assailants." "As a common man and not as Chief Minister, I expressed my pain on a phone call as I was too emotional at that moment. But it was quoted out of context," he said. Soon after hearing the news of the murder, Mr. Kumaraswamy, who was in Vijayapura on Monday, had told a person (believed to be a senior police officer) to mercilessly shoot the assailants.

Meanwhile, the situation in Thoppanahalli continued to be tense on Tuesday. Houses of two people suspects, Prasanna and Muthuraj, were vandalised by JD(S) workers. Both are absconding. Earlier, Prakash's body was taken to the village from the mortuary under heavy police security. Later, the funeral was held. Various human rights organisations have planned to meet Karnataka Human Rights Commission chairperson on Wednesday against Mr. Kumaraswamy's remark.

## Koreas hold groundbreaking ceremony for railway project

(Gns. News), Wednesday's ceremony at the North Korean border town of Kaesong comes weeks after the Koreans conducted a joint survey on the northern railway sections they hope to someday link with the South. The ambitious project is among a variety of peace gestures agreed between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and liberal South Korean President Moon Jae-in as they push ahead with engagement amid a stalemate in larger nuclear negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang. But beyond on-site reviews and ceremonies, the Koreans cannot move the project much further along without the removal of U.S.-led sanctions against the North. During his three summits with Mr. Moon and a meeting with President Donald Trump in June, Mr. Kim signed vague statements pledging a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula without describing how and when it would occur. But follow-up nuclear talks between Washington and Pyongyang have stalled for months over the sequencing of the denuclearization that Washington wants and the removal of international sanctions desired by Pyongyang. South Korea's Unification Ministry, which



handles inter-Korean affairs, said the Seoul government plans to conduct further surveys on North Korean railways and roads before drawing up a detailed blueprint for the project. "Actual construction will be pursued in accordance with progress in the North's denuclearization and the state of sanctions against the North," the ministry said in a statement. Even if the North takes concrete steps toward denuclearization and gains sanctions relief, some experts say updating North Korean rail networks and trains, which creak slowly along the rails that were first built in the early 20th century, could take decades and massive investment. Seoul said it received an exemption to sanctions from

the U.N. Security Council to proceed with Wednesday's ceremony as it involved the usage of South Korean transport vehicles and goods. The Koreans' joint survey of North Korean railways in November, which also required U.N. approval, marked the first time a South Korean train traveled on North Korean tracks. The Koreans in December 2007 began freight services between South Korea's Munsan Station in Paju and the North's Panmun Station to support operations at a now-shuttered joint factory park in Kaesong. The South used the trains to move construction materials north, while clothing and shoes made at the factory park were sent south.

# Indonesia asks people to avoid coast near erupting volcano

(Gns. News), Indonesian authorities asked people near an island volcano to avoid the coast while eruptions and weather and sea conditions were being monitored for tsunami risks. A tsunami that followed an eruption of Anak Krakatau hit communities along the Sunda Strait on Saturday night, killing more than 420 people and displacing thousands. The eruption is believed to have set off a landslide on the volcano's slopes, displacing the water that then slammed into Java and Sumatra islands. Indonesia's Meteorology, Geophysics and Climatology Agency asked people late on Tuesday to stay at least 500 meters (1,640 feet) from the Sunda Strait coastline. Agency's head Dwikorita Karnawati said government agencies were monitoring Anak Krakatau's eruptions and that high waves and heavy rain were possible Wednesday. "All these conditions could potentially cause landslides at the cliffs of the crater into the sea, and we fear that that could trigger a tsunami," she said at a news conference. She asked that communities remain vigilant but not panic. The tsunami on Saturday night struck without warning, taking people by surprise even in a country familiar with seismic disaster. No big earthquake shook the ground beforehand, and it hit at nighttime on a holiday weekend while people were enjoying concerts and other beach and resort activities. People in Sumur village, which has been slow to receive aid due to roads being cut off, remained stunned by how quickly the tsunami hit. The beach, located just a few kilometers from the tourist island of Umang near Java's western tip, is popular for snorkeling and other water activities. The tsunami decimated the area,



