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DETAILS ON ▶ PAGE 9

## Anil Ambani firm got tax relief after Rafale deal: French paper

Reliance Communications denies favouritism; MoD terms link mischievous

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

In fresh revelations with a bearing on the Rafale fighter aircraft deal, a leading French newspaper on Saturday reported that Anil Ambani's French registered telecom company was given tax waivers worth ₹143.7 mn, shortly after the announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the purchase of 36 Rafales.

According to *Le Monde*, French authorities cancelled a tax recovery "claimed for years" of ₹143.7 mn from a French company of Mr. Ambani's Reliance Communications. "The dispute was settled between February and October 2015, at a time when India and France were negotiating the sale of 36 combat aircraft," the report said.

### Conjecture, says MoD

Responding to the report, the Ministry of Defence said it was drawing a "conjectural connection" between tax exemption to a private company and procurement of Rafale fighter jets by Government of India. Any connections drawn between the tax issue and the Rafale

### Who said what

#### Le Monde

France has cancelled a tax recovery of an amount of ₹143.7 mn, claimed for years, in favour of a French company belonging to Reliance Communications. The dispute was settled in 2015, at a time when India and France were negotiating the sale of 36 combat aircraft

**Ministry of Defence**  
• Any connection drawn between the tax issue and the Rafale matter is totally inaccurate, tendentious and is a mischievous attempt to disinform

**Reliance Communications**  
• Reliance denies any favouritism or gain from settlement... French tax authorities had raised a tax demand of over ₹1,100 crore... As per the French tax settlement process as per law, a mutual settlement agreement was signed to pay ₹56 crore as a final settlement

matter is "totally inaccurate, tendentious and is a mischievous attempt to disinform."

Denying any "favouritism or gain" from the settlement, Reliance Communications said in a statement that the tax case pertained to 2008.

Reliance FLAG Atlantic France SAS is a subsidiary of Reliance Communications, India and owns a terrestrial cable network and other telecom infrastructure in France. According to the report, Reliance Atlantic FLAG France was investigated by French tax authorities and found liable to pay ₹60 mn between 2007 and 2010.

In an attempt to reach a

settlement, Reliance had offered to pay ₹7.6 mn but the authorities had rejected the offer and an additional tax of ₹91 mn was levied for the period 2010 to 2012. By 2015, the tax liability was at least ₹151 mn.

According to the *Le Monde* report, six months after the surprise announcement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the purchase of 36 Rafale aircraft during his April 2015 Paris visit, French tax authorities made a settlement with Reliance for just ₹7.3 mn instead of ₹151 mn.

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## 'Payback' for buying jets: Congress

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

After French newspaper *Le Monde* revealed that tax benefits were given to a French-registered telecom subsidiary of the Anil Ambani-led Reliance Communications, months after the Rafale deal was negotiated, the Congress on Saturday said: "Layers of connivance, crony capitalism and corruption are now getting unveiled."

At a press conference here, Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the revelation pointed to the money trail as the payback for buying the jets at an exorbitant cost.

In a series of tweets, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said the BJP was trying to legalise corruption and the "nexus" was now out in the open.

CONG. TARGETS MODI ▶ PAGE 10

## Oil import from Iran may be reduced as U.S. mulls waiver

Efforts on to beat deadline on GSP trade status

SUHASINI HAIDAR  
SRIRAM LAKSHMAN  
NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

Far from the din of elections, Indian officials are working closely with U.S. officials to ensure that two upcoming deadlines in early May, for the extension of the Iran oil sanctions waiver, as well as the final decision on withdrawing India's preferential Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) status, end positively for the government, multiple sources in Delhi and Washington confirmed.

### Lower quotas

While the decision on the GSP could be deferred until after elections, the discussions on the Iran oil sanctions waiver have indicated an extension is likely, with India allowed a lower quantity of oil imports from Iran.

Last week, following discussions with U.S. Under Secretary for Terrorism and Fi-

### Double deadline

India faces two deadlines from the United States on separate issues next month

#### MAY 2: GSP TRADE STATUS

60 days since the U.S. Trade Representative notified cancelling GSP status to Indian exporters

#### Possible outcomes

- President Trump signs notification cancelling GSP status
- The Trade Representative agrees to defer decision until after election on May 23
- Trade Representative, Commerce Ministry have a breakthrough deal on trade

#### MAY 4: IRAN OIL SANCTIONS WAIVER

6 months since original U.S. waiver to 8 countries to "zero out" oil imports from Iran

#### Possible outcomes

- The U.S. grants waiver to India on the same terms
- The U.S. grants a conditional waiver with a lower allowance of oil imports for India
- The U.S. cancels waivers for India, China, Turkey that still have significant imports

Financial Intelligence Sigal Mandelkar during his visit to discuss "U.S. nuclear-related sanctions on Iran and the global coalition to combat Iran's state support for terrorism," the Ministry of Exter-

nal Affairs (MEA) said both sides had been "continuously engaged" on the issue of India's oil imports from Iran since November.

