

1984 anti-Sikh riots: HC dismisses Sajjan Kumar plea for time till Jan 30 to surrender

Agency New Delhi, Dec 21

The Delhi High Court Friday dismissed former Congress leader Sajjan Kumar's plea seeking time till January 30 to surrender after being recently sentenced to life imprisonment in a 1984 anti-Sikh riots case. A bench of Justices S Muralidhar and Vinod Goel said it saw no grounds to grant him the relief and rejected his application. "Application is dismissed," it said. The same bench had on December 17 convicted and sentenced 73-year-old Kumar to imprisonment for the remainder of his life in the case and had asked him to surrender by December 31. He had sought more time, till January 30, to surrender saying he has to settle family affairs related to children and property and also needs time to file appeal in the Supreme Court against the high court verdict. The application, filed through advocate Anil Dharma, had said Kumar was "under shock and surprise" since the time he has been convicted and he believes that he

is innocent. The case relates to killing of five Sikhs in Raj Nagar part-I area in Palam Colony in South West Delhi on November 1-2, 1984, and burning down of a Gurudwara in Raj Nagar part II during that period. The riots had broken out after the assassination of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984 by her two Sikh bodyguards. The high court in its judgement had said that the riots were a "crime against humanity" perpetrated by those who enjoyed "political patronage" and aided by an "indifferent" law enforcement agency. It had set aside the trial court's verdict which had acquitted Kumar in the case. The court had said there has been a familiar pattern of mass killings since the Partition, like in Mumbai in 1993, Gujarat in 2002 and Muzaffarnagar, UP in 2013, and the "common" feature of each was the "targeting of minorities" with the attacks being "spearheaded by the dominant political actors, facilitated by the law enforcement agencies". The six accused, including Kumar who

was a Member of Parliament at that time, were sent for trial in 2010. Three years later, the lower court convicted five of the accused but acquitted him of all the charges. The high court upheld the conviction and varying sentences awarded by the trial court to the other five — former Congress councillor Balwan Khokhar, retired naval officer Captain Bhagmal, Girdhari Lal and former MLAs Mahender Yadav and Kishan Khokhar. It also convicted them for criminal conspiracy to burn down residences of Sikh families and a gurdwara in the area during the riots. The trial court in 2013 had awarded life term to Khokhar, Bhagmal and Lal, and a three-year jail term to Yadav and Kishan Khokhar. Following the high court verdict, life term of Khokhar, Bhagmal and Lal has been upheld and the sentence of Yadav and Kishan Khokhar has been enhanced to a 10 years in jail. All six, including Kumar, were directed by the high court to surrender by December 31, and not to leave Delhi.

Home Ministry team to review Pondy finances: Bedi

Agency Puducherry, Dec 21

The Union Home Ministry will soon depute a team to take up audit of finances of the Puducherry government, Lt Governor Kiran Bedi said Friday. Officials of the territorial government should be "prepared to answer the questions the team members would raise," she said in a communication to the media. She said Puducherry "is poor not because it does not have the resources

but because revenue generating departments are not being proactively administered." The former IPS officer said Puducherry officials should focus on priority areas of revenue generation on a regular basis. Officials should take steps to improve financial position during the current financial year itself, she said. The home ministry team would visit Puducherry to carry out audit of financial position of the departments here, the Lt Governor added.

Lok Sabha adjourned till noon amid protests

Agency New Delhi, Dec 21

The proceedings of the Lok Sabha were adjourned for nearly 50 minutes Friday morning amid din created by AIADMK, TDP and AAP members over a variety of issues. There were no protests by Congress members who had been persistently attacking the government on the Rafale jet deal and demanding a joint parliamentary committee probe into the issue. Friday is the 8th day of the Winter session which has seen repeated disruptions over several

issues, including Rafale, dam over Cauvery River and sops for Andhra Pradesh. Despite repeated adjournments, the Lok Sabha had on Thursday passed two bills. As soon as the House took up question hour, AIADMK members rushed to the Well holding placards and raising slogans opposing construction of a dam over River Cauvery. They were joined by members from the Telugu Desam Party who were demanding various sops for Andhra Pradesh. Some of the Aam Admi Party members also

joined AIADMK and TDP. They were holding placards denouncing sealing, apparently in Delhi. "Atrocities in the name of sealing" was one of the placards they were holding. As minister Sripath Naik was answering a question on the Ayush Ministry, some members in the Well hurled torn pieces of paper on the table where the Lok Sabha secretariat officials sit during proceedings. The table is located in the Well near the Speaker's podium. At this, Speaker Sumitra Mahajan adjourned proceedings till noon.

