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Never spoke of imposing Hindi, says Amit Shah

"It is the language of a particular State, like Gujarati in my State. But there should be one language in the country, if someone wants to learn another language, it should be Hindi."

"I too come from a non-Hindi speaking State. I come from Gujarat where Gujarati is the language, not Hindi. One has to listen to my speech carefully..." Mr. Shah said.

Mr. Shah's statement came following widespread criticism of his earlier remarks.

Several Opposition parties accused the Centre of attempting to impose Hindi over other languages.

The Congress said the three-language formula should not be tinkered with.

"The Polit Bureau of the CPI(M) strongly opposes these efforts which stem from the RSS conception of one nation, one culture, one language," said the party in a statement.

The CPI also described Mr. Shah's comments as an "attack on the very concept of diversity."

Cabinet approves ban on e-cigarettes

The sub-inspector has been designated as the authorised officer to take action under the ordinance. The Central or State governments may also designate any other equivalent officer (s) as authorised officer for enforcement of the provisions of the ordinance.

The Prohibition of E-cigarettes Ordinance, 2019, was recently examined by a Group of Ministers (GoM) following directions from the Prime Minister's Office. In the draft ordinance, the Health Ministry had proposed a maximum imprisonment of up to one year along with a penalty of ₹1 lakh against first-time violators.

E-cigarettes are battery-operated devices that produce aerosol by heating a solution containing nicotine, which is the addictive

substance in combustible cigarettes.

Complete prohibition

The Minister noted that as per data the misuse of e-cigarettes is very high among students. The Union Health Ministry had earlier issued an advisory to all States and Union Territories to ensure that Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS), e-cigarettes, heat-not-burn devices, vape, e-sheesa, e-nicotine flavoured hookah, and devices that enable nicotine delivery are not sold (including online sale), manufactured, distributed, traded, imported and advertised in their jurisdictions.

Union Health Secretary Preeti Sudan had also written to the Commerce Secretary to block the entry of a U.S.-based company manufacturing vaping devices.

Xi-Modi meet likely to skirt Kashmir issue

Beijing had also backed Pakistan on taking the Kashmir issue to the UN Security Council, following India's decision on August 5 to deny special status to Kashmir.

"As for Kashmir being on the agenda, I'm not sure because this is kind of an informal summit and leaders' meeting, I think better we need to give the leaders much time to discuss whatever they would like to discuss," Ms. Hua observed.

But the spokesperson reiterated China's stance backing direct talks between India and Pakistan as well as the UN's role in resolving the Kashmir issue.

Ms. Hua pointed out that Kashmir issue was a problem between India and Pa-

kistan. The Chinese diplomat hoped that as good neighbours of China, India and Pakistan could live together in peace. "And both India and Pakistan can try their best to resolve the issue peacefully through negotiations," she said.

Analysts say that despite China's apparent decision not to focus on Kashmir, the Indian side appears inclined to raise "tough questions" with China regarding its ties with Pakistan that have faltered with India.

On China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Ms. Hua said it is up to the Indian side to decide when and how to join the enterprise, which is gaining in popularity.

Tabrez case accused face murder charge

"Due to expeditious investigation, 11 accused were arrested and sent to jail within 72 hours of the incident. Special emphasis was given on scientific accumulation of evidences. We have taken other mob lynching cases quite seriously. As many as 66 accused in mob lynching cases have so far been punished. We are committed to prevent such cases in the State," the police said.

"I am happy that the accused will now be facing murder charges. We will not let anyone off the hook," Sachista Pervez, wife of deceased Tabrez, told *The Hindu*.

A couple of days ago, Ms. Pervez had threatened a fast-unto-death alleging that the administration was not cooperating in supply of necessary documents in connection with the murder.

'Who said we are going to destroy Parliament?'

On the colonial architecture, he said: "The English ruled for 190 years. Their architecture is very good, everyone praises it and it is a part of our cultural and architectural heritage. That will stay. You think we will break down North Block or South Block? No. But you may decide that one or both may be made a museum to reflect those 190 years."

He clarified that while Rashtrapati Bhavan, Parliament House and North and South Blocks would not be

demolished, "some of the buildings made in the 1960s and 1970s should have been torn down much earlier".

"From the time the CPWD built Rashtrapati Bhavan, something went wrong. Either we lowered our standards or we took our eye off the ball," he said.

Durga Shanker Mishra, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs Secretary, said he would soon be setting up a "core team" of CPWD officials to oversee the project.

India, U.S. to end dogfight over ground handling

Civil Aviation Ministry to amend rules after Air India was barred from carrying out operations in America in July

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

India is set to amend its ground-handling regulations for foreign airlines after the U.S., in a retaliatory action, recently barred Air India from performing ground operations on its own at American airports.

