

SC to take up pleas against dilution of Article 370 on July 11

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A Constitution Bench, led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, will take up on July 11 a series of petitions challenging the dilution of Article 370 of the Constitution, which deprived Jammu and Kashmir of its special privileges and led to the bifurcation of the then State in 2019.

The five-judge Bench, besides the CJI, would have Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul, Sanjeev Khanna, B.R. Gavai and Surya Kant as Associate Judges.

The five judges are the senior-most in the court and also members of the Supreme Court Collegium. Justices Khanna, Gavai and Kant are in line to be CJIs, as per seniority norm in the future.

The case was last mentioned by the petitioners on February 17 for early listing and the CJI had agreed to give a specific date for the hearing.

The Article 370 case has been pending in the Supreme Court for over two years. The case had not come up after a five-judge Bench refused to refer the petitions to a larger Bench in March 2020.

The petitions have challenged a Presidential Order of August 5, 2019, which

Article 370 case has been pending in the court for over two years. The case had not come up after a Bench refused to refer it to a larger Bench in 2020.

took away special status under Article 370 of J&K. The Article had accorded special rights and privileges to the people of J&K since 1954 in accordance with the Instrument of Accession.

The special status was bestowed on J&K by incorporating Article 35A in the Constitution. Article 35A was incorporated by an order of President Rajendra Prasad in 1954 on the advice of the Jawaharlal Nehru Cabinet.

Parliament was not consulted when the President incorporated Article 35A into the Constitution through a Presidential Order issued under Article 370.

Following the abrogation, the Jammu and Kashmir (Reorganisation) Act of 2019 came into force and bifurcated the State into the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh.

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SC to take up pleas against Article 370

In a day, J&K had lost its full statehood and became a Union Territory. The move had been preceded by a state of lockdown in the Valley. The various petitions have challenged the Centre's "unilateral" move to impose curfew and unravel the unique federal structure of India by dividing J&K "without taking consent from the people". They have questioned the Centre's move, under cover of President's Rule, to "undermine crucial elements of due process and the rule of law".

Separate petitions have contended that the August 5 order and the Jammu and Kashmir (Reorganisation) Act of 2019 were arbitrary. They have also challenged the proclamation of President's Rule in the State in 2018.

The petitions have said what happened to J&K "goes to the heart of Indian federalism".

They said the Presidential Order took cover of a temporary situation, meant to hold the field until the return of the elected government, to accomplish a fundamental, permanent and irreversible alteration of the status of the State of J&K without the concurrence, consultation or recommendation of the people of that State. The National Conference, the Peoples Democratic Party and the CPI(M) welcomed the court's decision to hear petitions challenging the dilution of Article 370.

Tomatoes to be sold at 82 fair price shops in city at ₹60 a kg from today

Minister of Co-operatives K.R. Periyakaruppan announces the decision after presiding over a meeting; wholesale price drops marginally as arrivals improve at the Koyambedu wholesale market; prices of ginger and garlic shoot up

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The State government has decided to sell tomatoes through fair price shops in Chennai at ₹60 a kg from July 4.

After holding a review meeting on Monday, Minister of Co-operation K.R. Periyakaruppan announced that tomatoes would be sold at 82 fair price shops in Chennai in the first phase. Of this, 32 fair price shops were in north Chennai.

The initiative would be extended to other parts of the State depending on the need, the Minister said.

Pannai Pasumai (Farm Fresh) outlets in various parts of the State, includ-



In great demand: Koyambedu market on Monday received additional loads of tomatoes from Kolar. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

ing Chennai, Coimbatore, Salem, Erode and Vellore are selling tomatoes at ₹60 a kg.

Meanwhile, the wholesale price of tomatoes

dropped marginally to ₹90 a kg in Chennai on Monday after staying high for the past several days. However, the retail price continued to be ₹120 a kg in ma-

ny areas. The Koyambedu wholesale market complex received an additional five vehicles on Monday. Wholesale merchants said additional loads were sourced from Srinivasapura and Kolar in Karnataka.

In short supply

The market got 40 to 45 truckloads on Monday against the normal load of 90 to 100 lorry loads of tomatoes.

Merchants said that only 50% of farmers cultivated tomato crops as earlier harvest did not fetch a good price. Excessive heat and recent rain were cited as the reasons. Chennai receives a bulk of its supply from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Diversion of supply to offset the short-

fall in other regions led to such a steep rise in price.

Ginger and garlic are among the other costly produce whose prices rose to ₹200 a kg and ₹150 a kg.