India is Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner: Pentagon

Agency Washington, Dec 21

India is Afghanistan's most reliable regional partner, the Pentagon has said as it praised New Delhi's contributions to the peaceful development of the war-torn country. The Pentagon, in its semi-annual Afghan report to the US Congress that covers the period of June to November 2018, said India interpreted the new US South Asia policy as an opportunity to increase its economic involvement with Afghanistan. The South Asia Strategy, which was announced by President Donald Trump in August 2017, has focused on pressuring

Pakistan to limit support and safe-haven for proxy terrorist and militant groups and to play a constructive role in facilitating Afghan reconciliation, the Pentagon said in the report. Noting that the US strategy calls for a regional approach to enhance stability in South Asia, the report said this includes building a broad consensus for a stable Afghanistan, emphasising regional economic integration and cooperation, stressing cooperation for an Afghan-led peace process, and holding countries accountable for their use of proxies or other means to undermine stability and regional confidence.

Pakistan rejects Punjab's land swap demand to make Kartarpur part of India

Agency Chandigarh, Dec 21

Pakistan has turned down the demand from the Indian side for a land swap between the two countries to make Kartarpur a part of India. "Absolutely not", Pakistan foreign office spokesperson Mohammad Faisal said in Islamabad on Thursday, responding to a media query if Pakistan would consider handing over the Kartarpur land to India in a swap deal. "It's a gesture for Sikh

minority community made on their request to provide a visa-free corridor to facilitate visit to a religious shrine. The decision to open the Kartarpur corridor was taken at the state-to-state level and the Indian government was fully involved in it," he added. The Punjab assembly on December 14 had unanimously passed a resolution, seeking an India-Pak land swap deal on Kartarpur, the final resting place of Guru Nanak located in Narowal district of Pakistan. The Capt Amarinder Singh government had decided to take up the proposal with the Union government, offering over 10,000 acres in the Dera Baba Nanak area in exchange for the land on which the historic gurdwara stands barely three kilometres from the India-Pakistan border. Congress Rajya Sabha member Partap Singh Bajwa too had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in September with a similar demand. Citing an example from 1962 when land was swapped with Pakistan in return for a piece of land at Hussainiwala where the cremation site of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru is located, Bajwa said it will also negate national security concerns that may arise from the corridor.

HC dismisses appeal against LIC move to acquire 51 pc stake in IDBI

Agency New Delhi, Dec 21

The Delhi High Court Friday dismissed an appeal against its single judge order rejecting a plea challenging the LIC's move to acquire 51 per cent stake in the Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI). A bench of Chief Justice Rajendra Menon and Justice V K Rao said the single judge had considered all aspects before denying any relief to the All India IDBI Officers Association, which had opposed the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) move on the ground that change in shareholding could take away IDBI's public sector bank status. The association, in its appeal, told the bench that LIC's move to acquire 51 per cent stake in the IDBI violated provisions of the Insurance Act. The court, however, did not accept the contention

and said if there was any violation of the Insurance Act, then the association has to approach the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDAI). "We cannot hold any enquiry into whether the Insurance Act was violated. Go to IRDAI," the bench said. The LIC, meanwhile, told the court that the amount it was investing in the bank was just one per cent of its entire funds and assured the bench that interests of its policy holders are protected. The association was concerned that taking away public sector bank status of the IDBI could affect the employment conditions of its staff. The bench was of the view that this issue has been addressed by the single judge in his decision of December 17. The LIC had argued before the single judge that it wanted to acquire

51 per cent stake in the IDBI as since 2000, the state-run insurance company has been trying with the idea of having banking operations. It had said it had in the past made several attempts to have a bank of its own, but its endeavours had "failed" as "nothing fruitful". The IDBI, in which the government holds 85.96 per cent stake, had posted a net loss of Rs 2,409.89 crore in the quarter ended June 2018. It had posted a gross non-performing asset (NPA) of about Rs 57,807 crore. The association had claimed before the single judge that the change in shareholding was not in public interest as it "exposes the investments made by the public in the IDBI and corrodes the ability of the LIC to pay back its policy holders since it will have to invest an amount of Rs 13,000 crores to acquire the 51 per cent stake".