"We are adjusting ground-handling norms and devising a mechanism to attempt to address their concerns without compromising security," P.S. Kharola, Secretary, Civil Aviation Ministry, told *The Hindu*.

Tit for tat

On July 30, the U.S. Department of Transportation served an order amending Air India's foreign air carrier permit, and barring it from performing its own ground-handling functions in the U.S., after India failed to al-

Turbulent phase

April 14, 2005: Air Service Agreement between India and the U.S. allows airlines to self-handle operations in the territory of the other party

December 15, 2017: New ground handling regulations released, foreign airlines barred from ground handling

April 19, 2019: U.S. Department of

Transportation (DoT) asks why India is not allowing U.S. carriers to exercise their bilateral right to self-handle

July 30, 2019: U.S. DoT bars Air India and Jet Airways from self-handling

September 2019: Civil Aviation Ministry says it will "adjust" norms on ground handling



We are adjusting ground handling norms and devising a mechanism to attempt to address their [U.S.] concerns without compromising security
P. S. KHAROLA, Secretary, Civil Aviation Ministry

low U.S. airlines to "exercise their bilateral right to perform their own ground-handling (to "self-handle") at Indian airports".

Air India is the only Indian carrier that currently flies to the U.S.

"A special dispensation will be allowed to those

countries with whom we have an air services agreement to perform ground operations," said another official in the Ministry of Civil Aviation, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The employees of these foreign airlines would, however, be subjected to stric-

ter security monitoring, the official added.

It is reliably learnt that the Ministry will be seeking an in-principle approval from the Union Cabinet as the issue pertains to national security, before moving to modify the clause in the Airports Authority of India

SC reserves orders on SC/ST Act

Government had filed a review petition against the dilution of the law

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved orders on a review petition filed by the government against a March 20, 2018 judgment allowing anticipatory bail to persons accused of committing atrocities on people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The March 20 verdict had reasoned that the anti-atrocities law was misused as a means for "blackmail".

A three-judge Bench of Justices Arun Mishra, M.R. Shah and B.R. Gawai heard the review petition, which was referred to it by a two-judge Bench.

Govt. intervention

A huge public backlash followed the verdict. Several people died in protests and property worth crores of rupees was destroyed. The government then filed the review petition and subsequently amended the 1989 Act back to its original



The court earlier said that the law was misused as a means for "blackmail".

form last year.

The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Act of 2018 nullified the March 20 judgment of the Supreme Court, which allowed anticipatory bail to those booked for committing atrocities against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes members. The original 1989 Act bars anticipatory bail.

Several petitions were

filed last year challenging the Amendment Act. The three-judge Bench has scheduled these petitions for hearing next week.

The lead petitioner, advocate Prithvi Raj Chauhan, has even called the amendments a "blunder" and a violation of the fundamental right to equality and personal liberty. The Supreme Court, however, had refused to stay the implementation of the amendments.

The Centre has argued in the court that the amendments were necessary as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes would continue to face the same social stigma, poverty and humiliation that they had been subjected to for centuries.

The government said there was no decrease in the atrocities committed on members of SC/ST communities despite the laws meant to protect their civil rights.

It said the sad state of affairs was prevalent despite the existence of 195 special

courts across 14 States to exclusively try Prevention of Atrocities (PoA) cases.

Status quo

As per the National Crime Records Bureau statistics, there is no decrease in the crimes against SC/ST members.

The number of cases registered under the PoA in 2014 is 47,124, while in 2015 it is 44,839 and 47,338 in 2016.

In 2014, 28.8% of the cases were convicted, 71.2% acquitted and 85.3% cases pending. The next year saw 25.8% convictions, 74.2% acquittals and 87.3% pendency. In 2016, there was 24.9% convictions, 75.1% acquittals and 89.3% pendency.

"The SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989 is the least which the country owes to this section of the society who have been denied several civil rights since generations and have been subjected to indignities and humiliations," the government argued.

Equations in Bihar have changed, says BJP

Party may seek more seats from JD(U) for the Assembly polls owing to better performance recently

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister and BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi may have tried to quieten the demand by some party colleagues for a rethink on whether or not the National Democratic Alliance should persist with Nitya Kumar as Chief Minister going into the 2020 Assembly election, but the party is girding up for serious bargaining over seats with the Janata Dal(U).

The BJP and the JD(U) last fought the Assembly election in the State together in 2010 under a seat-sharing arrangement. The JD(U) contested 142 seats while the BJP fought in 101 constituencies. The two split just before



Sushil Kumar Modi had pacified BJP members who demanded more seats for the 2020 Assembly polls. •RAMESH SHARMA

the 2014 Lok Sabha election, and the JD(U) then tied up with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), led by Lalu Prasad, for the 2015 Assembly election.

