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CHIEF GUEST
Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu presenting the University Gold Medals to the Students, at the Annual Convocation of Presidency College, in Chennai on Thursday.

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Chief minister Mamata Banerjee inaugurating Durga Puja at Bokulbagan in south Kolkata—Shyamal Maitra

SC to hear plea challenging state's decision to grant funds to Durga Puja committees today

NEW DELHI, OCT 11 /-- The Supreme Court today agreed to hear tomorrow an appeal challenging the West Bengal government's decision to grant Rs 10,000 each to puja committees in the state for Durga Puja celebrations. A bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi was apprised that on Wednesday the Calcutta High Court had refused to interfere with the Mamata Banerjee government's decision to grant funds to Puja committees in the state. The bench also comprising Justices S K Kaul and K.M. Joseph was told by lawyer Saurav Dutta, who had filed an appeal against the high court's decision, that the decision of the state government was against the established principle of law and sought an urgent hearing on his plea. The High Court had on Wednesday refused to interfere in the state government's decision to give Rs 10,000 each to 28,000 Durga puja committees in the state, and said the legislature is the appropriate forum to decide on such expenditure. An interim stay granted by the court on disbursement of funds stood vacated as the court disposed of the plea. The petitioner, in his plea, had challenged the government's decision to disburse funds to the tune of Rs 28 crore, claiming it was a done to puja committees and had no public purpose. The plea also claimed that providing funds to puja committees is a violation of the secular structure of the Constitution. On September 10, Mamata Banerjee had declared that Rs 10,000 would be given to each of the 28,000 puja committees across the state—3,000 in the city and 25,000 in the districts, costing the government an amount of Rs 28 crore.

'Titli' leaves 8 dead in Andhra, causes widespread damage

AMARAVATI, OCT 11 /-- The "very severe" cyclonic storm, "Titli", left eight people dead, besides causing widespread damage in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts of north coastal Andhra Pradesh today, the State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) said. The cyclone threw normal life out of gear as heavy to very heavy rains started lashing the two districts since late Wednesday night. Eight people were killed in different storm-related incidents. While a 62-year-old woman died at Gudivada Aghraharam village after an uprooted tree fell on her, a 65-year-old man died in a house collapse at Rotanasa village in Srikakulam district, the SDMA said. The chief minister's office (CMO) informed that six fishermen, who had put out to sea, were killed. Of the 67 fishing boats that had ventured into the sea over the last few days from Kakina in East Godavari district, 65 had returned to the shore safely, the CMO said. Efforts were on to bring back the remaining two boats safely, it added in a release. The road network suffered extensive damage in Srikakulam district, while the power distribution network was also vastly affected. More

Farakka Express derailment: Death toll reaches 7

LUCKNOW, OCT 11 /-- The toll in derailment of New Delhi-bound New Farakka Express rose to seven today with two of the injured people succumbing to their injuries at hospitals in Lucknow. Five coaches and the engine of the New Farakka Express derailed near Rae Bareilly, early on Wednesday killing five people and seriously injuring nine. Divisional Railway Manager (DRM), Northern Railway, said: "Two of the injured died on Thursday... with this, the toll in yesterday's derailment incident has gone up to seven." Rinku (28), who was brought to the KGMU Trauma Centre in Lucknow in a very bad state, and 11-year-old Sugandh admitted at the Trauma Centre of SGPGI with multiple fractures, died early on Thursday.

'Lackadaisical attitude' in India towards enforcing sexual harassment law: Mohandas Pai

HYDERABAD, OCT 11 /-- As the #MeToo movement gathers momentum, IT industry veteran T.V. Mohandas Pai today said most of the Indian entities, particularly government organisations, have a general lackadaisical attitude towards enforcing law dealing with sexual harassment at the workplace. The law is adequate, but as usual implementation is weak, the former chief financial officer of Infosys Ltd alleged and claimed that the IT industry was implementing it fairly well, ahead of other industries. All entities need to enforce this within their enterprises but there is a general lackadaisical attitude within most of them, especially media and entertainment, both of which have an "exaggerated notion" about themselves, Pai said. "Most media seem to believe that they are above the law and powerful, a typical Delhi attitude, and we will probably see more stories coming out," he told news agency PTI. Noting that there is a global movement and more and more women are coming out, Pai said it is a good development showing greater resolve to get gender justice. "The government should criminally prosecute companies which have not complied with the law, but first government should ensure that it has set up the process to carry out the law for its own employees. From what I know, the government itself is probably the biggest offender," he said. "We also saw some universities like JNU have weak enforcement earlier. All colleges and universities should tighten up their enforcement," he said. India's biggest challenge, Pai said, is a broken down justice system which does not deliver justice in time. "In our society, there is a lack of respect for rule of law as great many police and law officers are corrupt and our courts failing in their duty to deliver justice in time. Then and only then (only when this changes) will we see an improvement," he added. Following Hollywood's #MeToo movement, which has seen several women speaking out about sexual harassment faced by them, many are referring to actress Tanushree Dutta's statement on Bollywood actor Nana Patekar as the beginning of a similar campaign in Hindi cinema. Following her allegations, women across various spheres, including journalists, have taken to the social media, narrating their ordeal.

Defence minister's France trip a cover-up bid by Govt: Rahul BJP accuses Cong president of lying at election rallies

NEW DELHI, OCT 11 /-- Congress president Rahul Gandhi today described defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman's three-day trip to France from Thursday as part of a "huge cover-up" by the Union government on the Rafale deal.