P. Sukumar, treasurer, Koyambedu Vegetables, Fruits and Flowers Merchants Association, said: "Vegetable cultivation has vanished in the neighbouring places. We used to get 10-15 truckloads of local vegetables daily from Gudiyatham till the year 2000. Koyambedu does not get vegetables anymore from Gudiyatham. Such issues have led to gaps in demand and supply."

In Koyambedu, coriander was sold at ₹200 and ₹350 a k. One big bunch was available for ₹40 now because of short supply.

‘SIPCOT BizBuddy Outreach’ initiative inaugurated

Sangeetha Kandavel

CHENNAI

Industries Minister T.R.B. Rajaa on Monday inaugurated a new initiative called ‘SIPCOT BizBuddy Outreach’ which aims at improving the industrial ecosystem in Tamil Nadu.

After inauguration, the Minister held the first ever outreach event at the SIPCOT Oragadam Industrial Park.

The annual outreach events will now be held across all industrial parks of SIPCOT starting this year. Representatives of all establishments in the industrial parks will be invited to share the challenges they face and ideas with officials of SIPCOT and the Industries Department.

“The idea behind the programme is to listen to the industry and address your concerns in the best way possible. We want to assure you that we intend to stand by you and help you solve any issues you may face.

“We want your honest feedback. We are also very keen on taking your inputs on how to improve policies and infrastructure in your respective parks,” Mr. Rajaa told the industry representatives.

Improving the infrastructure of SIPCOT parks and addressing the concerns of the industry are also key to realising Chief Minister M.K. Stalin’s goal of a one-trillion dollar economy in Tamil Nadu, the Minister said.

Tamil Nadu added 24 reserve forests in past two years, says Forest Department

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu has added 24 reserve forests, covering an area of 3,585.3 hectares, in the past two years, according to the Forest Department.

Under the Green Tamil Nadu Mission, which aims at increasing tree and forest cover from 23.69% to 33%, the State had notified reserve forests in eight districts – Dindigul, Dharmapuri, Madurai, Namkkal, the Nilgiris, Kallakurichi, Sivaganga and Theni – in 2021-2023 under Section 16 of the Tamil Nadu Forest Act, said Supriya Sahu, Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Environment, Climate Change and Forests.

The State had also established over 240 nurseries to nurture seedlings. "In addition, the mission helps create thousands of green jobs, especially for



Under the Green Tamil Nadu Mission, which aims at increasing tree and forest cover from 23.69% to 33%, the State had notified reserve forests in eight districts. FILE PHOTO

rural women," Ms. Sahu said.

Increasing protected forest area was a welcome move, said Balaji Srinivasagopalan, a retired forest officer.

He added that the focus could also be on agroforestry, wherein tree plantation could be done on private cultivable land.

"Urban reserve forests have to be improved as

there are a lot of developmental activities taking place. As urban areas expand, there will be water issues. Forests can augment groundwater supply," he said.

Modi meets Council of Ministers, speaks of 'Vision 2047'

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Addressing his Council of Ministers amid swirling speculation of a Cabinet reshuffle, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke of the road to 2047, the year India would mark the centenary of Independence, and urged his colleagues to keep the focus on infrastructure development and its impact.

The meeting was held at the new convention centre built in Pragati Maidan ahead of the G-20 meeting to be hosted there under India's presidency.

Mr. Modi spoke at length about the issues that will be presented before the international grouping when they meet in New Delhi.

"Issues like cryptocurrency regulation, public funding of digital infrastructure, something that became an urgent requirement when the pandemic-induced lockdowns hap-



Narendra Modi

pened between 2020 and 2022 and where India has much to show the world, were also spoken of by Mr. Modi," said a Minister present at the meeting.

Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra gave a presentation on the recent trips undertaken by Mr. Modi, and the outcomes of these meetings.

Minister of State for External Affairs Meenakshi Lekhi, speaking to the media after the marathon five-and-a-half-hour meeting was concluded, said that Mr. Modi's speech covered an expanse of topics, including road and space infrastructure.

'Human error' led to Balasore train tragedy, report says, pinning blame on signal dept.

The Commissioner of Railway Safety says the triple-train collision on June 2 took place owing to lapses in the signalling-circuit alteration carried out at the Bahanaga Bazaar station, which resulted in wrong signal to Coromandel Express; report submitted to Railway Minister; Railway Board

Maitri Porecha
S. Vijay Kumar
NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

Lapses at multiple levels in the Signal and Telecommunication (S&T) department led to the Balasore train collision on June 2, which left 291 persons dead and over 900 injured, the Commissioner of Railway Safety said in a report submitted to the Railway Ministry last week.