ripping houses from their foundations and bulldozing concrete buildings. Scientists have said the tsunami's waves were recorded in several places at about 1 meter (3.3 feet) high, but residents of Sumur insisted they towered more than 3 meters (10 feet) there. They said a soaring white wall of water roared toward them at high speeds, ripping trees out of the ground by their roots. "There was no sign of a tsunami when we were at the beach. The sea didn't recede," said Tati Hayati, a housewife, who was enjoying a pleasant evening with 10 other people when the disaster hit. "It was calm and bright with the full moon." When she spotted high, fast-moving waves launching toward the shore, she ran to her car and managed to get inside. But she couldn't outrun it. She said the car was struck by three waves, breaking out the back window and filling the vehicle with gushing water. "We were locked inside. The car was sway-

ing in the waves and we thought we would all die," Hayati said. "We almost could not breathe and I almost gave up when I groped the key in the water and managed to open the door, and the water began to recede. We got out of the car and ran to safety." More than 16,000 people were displaced from their homes and heavy equipment was urgently needed in the Sumur sub-district near Ujung Kulon National Park to help get aid flowing and reach people who may be injured or trapped, said Sutopo Purwo Nugroho, spokesman for Indonesia's Disaster Mitigation Agency. The death toll was 429, with more than 1,400 people injured and at least 128 missing, he

said. Anak Krakatau, or Child of Krakatau, formed in the early 20th century near the site of the cataclysmic 1883 eruption of Krakatau, which killed more than 30,000 people and hurled so much ash that it turned day to night in the area and reduced global temperatures. Anak Krakatau has been erupting since June and did so again 24 minutes before the tsunami, according to the geophysics agency. Saturday's disaster came ahead of the anniversary of the massive Asian tsunami that hit Dec. 26, 2004, after a magnitude 9.1 earthquake off Sumatra island spawned huge waves. The giant wall of water killed some 230,000 people in a dozen countries, most of them in Indonesia.

## No question of re-negotiating the Teesta agreement: Gowher Rizvi



(Gns. News), Gowher Rizvi, foreign policy adviser to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, discussed a plethora of issues, including those connecting Bangladesh and India, days before the country's general election on December 30. Excerpts: Bangladesh-India relationship has taken a giant leap forward. But many issues remain unresolved and often argued in Bangladesh that India has not done enough. Geography, history, culture, language and proximity binds the two countries together. Close and cooperative relations between the countries is not just a choice but also an imperative. The relationship is sanctified by shared experience and sacrifice of our war of liberation. This unique relationship cannot be defined or measured in the language of book keepers ledger of profit and loss. In the last decade the relationship between the two neighbours has reached new heights—virtually almost all outstanding issues have been amicably settled including demarcation of boundaries, resolution of adverse territorial possessions including 'teen bigha' and the enclaves; cross-border purchase of electricity; joint power ventures, significant Indian private investments in Bangladesh industries; and untied line of credit amounting to nearly 8 billion dollars. Buses are running from Shillong and Guwahati to Kolkata via Dhaka; direct passenger and goods trains have started to operate again; the waterways are being renovated to enable commerce through riverine routes; and the agreement on coastal shipping has cut the cost of cargo massively. The benefits of connectivity—road, air, rail, river and ICT—is fostering sub-regional cooperation and bringing benefits to India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. We are rebuilding the linkages, especially through river and road, the links which were destroyed in 1965 Pakistan-India war, and visa regime is enormously eased. Even though the adverse trade balance prevails, Bangladesh exports to India has almost quadrupled in the last couple of years. Indeed, the Teesta water agreement has not yet been signed. But it is important to understand that an agreement on water-sharing has been arrived at; and as far as we are concerned there is no question of re-negotiating the agreement. The agreement could not be signed because of India's domestic reasons. However, we have been repeatedly reassured by the Indian Prime Minister that the treaty will be signed soon. There is some concern about Awami League's alignment before this election with Islamist group Hifazat-e-Islam Bangladesh. Getting closer to such an organization may create problem later... what do you feel? Hifazat is not a political party but consists but consists of a large number of Madrasah students. Obviously any government will have interest in ensuring quality education in Madrasahs... to ensure inclusion of secular teaching with science, mathematics, physics, chemistry, English etc. We are working with Hifazat to broaden the curriculum to ensure that they are not snared into radical and extremist ideologies. [But] unlike the Jamaat, Hifazat is not against the creation of Bangladesh. They [unlike Jamaat] do not profess extra territorial loyalties to other countries. Then there was funding top about 550 mosques and Madrasahs from Saudi Arab... that is another concern? Instead of talking about any particular country, let me say that we are concerned about unchecked foreign donations coming to the country. We have recently revised the foreign contributions regulations act, like India, to prevent money laundering and funding of activities that undermines our plural, secular and multicultural society. Yes, we have received fund for building some mosques but it is designed in such a way that the space can be used for multi-purposes—it will also provide social space where youth and civil society members interact, make music, debate and organize community activities. They are aimed at creating a liberal, open society. Regarding elections, Awami League has done a lot of developmental work, but still it seems that the party is under huge pressure. Why? Elections in Bangladesh are hugely competitive; and it would be surprising if the government did not face strong opposition. This is the essence of democracy. You know, election in the subcontinent is noisy and it is so good that people can do this.

