

The Telegraph



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MISSION**
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34 PAGES

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IN BRIEF

Boris demands snap poll



Boris Johnson in the House of Commons. (AFP)

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday demanded an October 15 snap election after lawmakers seeking to prevent a no-deal Brexit dealt him a humiliating defeat in parliament which he cast as an attempt to surrender to the EU. **FOREIGN P2**

HK extradition bill

HONG KONG: Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam on Wednesday withdrew an extradition bill that triggered months of often violent protests. **FOREIGN P3**

RAIN ALERT



People commute through a waterlogged street on an inflatable boat following heavy rain in Mumbai on Wednesday. The IMD has predicted intense showers in Mumbai and its neighbouring areas in the next 24 hours and issued a "red alert". (PTI)

RBI interest rate

MUMBAI: The RBI on Wednesday made it mandatory for banks to link floating rate loans to an external benchmark such as the repo rate. The new regime will be effective for new loans disbursed from October 1. **BUSINESS**

QUOTE

My biggest worry about the economic slowdown is that the government may spend the Rs 1.76 lakh crore they have taken from the RBI on advertisements... to tell you there is no slowdown

SHASHI THAROOR

Auto industry pain spreads to villages

Manesar: The narrow lanes in Aliyar and Kasan villages in Manesar, an automotive manufacturing hub on New Delhi's southern outskirts, would usually be packed on Sundays with migrant workers employed at the nearby plants enjoying their day off, but not any more.

These are hard times for an area dependent on the fortunes of companies like Maruti Suzuki, the carmaker with the largest market share in India, and motorbike maker Honda Motor Co's local unit. The auto and component makers in and around Manesar have shed thousands of jobs.

Nationwide, according to industry estimates, automakers, component manufacturers and dealers have laid off about 350,000 workers since the start of the year, in response to plunging car sales. Figures for August, like July, are expected to show a drop of more than 30 per cent, making a 10th straight month of decline.

As the crisis in the sector bites harder, small businesses in the towns and villages around Manesar, home to one of the three plants where Maruti Suzuki cars are made, have seen a fall-off in trade.

"There are already fewer workers in the village and those who still have jobs are either not getting paid for working overtime or are not spending much out of fear they may lose work and need the



Cars parked at Maruti Suzuki's plant at Manesar in Haryana on August 11. (Reuters)

money," said grocer Rahul Jain, his shelves stacked with toothpaste and soaps.

Even sales of products like cooking oil and flour have fallen. On the lower rungs of the service sector, barbers and tea stall owners said they had fewer customers.

Shoe seller Subhay Singh, in Manesar's Aliyar village, has days when he doesn't make a single sale.

"My monthly earnings have halved," said Singh, who a year ago made an average Rs 8,000 a day. "I don't know what's happening."

In the US there was an old adage: "When General Motors

sneezes, the Wall Street catches a cold."

In India, the impact goes well beyond the stock market. India's automotive industry is the fourth largest in the world, employing more than 35 million people, directly and indirectly, and accounting for nearly half of India's manufacturing output.

The industry has three main centres; Gurgaon in the north, Chennai in the south, where among others Ford Motor and Hyundai Motor have plants, and Pune in the west, where Tata Motors and Fiat are located.

All of them are hurting,

and the pain is radiating outwards.

The auto industry's troubles stem in part from banks' and non-banking finance houses' reluctance to extend consumer loans, as well as subdued demand, particularly in the villages, where two-thirds of Indians live.

Laid-off workers returning to their villages are now putting more burden on a rural sector already suffering falling income from low crop prices, and dampening consumer sentiment and growth across the country.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Lt Gen. visits ski resort 5 times in 15 days

Teen dies of injuries after a month

MUZAFFAR RAINA

Srinagar: An 18-year-old student injured during protests in Srinagar on August 6, the day after Jammu and Kashmir's special status was revoked, died in hospital on Tuesday night.

Medical records accessed by **The Telegraph** suggested that Asrar Ahmad, a Soura resident who was admitted to the Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences, had multiple "shell/blast/pellet" injuries on his head and eye.

Firdous Ahmad, the boy's father, told journalists Asrar died of pellet injuries suffered in unprovoked firing by the security forces.

The authorities confirmed the death — unlike previous occasions when they had denied media reports of at least two deaths in protests — but blamed it on "stone-throwers".

The army's Valley chief, Lt General K.J.S. Dhillon, and additional director-general of police Munir Khan told a news conference Asrar was hit by a stone. Lt Gen. Dhillon said: "This makes it the fifth civilian death in the last 30 days.... This is the fifth death, which has happened because of the terrorists/stone pelting or the puppets of Pakistan who are trying to disrupt the peace."

Khan said he would get the medical records to prove the claim.

Massive restrictions were imposed across the city to prevent protests as word of the death spread.

350 army operations in Gulmarg

MUZAFFAR RAINA

Srinagar: The army on Wednesday said it had conducted 350 operations in Gulmarg over the past fortnight, the large number suggesting the skiers' paradise has been a theatre of major action between India and Pakistan away from the media's glare.

The army's Valley chief, Lt General K.J.S. Dhillon, said he had visited the Gulmarg sector of the Line of Control five to six times in the past 15 days, which is unprecedented.