Multiple sources in the Ministry told *The Hindu* that the primary responsibility had been pinned on the S&T department and that "human error" led to the triple-train collision.

The Commissioner of Railway Safety, South Eastern Circle, A.M. Chowdhary, who conducted the inquiry into the circumstances that led to the accident, said in the report that the rear collision occurred due to "lapses in

the signalling-circuit alteration" carried out at the north signal *goomty* (of the Bahanaga Bazaar station) in the past. A *goomty* is a cabin that houses railway equipment.

The report pointed that the collision took place also owing to lapses in the execution of signalling work related to the replacement of electric lifting barrier at level crossing gate 94. On the ill-fated day of the accident that occurred at close to 6.40 p.m., the report said that the disconnection memo was issued at close to 4.20 p.m. for repairs. A reconnection memo was issued at 4.50 p.m. "After reconnection (which is ideally given after the work is complete), the S&T staff was still working on signal circuit," the report said.

"These lapses resulted in wrong signalling to Train 12841 (Shalimar-Chennai Coromandel Express)



Grave tragedy: The derailed coaches after trains collided in Balasore district in Odisha on June 3. BISWARANJAN ROUT

where green signal was indicated for run though movement on UP mail line of the station, but crossover 17 A/B was set to UP loop line. This led to the train traversing on loop line, and eventual rear collision with the goods train," it stated. There was also consequential derailment of train no. 12864 Yeshwantpur-Howrah Express in this course.

Sources said the 40-

page report was submitted to Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's office, Director-General, Safety and Railway Board. While the Railway Board studies the CRS report, the latest in line to be transferred is Rahul Agarwal, Additional Member (Signal).

Accident was avoidable
While it is still not clear whether the angle of "sabotage", as earlier alleged

by the Railway Ministry, was involved, sources said there was human error and total failure of the "fail-safe method", leading to fault in signalling. Criminal negligence on the part of the supervisory staff, including the stationmaster on duty, is also being probed.

Referring to a similar incident in the past where there was a mismatch between the intended route set by signals and the actual route taken by a train on May 16, 2022 at the Bankranayabaz railway station under the Kharagpur Division of South Eastern Railway on account of wrong wiring and cable fault, the CRS said that had corrective measures been taken after the incident to address the issue of wrong wiring, the accident at the Bahanaga Bazaar station would not have taken place.

Giving his recommendations to the Railway Minis-

try, Mr. Chowdhary said a drive should be launched to update the completion signalling wiring diagrams, other documents, and lettering of signalling circuits at site. Standard practices should be followed for carrying out signalling-modification work.

Before taking up modification of the signalling circuits, functional tests of the existing circuits, under alteration, should be done to ensure that the actual circuits are in accordance with the completed drawings. Any alteration to signalling circuits should be carried out with an approved circuit diagram, and in presence of an officer.

A separate team should be deployed for testing of modified signalling circuits and functions before restoration of the work. A competency certificate should be issued for carrying signalling modification work.

In 'futuristic', tech-savvy Supreme Court, mouse outshines the gavel

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday reopened after the summer vacation to tech-savvy, paperless courtrooms with free Wi-Fi for everyone. The new courtroom decor has big screens for virtual hearings.

Wooden bookshelves with rows of legal texts, bundles of case files and haphazardly perched law books in cozy corners under the judges' dais have been removed to make space for swanky screens mounted on walls and desks.

The Supreme Court called the design "futuristic".

It said the "digital enhancements have been implemented as part of green initiatives for optimum use of technology in justice delivery systems".

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, who has steered the court into the digital age, invited lawyers on Monday to give their



Digital era: The courtroom of the Supreme Court with digital enhancements. PTI

feedback. Recent months had seen the Chief Justice insist that lawyers stick to their tablets or iPads rather than bulky paper files, gently ribbing senior lawyers such as Kapil Sibal and Tushar Mehta about their paper notes.

The upgrades have been made in the first three courtrooms. The enhancements include a state-of-the-art digital video conferencing and sound system with facilities to connect multimedia devices.

LED video walls have been installed to increase the visual impact of presentations, evidence and

video recordings, creating an immersive courtroom experience.

"Document cameras" have been installed to enable the clear capture and real-time display of physical documents, facilitating seamless sharing of important legal materials, evidence, and exhibits.

A software has been developed to facilitate the advocates to upload reference material and citations relating to the matter. The top court is fine-tuning a software to provide e-pass facility for advocates and litigants to access its premises.