## Telangana Chief Minister Chandrashekar Rao meets Modi

(Gns. News), Telangana Rashtra Samithi chief and Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao met Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Wednesday. This is Mr. Rao's first meeting with Mr. Modi after the former won the Assembly election to return to power in Telangana. And the meeting comes at a time when Mr. Rao is trying to build a non-BJP, non-Congress "federal front" and has started second round of meetings with Opposition leaders. Last week he had a meeting with Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao presenting a memento to his Odisha counterpart Naveen Patnaik in Bhubaneswar on Sunday CR-Naveen meet fuels speculation on federal front



According to sources close to him, the meeting was largely restricted to the issues related to the State. Mr. Rao had gone with 16 items on his agenda,

including release of funds for 10 backward districts, setting up of a separate High Court for Telangana, Kendriya Vidyalayas in new districts and an Indian Institute of Information Technology (IIIT) in Karimnagar district. To meet BSP chief The TRS chief, who is in Delhi since Monday night, also plans to meet Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati. Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav has said that he will visit Hyderabad to meet Mr. Rao. Mr. Yadav said he would meet Mr. Rao after January 6 in Hyderabad as he could not be in Delhi on December 25 and 26 as planned earlier.

## Fog woes begin as cold wave continues

Low visibility conditions at the Indra Gandhi International Airport impacted flight operations through most of the day on Tuesday as Delhiites woke up to a cold, foggy Christmas morning. Nearly 84 flights were delayed and two flights cancelled, airport sources said. Departures had to be put on hold for an hour in the morning hours as visibility fell below 50 metres. Five incoming flights were diverted to nearby airports, including three international ones. The airport has CAT IIIB instrument landing system which allows aircraft to land even when visibility is as low as 50 metres. The MeT Department said that minimum temperatures are likely to fall by 2-3 degrees Celsius under the influence of a feeble western disturbance in the Himalayan region and in the next three-four days and dense fog, ground frost and cold wave conditions are likely to prevail in the Capital. "Moderate/dense fog in the morning on December 26, shallow/moderate fog in the morning will prevail between December 27 and December 29,"



said the MeT Department in its bulletin. It added that moderate/dense fog would return on December 30. On Tuesday, the maximum temperature fell to 19.5 degrees Celsius, two degrees below normal and the minimum temperature settled at 5 degrees Celsius that was three degrees below normal. Minimum and maximum temperatures are likely to settle between 20 degrees Celsius and 4 degrees Celsius.

Due to the cold weather and low wind speeds, the air quality also remained poor for the fourth consecutive day. Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data showed the overall air quality index (AQI) score was 409. According to SAFAR, Delhi's overall air quality is expected to improve due to increased wind speed from December 26 and it will go back to very poor category for the next three days.