Cold wave conditions continue unabated in Pb, Hry; Adampur records low of 0.9 deg C

Agency Chandigarh, Dec 21

Adampur shivered at 0.9 degrees Celsius as the cold wave sweeping most parts of Punjab and Haryana for more than a week continued unabated, with minimum temperatures hovering below normal limits at most places on Friday. Adampur in Punjab was the coldest place in the two states recording a bone-chilling minimum temperature. Severe cold conditions prevailed in Faridkot and Bathinda too, which recorded minimum temperatures of 2 degrees

Celsius and 2.8 degrees Celsius respectively, a Meteorological Department official said here. Amritsar (3.3 deg C), Ludhiana (3.5 deg C), Halwara (3 deg C), Patiala (6.1 deg C), Pathankot (4 deg C) and Gurdaspur (4.8 deg C) too experienced a cold night. In Haryana, Narnaul was the coldest place recording a low of 2.5 degrees Celsius, while Hisar and Sirsa, too, were gripped by intense cold conditions recording their respective minimums of 2.7 deg C and 2.6 deg C. Piercing cold wave also

swept Rohtak (4 deg C), Karnal (3.6 deg C) and Bhiwani (6.3 deg C) while Ambala's low settled close to normal at 7 deg C. Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states, reeled under biting chill recording a low of 5 deg C. The ongoing cold weather conditions are likely to continue in Haryana and Punjab over the next few days, the MeT official said. He said fog reduced visibility at many places on Friday morning including at Amritsar, Ludhiana, Patiala, Hisar and Karnal.

Bills in jeopardy as Parliament faces forced interruptions

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An upbeat opposition and the focus of all parties increasingly turning to the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections are leading to forced adjournments of Parliament, putting in jeopardy the passage of several key government Bills that would help it get political mileage or bolster its image of being a dispensation committed to social justice. Law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad

introduced The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2018- popularly known as the Triple Talaq Bill-in... the Lok Sabha on Thursday to replace the Ordinance on the issue. But the Opposition insisted that it be taken up on December 27 when the House meets after the Christmas holidays. Though the Bill is not likely to be passed, a fresh debate on the issue gives the government as well as the Opposition to make political capital on the sensitive instant talaq

matter. Despite so many delays and the promulgation of Ordinance, the government has refused to send the Bill to a Select Committee of Rajya Sabha on previous occasions ostensibly as it does not want the opposition to share the credit. The Bill is directed at protecting the rights of Muslim women but many also see this as an attempt by the BJP to interfere in the affairs of the minority community. BJP members also maintain that the Bill forces Congress to take a

categorical stand on the issue and thus make a choice between their commitment to the rights of Muslim women and vote bank politics. The Bill on making changes in the Telegraph Act and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act to make use of Aadhaar voluntary is also on the government agenda. The Union cabinet has cleared the Bill and the government wants to pass it in this session but the possibilities are dim due to disruptions in both Houses.

Arunachal Pradesh Former CM appeals to PM to defer Bogibeel Bridge inauguration

Agency Itanagar Dec 21,

Senior Congress leader and former Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Nabam Tuki has appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to defer the inauguration of Bogibeel Bridge as it is Christmas Day and as such it is difficult for people from Arunachal Pradesh to participate in the historic function. "We are aware that you will be inaugurating the historic Bogibeel Bridge over the river Brahmaputra on December 25 this year. While I congratulate you for the completion of this historic bridge which is of strategic and economic importance to the region, I would at the same time like to request you to kindly defer the said inauguration to any other date as December 25 is Christmas and one of the most important festivals of the Christians," said Tuki in a letter addressed to the Prime minister on Thursday. If the inauguration of the bridge, which is a boon to the people of Assam and

Arunachal, takes place on December 25, a large number of people from the Christian community will not be able to participate in the opening ceremony. Therefore, I request you to defer the date of inauguration and thus enable all sections of people of the region to witness the historic event, the letter added. The 4.98-km long bridge will be inaugurated by Prime Minister on December 25, which the BJP government is set to celebrate as Good Governance Day. Built at an estimated cost of over Rs. 5000 crore, the Bogibeel Bridge will be the longest rail-cum-road bridge in the country and the second longest in Asia. The bridge will provide faster connectivity between the people of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The bridge will also enhance India's capability to ensure faster movement of troops and supplies to Arunachal Pradesh that borders with China. The bridge, closely

modelled on the Oresund bridge that connects Sweden and Finland across the Oresund strait, is designed to withstand heaviest of Indian battle tanks. Meanwhile, a controversy has also erupted over the naming of the bridge. Many organisations in Assam are demanding the bridge be named after their icons or heroes.

Home guard shot dead in UP

Agency Badaun, Dec 21

A home guard was shot dead by two bike-borne assailants in Ughaiti area here, police said Friday. Chhatrapal (42), who was on duty near a petrol pump, was shot dead late on Thursday night by two persons when he tried to stop them for checking. Senior Superintendent of Police Ashok Kumar said. The assailants have been identified and will be arrested soon, he said. The victim's body has been sent for a post-mortem examination.