

In a nutshell

Patna HC scraps Bihar quota hike
PATNA: The Patna High Court on Thursday struck down its last year's decision to raise quotas for Dalits, BCs and tribals from 50 to 65 per cent. It passed the order on a bunch of petitions which opposed the legislation of the State govt. (NATION PAGE 8)

Prep for J&K polls has begun: PM

SRINAGAR: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said preparations for the Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir have begun and the UT will get back its statehood too. He said the Centre has taken the recent terror strikes seriously. (NATION PAGE 7)

Mudragada changes name

AMARAVATI: Kapu leader Mudragada Padmanabham has changed his name to Mudragada Padmanabha Reddy, keeping his word to do so if he failed to defeat JSP leader K Pawan Kalyan. A notification in this regard was published in Andhra Pradesh Gazette. (NATION PAGE 7)

India objects to Khalistani protest

NEW DELHI: India on Thursday lodged a strong protest with Canada over Khalistani extremists holding a so-called 'citizens court' outside the Indian consulate in Vancouver. The extremists also reportedly burnt an effigy of PM Modi. PTI

BRS sees move to privatise SCCL

Says Cong, BJP going for auction of coal blocks

STATE BUREAU
 HYDERABAD

The BRS on Thursday voiced its opposition to attempts of the BJP and Congress to 'weaken' the Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) by depriving it of direct allocation of coal mines.

Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president KT Rama Rao, addressing a press conference here, said the BJP-led Centre and Congress-led State government were conspiring to deprive the SCCL of coal mines so that the company would find itself on a weak foot, run into losses and, later, be pushed into private hands.

He found fault with the State government for opting to participate in the coal mine auctions instead of seeking direct allocation of coal mines to Singareni.

The Centre is auctioning more than 60 mines across the country, including coal blocks pertaining to Singareni, from Friday. The State government's partici-

ALL-PARTY DELEGATION TO MEET KISHAN

KHAMMAM: An all-party delegation will meet Union Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy seeking to allot coal blocks in Telangana to the SCCL. Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said on Thursday. He said Kishan Reddy will launch the 10th round of commercial coal mines auction in Hyderabad on Friday. On behalf of the State government, the Union Minister would be requested to allot the Sravanapalli coal block in Mancherial district, which goes under the hammer in a couple of months, to SCCL without auction. Bhatti Vikramarka said Kishan Reddy would be asked to seek Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appointment to consult him regarding the issue. An all-party delegation and stakeholders would request the Prime Minister to protect the interests of the SCCL. (FULL REPORT PAGE 5)

pation in the auction contradicts its previous stance of opposing the auction and seeking direct allocation from the Centre to Singareni, Rama Rao said, pointing out several instances where coal mines were allocated without bidding to entities in other States, but not to Singareni.

In 2015, he said two mines in Odisha were given to Neyveli Lignite Corporation. Similarly, four coal mines were allocated to public sector companies in Gujarat without bidding. BJP's Tamil Nadu president

Annamalai had successfully lobbied to exclude coal mines in his State from auction, he said. "But the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant's plea for the Bailadila coal mine in Chhattisgarh was ignored. Without a dedicated coal mine, the company was pushed into losses and attempts were made for its privatisation," he said, cautioning that a similar strategy was being applied to Singareni, aiming to force it into losses by denying it coal mine allocations, ultimately pushing it towards privatisation. (SEE PAGE 2)

Prathima Group denies charges

STATE BUREAU
 Hyderabad

The Prathima Group condemned the allegations levelled by Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka in connection with the allocation of mine development and operation

(MDO) for coal mines in Sathupally of Khammam district.

In a statement here, Prathima Infrastructure Limited vice-president P Anil Kumar said: "We hereby confirm, as of date, we are neither directly or indirectly associated with any

sort of work in the Singareni Collieries Company Limited. We assume that the Deputy Chief Minister, Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, has been misguided on the above matter and we also request not to entertain any person or persons in future," he said.

Committee to review NTA

Pradhan says UGC-NET cancelled as paper leaked on Darknet

NEW DELHI/PATNA

Amid demand by the Opposition to re-conduct medical entrance exam NEET, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday said isolated incidents of malpractice should not affect lakhs of students who cleared the examination rightfully.

He announced a high-level panel to look into the functioning of the testing agency NTA. Addressing a press conference here, Pradhan also appealed to the opposition parties not to politicise the issue and said strict action would be taken against those found guilty, including officials from the National Testing Agency.

On the cancellation of the UGC-NET examination for the selection of junior research fellows, assistant professors and PhD scholars, the Union Minister said the exam paper was leaked on Darknet.



Students protest over the NEET-UG and UGC-NET examinations row in New Delhi. — Photo: PTI

Question papers sold for Rs 30 lakh in Bihar

Meanwhile, the NEET-2024 paper leak fiasco saw a fresh twist on Thursday with the accused persons confessing before police that question papers were arranged for certain candidates, for which aspirants shelled out Rs 30-32 lakh. (SEE PAGE 2)

SC SEEKS CENTRE, NTA'S RESPONSE ON PLEAS FOR CANCELLING NEET-UG 2024

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday sought responses from the Centre, the NTA and others on a slew of petitions, including those seeking scrapping of the NEET-UG 2024 exam and a court-monitored probe, amid mounting outrage over alleged irregularities in conducting the all-India medical entrance test. The apex court also stayed further proceedings on similar pleas pending before different High Courts. The top court, however, made it clear that it would not stay the counselling process. A Vacation Bench of Justices Vikram Nath and SVN Bhatti issued notices to the parties seeking their responses on four separate pleas filed by the NTA seeking the transfer of pending petitions. PTI

Kejriwal gets bail in excise case

NEW DELHI

In a huge relief to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, a court here on Thursday granted him bail in a money laundering case stemming from the alleged excise scam.

Special Judge Niyay Bindu declined the ED's prayer to keep in abeyance the bail order for 48 hours to allow the central agency to appeal against it in a superior court. The judge ordered Kejriwal's release on a personal bond of Rs 1 lakh. PTI (REPORT PAGE 7)

Woman tortured for not showing up at work

STATE BUREAU
 Nagarkurnool

In a gut-wrenching incident, a 30-year-old Chenchu tribal woman was assaulted by three persons after she failed to turn up for work after taking advance payment, at Molachintalapally village in Kollapur mandal in the district.

The accused disrobed her, tied her to a tree, burnt her private parts and rubbed chilli powder into her eyes, with the brutal torture going

on for nearly a week. The incident came to light on Wednesday night when locals approached police, who rescued her from the trio.

According to police, K Eddanna and K Eshwaramma used to work as labourers after taking money in advance from people. The couple agreed to work for one Bandi Venkatesh and took the money, but Eshwaramma did not turn up after working for a few days. (SEE PAGE 2)

34 die in TN hooch tragedy

KALLAKURICHI/CHENNAI

The Karunapuram locality in Kallakurichi on Thursday echoed with the wails of the families of the victims of the illicit arrack that claimed the lives of at least 34 people. About 100 others are undergoing treatment. The Opposition lashed out at the DMK while the latter said it should not be assumed such issues happened only during its regime. Leader of Opposition Palaniswami demanded CM Stalin's resignation. PTI

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