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## 'Jallianwala Bagh a shameful act'

British High Commissioner pays homage, expresses regret

VIKAS VASUDEVA  
CHANDIGARH

British High Commissioner to India Dominic Asquith on Saturday termed the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, a hundred years ago, "a shameful act in British-Indian history."

Mr. Asquith was in Amritsar to pay tribute at the Jallianwala Bagh National Memorial to mark the centenary of the tragedy.

After paying homage, Mr. Asquith wrote in the visitor's book, "The events of Jallianwala Bagh 100 years ago to-



Remembering the victims: British High Commissioner Dominic Asquith, second from left, pays homage at the memorial. ■ AP

day reflect a shameful act in British-Indian history. We deeply regret what happened and the suffering caused."

Later, talking to repor-

ters, Mr. Asquith said, "...what happened 100 years ago was a tragedy."

U.K. SHOULD APOLOGISE, SAYS MINISTER ▶ PAGE 9

## Every Oppn. leader in line to be PM: Modi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
THENI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said there was no consensus among the Congress's allies to name the party's president Rahul Gandhi as the coalition's PM candidate.

Speaking at a campaign rally here in the presence of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and other alliance leaders, Mr. Modi said only the DMK had wanted Mr. Gandhi to lead the nation.

The other allies had either turned down the proposal, or had not taken it seriously, he added.

Every leader in the Congress alliance, he claimed, was waiting in line to become the next Prime Minister. Mr Modi also described the DMK-Congress alliance as 'opportunistic'.

'CONG. MUST ANSWER' ▶ PAGE 10

## Mayhem in Mayapuri



Soaring tempers: Around 14 officials, including the area SDM and an ACP, were injured after clashes broke out between local scrap dealers and security personnel during a sealing drive in west Delhi's Mayapuri on Saturday, leading to a political slugfest between the ruling AAP and the BJP. ■ PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT (DETAILS ON PAGE 2)

## Keeping it simple, RJD connects with a song

Sans expensive PR machinery, the party's social media outreach is helmed by a tiny but dedicated team

SOBHANA K NAIR  
PATNA

At first you don't see anything out of the ordinary. You only feel the urgency in the air and hear the rhythmic click of the keyboard. A closer look reveals that Abhinav Pankaj, a core member of the Rashtriya Janata Dal's (RJD) social media team, is working the keyboard with just a stump for a hand.

Mr Pankaj, 33, lost both his hands in a railway accident in 2007. His right hand was amputated below the elbow but his left had to be cut close to the shoulder.

"After the accident, it took me a long time to believe that I could do anything. I started fiddling with the phone and computer keyboard first using my feet," Mr Pankaj

said.

Mr Pankaj, who has B.Tech in Chemical Engineering, joined the RJD team in 2013, when the party's social media outreach was at a nascent stage.

Like Mr Pankaj, the core members of the team are all young men from varied backgrounds, none of whom has a professional degree or experience in advertising or public relations.

"We do not have resources like the BJP to rope in advertising firms to design our campaign. We have a core team of five members who work from Patna and the RJD's youth team across Bihar contributes," said Sanjay Yadav, a close aide of RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav and mentor of the social media



A volunteer working at the RJD's social media room in Patna. ■ RANJEET KUMAR

team.

With party patriarch Lalu Prasad Yadav in prison in Ranchi, the social media campaign in centred around his absence. It has released three campaign songs – "Jan Jan Main Lalu Hai", an emotional appeal from

Rabri Devi in Bhojpuri, overlaid with images of her sitting at Mr Prasad's feet in hospital, and a third about Mr. Tejashwi Yadav with the tag line "Yashvi, Tapasvi, Ojasvi hai Tejashwi".

The core team doubles up as statisticians, researchers

and strategists. They analyse voter percentages, caste equations, and the impact of independents in various constituencies.

The RJD leadership too is new to the social media with Tejashwi Yadav, now a prolific user of Twitter, having joined only in December 2013.

The social media team works out of a room at his residence on 10 Circular Road in Patna.

Mr Prasad joined in a month later in January 2014, reluctantly but seduced by the possibility of a direct connect with supporters.

Given the RJD's largely rural voter base, the team focuses on Whatsapp and Facebook.

The party's official Facebook page has 1.2 million followers.