Much water has flowed in the Ganga since then, with Mr. Kumar having broken his

alliance with the RJD, tying up with the BJP again, and contesting the 2019 Lok Sabha election in an equal 17-17 seat split.

Senior BJP leaders, both in Delhi and Patna say the political ground has shifted a

lot since the previous Assembly election when the JD(U)-RJD alliance swept to power, with the BJP a distant third.

"In the last Lok Sabha elections, while we fought an equal number of seats, our vote share was 2% more than that of the JD(U). Also while the JD(U) won 16 of their 17 seats, their margins were not as big as ours, where the lowest margin was for Ram Kripal Yadav, around 38,000 votes," a senior BJP office-bearer said. "Clearly, the Modi effect had led to such results," he said.

The recent membership drive of the BJP, he said, has seen enthusiastic response from new sections.

At a meeting between

Bhupendra Yadav, BJP general secretary in charge of Bihar, and Mr. Kumar, along with other party officials, the Chief Minister reportedly admitted that the BJP's organisational strength had grown by leaps and bounds.

New pact needed

"All of this points to the fact that the old seat-sharing arrangement cannot continue as before, and the ground realities have to be acknowledged by the Janata Dal (U)," sources said.

The BJP had, in the past, broken with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and contested the Assembly election alone and formed the government. The situation in Bihar, say party men, is similar.

Section 3(2) of the ground handling regulations states that a foreign airline may undertake passenger and baggage handling activities before the passenger security hold area at an airport terminal, but prohibits them from carrying out a list of 60 security functions in ground operations that include loading and unloading of baggage, emplaning and deplaning passengers, fuelling and the cleaning of aircraft.

Conflicting rules

India earned U.S. ire as the regulations, which were amended in 2017 and notified again in 2018, were at variance with the India-U.S. air services agreement of 2005, which allowed the two countries' airlines to perform their own ground handling in the territory of the other party.

Court seeks M.P. govt's response on reservation

Plea filed after reservation crosses 50%

STAFF REPORTER
BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh High Court has sought a reply from the State government within two weeks to a petition challenging its decision to raise reservation for OBCs to 27%.

The petition was filed by four persons who had appeared for the Madhya Pradesh Public Service Commission Examination for various posts under the general category.

The petitioners contended that after the amendment to the Madhya Pradesh Lok Sewa Adhiniyam, 1994, on July 17, 2019, the reservation for the Other Backward Classes was raised from 14% to 27%, which crossed the 50% limit as laid down by the Supreme Court.

"The total reservation has now crossed the 50% mark and is against the dictum laid down by the Supreme Court in the case of

Indra Sawhney versus the Union of India," said the petitioner.

The reservation was against Articles 14 [Equality before law], 15 [prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth], 16 [equality of opportunity] and 19 (1) (g) [right to practice any profession] of the Constitution, the petitioners contended.

The plea said that the 26-year-old judgement had not been overruled to this day and was followed in letter and spirit across the country.

Aditya Sanghi, counsel for the petitioners, told *The Hindu*, "The decision is just a political gimmick by the ruling party to garner votes. Even they are aware such a move goes against the spirit of the Constitution. But they could now at least inform the electorate that they tried all their means to increase the quota."

Centre clears four names for SC judges

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Centre cleared the appointments of Justices V Ramasubramanian, Krishna Murari, S. Ravindra Bhat and Hrishikesh Roy as Supreme Court judges.

The Supreme Court Collegium led by Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi had recommended Chief Justices of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, Rajasthan and Kerala High Courts, V. Ramasubramanian, Krishna Murari, S. Ravindra Bhat and Hrishikesh Roy, respectively, as Supreme court judges.

One of the four judges would replace the vacancy following the retirement of Justice A.M. Sapre recently.

PDP man gets parole to attend brother's burial

He was let out for three hours

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) leader Khursheed Alam was released on a parole for just three hours on Wednesday to attend the last rites of his younger brother Shahnawaz Alam, who died of lung cancer on Tuesday evening.

An official said the former employees union leader who joined the PDP a few years ago, was shifted from the Centaur Lake View hotel, a designated sub-jail, on Wednesday morning to attend the last rites here.

"Mr. Alam was escorted by a posse of security per-

sonnel to Khanyar and was again whisked away after the burial. We expected the State government to release him for at least four days so that he could participate in all the congregational prayers to be offered," a relative said on the condition of anonymity.

A police official said the agencies were "weighing the options to release him again to attend the congregational prayers."

Mr. Alam was among 179 political leaders arrested in the crackdown launched on the mainstream leaders in J&K before the Centre revoked J&K's special status.