"Why has suddenly the defence minister rushed to France? What is the emergency," Rahul raised question at a press conference. The presser with the Prime Minister is corrupt. The Prime Minister of India is a corrupt man," he said. Modi came to power on the promise of fighting corruption, the Congress leader said, adding that he wanted to tell the youth of the country that the prime minister was involved in corruption.

On Wednesday, French investigative publication Mediapart, citing an internal document of Dassault Aviation, reported that the aerospace giant was forced to enter into a joint venture with Reliance Defence as part of a trade-off to bag the contract for the 36 Rafale jet deal. Dassault Aviation said in a statement that it has "freely chosen to make a partnership with India's Reliance Group".

Last month, Mediapart quoted former French President Francois Hollande as saying that France was given "no choice" on selection of the Indian partner for Dassault and the Indian government proposed the name of the Indian company to partner with the French aerospace giant.

The report triggered a massive

political row with Congress escalating its attack on the government and the government firmly rejecting the charges. The Congress president today demanded an investigation against the Prime Minister on role in the Rafale deal, alleging that he was a "corrupt man" who helped Anil Ambani pocket Rs 30,000 crore in the purchase of 36 aircraft. Under India's offset policy, foreign defence entities are mandated to spend at least 30 per cent of the total contract value in India through procurement of components or setting up of research and development facilities.

The Congress has been alleging massive irregularities in the deal, saying the government was procuring each aircraft at a cost of over Rs 1,670 crore as against Rs 526 crore finalised by the UPA government when it was negotiating the procurement of 126 Rafale jets. The Opposition parties have alleged Reliance Defence was formed just 12 days before the announcement of the Rafale deal in 2015. Reliance group has rejected the charges. The Congress has also been demanding answers from the government on why state-run aerospace major HAL was not involved in the deal as finalised during the UPA. However, Union minister Prakash Javadekar today accused Congress president Rahul Gandhi of lying to people at his election rallies, asserting that an untruth does not become the truth even if it is spoken loudly.

Javadekar's remarks came a day after Gandhi addressed a public rally in Bikaner city in the run-up to



Congress President Rahul Gandhi addressing a press conference at AICC headquarters, in New Delhi on Thursday.

the assembly election in Rajasthan on December 7. Javadekar, BJP's poll in-charge for Rajasthan, said Gandhi's "lies" will no longer work as the Congress president has not been "taught properly". "Rahul Gandhi has learnt a new mantra. He has been taught that tell a lie in high voice so that it appears true. But he has not been taught properly. A lie is always a lie and it never turns into truth," Javadekar said.

Speaking at a 'Naari Shakti Sammelan' programme, the human resource development minister said the opposition Congress has no face in Rajasthan and the ruling BJP would return to power after the Assembly election. "The number of BJP-ruled states and our number of MPs in Lok Sabha will increase in time to come. Vasundhara Raje will once again become chief minister in Rajasthan," he claimed.

Smriti declines comment on charges against Akbar Says justice should be given to ladies who are speaking out

MUMBAI, OCT 11 /-- Union minister Smriti Irani today declined to comment on the allegations of sexual harassment against her ministerial colleague M J Akbar even as she said justice should be given to the "ladies who are speaking out".

As the #MeToo campaign gains momentum, some women journalists have come out and accused Akbar, minister of state for external

affairs, of sexually harassing them during his stint as an editor in two newspapers. "The gentleman concerned would be better positioned to speak on this issue," Irani, the Union textiles minister, told newstextiles here while responding to questions over allegations against Akbar. "I appreciate that the media is accusing his (former) female colleagues but I think it is for the gentleman

concerned to issue a statement (and) not for me because I was personally not present there, Irani added. She urged people not to mock the women who are speaking out against the harassment meted out to them. "I have said again and again on this particular issue, especially about women speaking out that anybody speaking out that in no way should be shamed, victimised or

mocked. That is my only appeal to everybody who is witnessing this surge of outpouring of emotion, of anger on the internet and offline also," she said. She underlined that women don't go to work to be harassed but to work to live their dreams and earn a respectable living. So, I will say here today it must be very difficult for women to come out and talk about whatever happened in their professional lives. It is

extremely an important part in time in our society where more and more women are getting the support, so they can speak out. "I feel there are enough instruments in our judicial and police systems to deliver justice and I am hopeful that all these ladies who are speaking out get, due to due process, the justice that they deserve, Irani said. Akbar has not reacted to the allegations so far. (PTI)

Nearly 50,000 nominations for 2019 Padma awards

NEW DELHI, OCT 11 /-- Nearly 50,000 nominations for the 2019 Padma awards, which are given for work of distinction and exceptional achievement in different fields, have been received by the Union home ministry. The record number of 49,992 nominations for the Padma awards received is 32 times higher over the nominations received in 2010 when just 1,313 nominations were received from general public, a home ministry statement said. In 2017, the total number of nominations received was 36,595 and in 2016 the number was 16,768. While 64 distinguished people were honoured with the Padma awards in 2018, a total of 89 prominent people were given the awards in 2017. The Padma Vibhushan is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service; Padma Bhushan for distinguished service of high order and Padma Shri for distinguished service in any field. All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards. Instituted in 1954, these awards are announced on the occasion of the Republic Day every year.



An icecream vendor waiting for customers at Kovalam beach, as visitors keep away from the beach following rain and rough sea, in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday.