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‘Questions on RBI’s credibility outlandish’

“GST rate reduction it is not in my hands. It has to go to the GST Council...the Law committee will have to look at it,” she said.

When asked about the stimulus announced last week to revive the sagging auto sector, Ms. Sitharaman said: “I have announced some measures for the automobile sector last week...I have to see how it goes. I’ll also have to take some inputs to gauge the impact of those measures.”

Meeting on taxes

Ms. Sitharaman said the meeting with tax officials and traders had chiefly focused on matters pertaining to GST forms, simplifications, and deadline-related

issues. Urging tax officials not to overreach themselves to meet their targets, she said that the tax deadlines that had been fixed were in consultation with all the authorities.

“They are achievable deadlines and realistic. My request to them was not to overreach,” she said.

The Minister said the Centre was committed to letting businessmen carrying on their enterprises with a free mind. “Whatever be the size of the business – small, medium, micro, nano or large – we want entrepreneurs to carry on with their business without a worry...this essentially creates jobs and therefore, wealth for the country,” she said.

‘SC’s caution ignored in Chidambaram case’

Mr. Singhvi criticised the Delhi High Court for taking a bite of this “forbidden fruit” on August 20. He said the High Court’s judgment refusing protection to the senior Congress leader was solely based on the material enclosed in the sealed envelopes handed over by the probe agencies.

‘Forbidden fruit’

To buttress his point, Mr. Singhvi read out the relevant portion of the *ADM Jabalpur* judgment, which said, “What use can a court make of material which it cannot disclose to the detenu and how can it form a judicial opinion on matters not disclose to a party before it? The High Court, at the highest, could satisfy its curiosity by tasting the forbidden fruit but its secret scrutiny of the grounds and of the file containing the relevant information and material cannot enter into its judicial verdict.”

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, also for Mr. Chidambaram, said documents and records were placed on record in the High Court behind his client’s back to seek his arrest and interrogation.

Mr. Sibal said an application had been moved in the Supreme Court seeking a direction to the ED to produce the transcripts of Mr. Chidambaram’s interrogation.

against Mr. Chidambaram became scheduled offences under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act only in 2009. The alleged transactions, a year after the alleged FIPB approval (cause of action) was granted in 2007-08.

Mr. Singhvi argued that the provisions under which Mr. Chidambaram had been accused of did not exist at the time of the alleged transaction. “You are trying to paint a person ‘kingpin’ on the basis of offences that did not exist at the time,” he submitted.

Version ‘distorted’

He then referred to how the probe agencies presented a “distorted version” that Mr. Chidambaram was evasive in his replies. “During questioning, they expect you to confess or face questions till midnight till you give them an answer they want... Evasion here means ‘not giving the answer they want’,” Mr. Singhvi said.

The courts took a call on anticipatory bail based on the ‘triple test’ of flight risk, non-cooperation and tampering with evidence. “Flight risk virtually never arises in this case. That is not a consideration unless in the case of a terrorist. Non-cooperation does not mean not giving the answer you want. Finally, what can I tamper with in this case which is 11 years old. The documents are already frozen... Besides the man [Chidambaram] was in power till 2014,” Mr. Singhvi said.

In his rejoinder filed on Tuesday, Mr. Chidambaram apprehended that ED may use coercive methods in its bid to elicit responses from him.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta for the ED will commence his counter-arguments on August 28.

Seeks transcripts

“Let them show the transcripts of the questioning done on three former occasions [in December 2018 and January 2019]. We shall see whether they had confronted my client with the documents they showed in sealed covers in the Delhi High Court,” Mr. Sibal submitted.

Mr. Singhvi said the main provisions of law attracted in the INX Media case

J&K leaders to be freed in phases, process initiated

More high schools will be opened from Wednesday, in addition to 3,037 primary schools and 774 middle schools opened in the past one week.

“There is a significant improvement in one week in attendance of staff,” said

Education Director Younis Malik.

Senior Superintendent of Police, Srinagar, Haseeb Mughal said only two incidents of stone-pelting were reported on Tuesday from Srinagar’s Hawal and Tatoo Ground area.

Jawan kills havildar, self at camp in Chennai

Irked over this, Singh later went to the quarters where Joshi was sleeping and shot him with his service rifle. He then turned the weapon on himself and fired three rounds.

Hearing the shots, personnel rushed to the spot and found the duo in pools of blood. Joshi and Singh were rushed to the Military Hospital, Nandambakkam, where they were declared

brought dead. On Tuesday, a formal complaint was lodged by defence authorities with the Pallavaram police. Assistant Commissioner of Police Devaraj visited the scene and conducted an enquiry.

Police personnel took empty casings from the site and blood samples.

The bodies were taken to the Rajiv Gandhi General Hospital for post-mortem.

Rahul Gandhi accuses govt. of ‘stealing’ from RBI

Congress says Centre is pushing nation into bankruptcy, demands White Paper

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI**

The Congress on Tuesday launched a scathing attack on Modi government over the transfer of cash reserves of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and accused “the government of pushing the country into bankruptcy and stealing money” from the central bank.

While the former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi said the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister are “clueless about solving the self-created economic disaster,” former Commerce Minister Anand Sharma sought a

White Paper on the state of the economy and independent analysis of the government’s economic data.

“PM and FM are clueless about how to solve their self created economic disaster. Stealing from RBI won’t work - it’s like stealing a Band-Aid from the dispensary and sticking it on a gunshot wound,” Mr. Gandhi said on Twitter with the hashtag #RBIlooted.

Mr. Sharma said at a press conference that the government’s move reaffirmed what the Congress had been saying about an unprecedented economic crisis.



“In recent times, the Central Bank in Argentina had transferred its contingency fund to the government and now their economy is destroyed...This government has pushed the country into economic emergency and bankruptcy. The RBI has no room now to intervene if there is a crisis,” he said.

Former Minister Jairam Ramesh said, “Urjit Patel [former RBI Governor] & Viral Acharya [former Deputy Governor] held the fort. They were forced to leave. The fort was breached. The Govt of India now usurps a huge windfall from the RBI going contrary to what the central bank’s own think

99% of profits taken away: CPI(M)

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI**

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury hit out at the Centre over the record cash transfer by the RBI, alleging the government had “appropriated” 99% of the

profits of India’s central banking institution since 2014. A Polit Bureau statement said the RBI was a “lender of the last resort” and condemned the manner in which its reserves were being utilised.

tank CAFRAL had said. Fiscal breathing space but at what and whose cost?”

Other Congress leaders and spokespersons played around with acronym RBI to target the Modi government.

Party spokesperson Randeep Surjewala tweeted, “Modi 2.0 has converted the ‘R’ in RBI from ‘Reserve’ to

‘Ravaged’! Contingency Reserve of RBI meant for extreme financial emergencies and war-like situations is being used by BJP Govt to bury its monumental mess on economic front! BJP has finished RBI’s credibility!”

In another tweet, he asked, “Is this fiscal prudence or fiscal hara-kiri?”

2 agents who brokered deals identified: ED

Probe looks at foreign investment approvals during Chidambaram’s tenure

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI**

Investigating agencies claim to have identified two persons who interacted with those applying for approvals from the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB), including in the case of INX Media, and collected money in lieu of alleged favours.

The CBI, which has former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram in its custody, is focusing its probe on several FIPB clearances given during his tenure. The Enforcement Directorate has also been looking into the money laundering aspect of the approvals.

Both the agencies have al-

leged that kickbacks were taken through shell companies, which invested money in immovable and movable properties in India and abroad. They have so far zeroed in on more than a dozen “benami” bank accounts overseas.

As part of the money laundering probe, the ED also

claims to have identified two “agents”, who acted as go-betweens for those who sought the FIPB approvals that are under scrutiny.

Based on its findings, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, the ED has attached assets worth ₹54 crore in India, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Chidambaram’s family seeks proof for charges

‘Govt. is bent on demonising him’

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI**

Former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram’s family on Tuesday dared the Union government to produce even a shred of evidence of undisclosed bank account, property or shell companies and accused the government of demonising him.



P. Chidambaram

In a statement, the family said they were distressed that the “media has been reporting completely wild, unverified and unsubstantiated allegations” against Mr. Chidambaram in the last few days and “unable to uphold liberty against calumny”.

“Every person is presumed innocent unless proved guilty in a court of law,” said the statement that was shared on the Twitter handle of Mr. Chidambaram’s son and Lok Sabha member Karti Chidambaram.

“We challenge the government to produce a shred of evidence in support of one undisclosed bank account, one undisclosed property or one shell company anywhere in the world,” the statement said.

The family possessed enough wealth and did not crave for money through unlawful ways, it noted.

“We are therefore astounded by allegations of properties in multiple countries, multiple bank accounts, numerous shell companies etc. These are chapters plucked out of ghost stories and one day these ghosts will be buried,” it said.

Appealing for restraint and dignity from the media, the family said, “Chidambaram has been in public life for nearly 50 years and his impeccable honesty, work as well as contribution cannot be wiped out by a campaign of vilification”.

In a separate but similar statement, Mr. Karti stressed that all his assets were declared and he could lose his Lok Sabha membership if he was dishonest about his filings.

“I have contested two elections, one successfully. I am obligated to publicly declare my assets and I have done so,” he said.

Words of comfort



Prime Minister Narendra Modi consoling family members of the late BJP leader Arun Jaitley in New Delhi on Tuesday. • ANI

U.S. religious panel anxious about ‘potential abuse’ of NRC

Process could be used to ‘render stateless’ Muslim communities, it says

**SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON**

A U.S. federal government bipartisan commission that looks into matters of international religious freedom has said it is concerned about the finalisation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in

Assam. United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) Chairman Tony Perkins and one of its commissioners Anurima Bhargava said the process to finalise the NRC by August 31 could undermine religious freedom for

vulnerable minorities and potentially be used to “render stateless” Muslim communities in the northeast.

“Freedom of religion or belief for India’s diverse faith communities and respect for religious pluralism have long been a bedrock of Indian society, values enshrined in the constitution. However, we remain concerned with the potential abuse of the Na-

tional Register of Citizens in Assam and the resulting introduction of a religious requirement for citizenship, which are contrary to the ideals of religious freedom in India,” Mr. Perkins said.