"There are more than 350 operations which have been launched around Gulmarg, including some specific information searches inside Gulmarg town. Otherwise, as you are aware, Gulmarg has been a terrorism-free area because of tourism and other things," he said.

"But in the past 15-20 days, wherever we got information or even rumours, which you are speaking of, not a single thing has happened in Gulmarg," he added.

Rumours of India-Pakistan action in Gulmarg have been rife. But it is unprecedented for the army to conduct operations on such a scale based on rumours.

Gulmarg residents claim to have witnessed "unusual" movement in the area that has led to countless night patrols,

apparently in search of militants. Unconfirmed reports said the Pakistan army has conducted Border Action Team operations on some posts in the area.

"These are operational details. I can tell you one thing, no attempt whatsoever, whether BAT action or infiltration, has been successful. They have been eliminated before they came close to ambushes on the posts of the Indian Army," the officer said.

Lt Gen. Dhillon said anyone who wants to visit Gulmarg was welcome. "Whatever rumours you are hearing, they will absolutely get addressed," he said.

The army said Pakistan had stepped up attempts to push in militants since the August 5 decision to abrogate Jammu and Kashmir's special status. Launch pads along the LoC were active and full of militants who were being helped by the Pakistan army to infiltrate into the state, he said.

"They will be befittingly replied to and replied in a manner where the generation to come will remember," he said. "This has been told by the honourable defence minister; this has been told by my chief of army staff.... I again on behalf of the Indian Army can confirm to you the Pakistan army will be taught a lesson... probably better than 1971."

Kashmir protest in UK

OUR BUREAU AND PTI

London/New Delhi: Pakistani demonstrators who arrived by the coach-load from Birmingham, Manchester, Bradford and other cities on Tuesday laid siege to the Indian high commission building in London.

The demonstrators, who appeared well organised, also festooned Mahatma Gandhi's statue in Parliament Square with Pakistani Kashmiri flags.

Under British law, peaceful demonstrations are allowed. The Indian mission issued a picture of an egg-splattered broken window and said on Twitter: "Another violent protest outside the Indian High Commission in London today, 3 September 2019. Dam-

age caused to the premises."

One of the leaders of the protest was identified by the *Birmingham Mail*: "Inam Ul Haq, 50, of Birmingham, who helped organise the demonstration, said protesters were demanding for the Indian government to lift the curfew imposed on the Kashmir state."

The violence was condemned by the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who tweeted: "I utterly condemn this unacceptable behaviour and have raised this incident with @metpoliceuk to take action."

In New Delhi, the external affairs ministry spokesman said: "We are deeply concerned by the reports of unruly demonstration by Pakistan-incited elements and consequent organised vandalism of the property of the High Commis-

sion of India in London. This is the second time in less than a month that such an incident has taken place affecting the security and the normal functioning of our mission."

After a smaller protest on August 15, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had raised the violence with his British counterpart Boris Johnson.

On Wednesday, the UK government described the protests as "largely peaceful" and said the safety of the Indian mission was not compromised.

While the UK holds that the Kashmir dispute is a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan, it said on Tuesday that the issue of human rights was not a "bilateral" or a "domestic" issue but an "international issue".

Kerala AIR employee booked for NRC post

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Bangalore: A Malayalam writer and producer at All India Radio has been booked for a derogatory Facebook post on the National Register of Citizens that was published in Assam last weekend.

Police in Kodungallur, Thrissur, booked K.R. Indira on Tuesday for the post, which is abusive towards Muslims.

She has been charged under penal provisions, including the non-bailable IPC Section 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on ground of religion, race and birth, etc.). If found guilty she can be jailed for up to five years.

The police action followed a complaint filed by M.R. Vipindas of the Kodungallur Media Dialogue Centre. Going by the complaint, Indira, currently posted at the AIR in Thrissur, is a writer who has published a few books.

Vipindas said Indira was not on his Facebook friend list. "But when I happened to see a screenshot of the NRC comment, I went through her Facebook wall to discover so many posts laden with communal hatred," he told **The Telegraph**.

"I then took screenshots of the comments and filed a complaint."

Till Wednesday evening there was no information on whether Indira had been arrested.

The police station in Kodungallur could not be reached for comment.

ASI DECISION ON KONARK MONUMENT

Sun Temple scaffolding to go

SUBHASHISH MOHANTY

Bhubaneswar: The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has decided to remove the iron scaffoldings around the Sun Temple in Konark that have over the decades encircled the 13th-century shrine and obscured its architectural beauty.

The decision to remove the scaffoldings, which began to be installed in 1992 and covered the entire temple by 2011, was taken on the basis of a recommendation of the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), Roorkee. An ASI team inspected the structure on Tuesday.

The iron scaffoldings had been installed for periodical repairs and to support the stones that are part of

the temple's structure. ASI officials said such support was no longer needed and that an alternative plan would be chalked out to maintain the ancient temple.

The Bhubaneswar circle superintendent of the ASI, Arun Mallik, told **The Telegraph**: "There has been a long-standing demand from the Odisha government to remove the scaffoldings. The CBRI has submitted a report favouring the removal of the scaffoldings. We will soon launch a tender for the removal of the scaffoldings. They will be removed within 60 days. People will again get to see the fine artwork of the Sun Temple from close quarters."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



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