“We remain troubled by any government policies or actions that have the effect, whether intentional or not, of undermining religious freedom for vulnerable reli-

gious minorities. The NRC verification process must not become a means to target and render stateless the Muslim community in northeastern India,” Ms. Bhargava said.

“Proposed policies that suggest that Muslims – and Muslims alone – will face a higher burden for verification, along with worrisome rhetoric, create a negative

and potentially dangerous climate for the Muslim community in northeastern India.” A USCIRF press release also made reference to a June 2018 letter written by four U.N. special rapporteurs to then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, expressing concern that the NRC process could potentially disenfranchise the region’s Muslims.

How many likely to be out of NRC?

Predictions have varied from a minimum of 10 lakh to a maximum of 20 lakh

**RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI**



Women waiting to submit NRC documents. • FILE PHOTO

With just four days to go for the publication of the final updated National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, the State is rife with debates and predictions of the number of people likely to be excluded.

The figures have varied from a minimum of 10-12 lakh to a maximum of 20-22 lakh – roughly half of the 41,10,169 mentioned in the two exclusion lists. However, most analysts agree the NRC-exclusion list is likely to be split between migrant Muslims of Bengali origin and non-Muslims, a majority of them Bengal-origin Hindus.

Lawyers who have represented stakeholders in filing petitions at the Supreme Court, which is monitoring the updating exercise since 2013, hazard a guess “have a hunch” that the number of people to be excluded from the final NRC would be around the 20 lakh mark,

“give or take a lakh or two”.

Their belief is based on the apex court’s rejection of a few petitions while upholding NRC State Coordinator Prateek Hajela’s suggestions from time to time.

“Two judgements – one on November 1, 2018, and the other on July 23 this year – should lead to the exclusion of about 12 lakh people. The first judgement was where the apex court agreed to the State Coordinator’s argument that legacy data were exchanged or traded.

The second pertained to excluding declared foreigners, doubtful (D) voters, and people with pending cases in Foreigners Tribunals along with members of their families,” a lawyer of one of the litigant groups said.

Data provided by the State government less than a month ago said there are pending cases against 2,07,311 people while 1,13,738 people were marked D-voters by the Election Commission and 1,17,164 (of whom 29,855 were deported) declared foreigners by the Foreigners’ Tribunals.

Legacy data

One of the cases that Mr. Hajela cited to buttress the legacy data misuse claim was that of Nilakanta Barman who had legacy data codes of three years – 1951, 1966, and 1971. “An imposter used the 1966 legacy data code and was caught when the real descendants of Nilakan-

ta Barman refused to identify him during family tree identification verifications,” he told the court.

A set of documents such as the 1951 NRC and voters’ list up to March 1971 are together called legacy data. A legacy code is provided to each person figuring in these documents.

“Some 50,000 people inadvertently used wrong legacy codes while a few thousand more allegedly traded such code. If we take an average four members per family of people falling in the categories the two orders involve, the number comes to 12 lakh,” the lawyer said.

“If we take the 3.96 lakh people who did not re-apply after being excluded from NRC in July 2018, a realistic figure that appears is about 20 lakh out of the total 3.29 crore applicants,” said an activist who helped poor and marginalised people with filing NRC applications.

Paralegals trained to help those excluded

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI**

Some 100 paralegals in Assam have been trained to help defend the citizenship of people whose names will be excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which is to be published on August 31.

The three-day training in Guwahati to “navigate the complex issue of citizenship after the publication of the list” was organised by Citi-

zens for Justice and Peace (CJP), a non-governmental organisation.

“We do not want any genuine Indian citizen to suffer on account of lack of proper legal advice. CJP has about 500 volunteers working across 19 districts. Nearly 100 of them were trained in the workshop. More workshops have been planned in other regions of the State,” CJP secretary Teesta Setalvad said.



APPEAL

Name of Patient: **Master MD Shad**, 1 years, Hospital Name: Christian Medical College, Diagnosis: B Cell Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. This is a type of Blood Cancer for which he needs Chemotherapy. The estimated cost of Chemotherapy, Hospitalization, Investigation, Antibiotics, other Drugs & Blood Product support is likely to be about **Rs. 4,50,000/-**.

We request kind hearted Philanthropists to save him, kindly send donation by Cheque/D.D/M.O Favouing Save Poor Lives A/c Master MD Shad S/B Account No. 20000913487, State Bank of India, Raja Annamalaipuram Branch, IFSC Code: SBIN0001855, which is exempted under 80G of I.T. Act. Contact: **SAVE POOR LIVES REGISTERED PUBLIC CHARITABLE TRUST**, (Admin Division) Flat No. A4, Ceebros Garden, Ground Floor, Old No. 76, Kamarajar Salai, Raja Annamalaipuram, Chennai - 600 028. Ph: 044-42044165. Mobile: 9884607377, E-mail: **savepoorlives@gmail.com** Our Website: **www.savepoorlives.com** Donation given to patients upto March 2019 For Rs. 4,26,89,335/- and Scholarship 7,30,800/-.