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DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



NEPAL VISIT UNLIKELY

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi is unlikely to go for the first edition of the 'Sagarmatha Sambaad' in Kathmandu, scheduled to be held April 2-4, on the theme 'Climate Change, Mountains and the Future of Humanity'. The Nepal government has invited the SAARC countries and China, and there was expectation that it would provide an opportunity for the top leadership of India and Pakistan to gather at a venue in Kathmandu. But India is likely to send its environment minister, who could be best suited to represent the government at the platform. However, a final call is yet to be taken.

DIVIDED OPPN

WITH THE second half of the Budget Session of Parliament beginning next week, the big question is whether the Opposition parties will try to corner the BJP-led government on the communal violence in Delhi. The Opposition, however, has not put up a united front on the issue. On Thursday, the Congress went on its own to meet President Ram Nath Kovind. And on Friday, seven parties, including the Left and Congress's allies DMK, RJD and NCP, wrote to the President separately. The Trinamool Congress was not part of either initiative; the BSP and SP were also missing. The Congress was also missing from a rally organised by CPI leader Kanhaiya Kumar in Patna on Thursday against the new citizenship law and NRC.

NEW ROLE

FORMER INDIAN Ambassador to China Gautam Bambawale has joined Ola as senior advisor for corporate and international affairs. A diplomat with 34 years of experience, Bambawale earlier served as India's Ambassador to Bhutan as well as the High Commissioner to Pakistan. He also held a number of positions where he was directly involved in advancing India's relations with Japan, China and South Korea among others. He will now play a key role in advising Ola on its corporate affairs initiatives across India and the global markets where it operates.

MAHARASHTRA

5% quota for Muslims soon in educational institutes

VISHWAS WAGHMODE
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 28

THE MAHARASHTRA government on Friday announced that it will bring a law to give five per cent reservation to Muslims in educational institutes.

The announcement was made by Minister for Minority Affairs Nawab Malik at the Legislative Council. In 2014, the then Congress-NCP government had passed an Ordinance allowing five per cent reservation for Muslims in jobs and educational institutes in the state. The Bombay High Court, where the decision was challenged, had upheld reservation for Muslims in government and government-aided educational institutes but not in jobs. However, the Devendra Fadnavis government, which subsequently came to power, had allowed the Ordinance to lapse, as it did not convert it into a law.

Replying to a question raised by Congress' Sharad Ranpise,

Malik said at the Council: "The five per cent reservation given in educational institutes to Muslims in 2014 has been upheld by the HC. The government will bring a law soon to provide the reservation."

Maintaining that the government will bring a law that will be valid as per the Constitution and stand scrutiny in court, he added: "The government will take appropriate decision on bringing the law before school admissions begin in June."

In a written reply to a starred question on Muslim reservation by Ranpise, Malik said the state had given five per cent reservation to Muslims in government jobs and educational institutes through an Ordinance in July 2014. "...Petitions were filed against it and the HC, in its interim order in November 2014, had upheld five per cent reservation in government and government-aided educational institutes. But it had stayed the reservation given in private ed-

ucational institutes and government jobs," he added.

Malik further said that the Ordinance had lapsed in November 2014, as it was not converted into a law. At present, reservation in jobs and educational institutes in Maharashtra is at 75 per cent and 74 per cent, respectively.

"Leaders of the Maha Vikas Aghadi will collectively take a call on policy decision like giving reservation to any community. Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray will take appropriate decisions at right time. No decision has been taken yet," Eknath Shinde, Urban Development Minister and senior Shiv Sena leader, told mediapersons.

Anil Parab, Parliamentary Affairs Minister, said: "Whatever decision is taken by the leaders of Maha Vikas Aghadi will be acceptable to all of us."

However, the Opposition BJP said that giving reservation to Muslims will impact the existing quota of OBCs and Marathas.

"The Constitution does not provide for quota based on religion. Any attempt to give reservation to Muslims would indirectly impact the existing quota of OBCs and Maratha community in Maharashtra," said Devendra Fadnavis, the Leader of Opposition in the Assembly.

The Mehmood-ur-Rahman Committee, set up by the Congress-NCP government to look into the socio-economic condition of Muslims in Maharashtra, in 2013 had recommended reservation for the community. In its report, it recommended eight per cent reservation in education and housing — both public and private. It also asked for an anti-discrimination Act for Muslims on the lines of the atrocity Act. Further, it had demanded that a special commission be set up to inquire into the large number of Muslims in detention and recommended that the minority department should monitor detention of community members in terror and riot cases.



Union minister Ravi Shanker Prasad at the BJP head office in New Delhi on Friday. Prem Nath Pandey

Don't preach us raj dharma: BJP hits out at Cong

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 28

WHILE THE BJP said on Friday that it didn't approve of provocative statements made by some of its leaders, it accused the Congress of instigating the violence in Delhi.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters, senior party leader and Union Minister Ravi Shanker Prasad said: "Yesterday, the Congress went to the President, and is now teaching us raj dharma. Sonia Gandhi, please don't preach us raj dharma; your record is full of twists and turns".

On Thursday, a Congress delegation, led by Sonia, met President Ram Nath Kovind and submitted a memorandum demanding Union Home Minister Amit Shah's resignation for "abdication of duty" during the communal violence in northeast Delhi. Sonia had also reminded the Centre of its raj dharma, and the need to protect people of all faiths.

Prasad said several Congress leaders had supported granting citizenship to persecuted minorities from other countries. "How have all of them done a volte face now? What kind of raj dharma is that," he said.

He accused the Congress of making provocative statements on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. "During your rally at Ramlila Maidan, you said

is paar aur us paar ki ladai hai (fight to the finish). If this is not provocation, what is? A statement like this means moving away from the Constitutional path," he said.

"Congress leaders went to Shaheen Bagh and one of them called Modi ji a murderer. They were standing by people who chanted 'Jinnah wali azadi'. Whatever happened in Delhi should not have happened; provocative statements were made. But this was a time for peace, not for politics. In the name of raj dharma, an attempt is being made to provoke people," he said.

"The BJP condemns the politicking by the Congress party on such a sensitive issue, when we should all be talking about peace," he said.

Asked about the provocative remarks made by BJP leaders like Kapil Mishra and Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, Prasad said the Home Minister had already "clarified" the party's position, and the top BJP brass did not consider these comments appropriate.

"They have not approved of their remarks... If very senior leaders have disapproved of these statements publicly, I think it means a lot. The party, with its own internal system, will surely respond to these situations," he said.

He said the police were looking into these statements, and the matter was sub-judice.



Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik hosts a lunch for Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee and Bihar CM Nitish Kumar at his residence in Bhubaneswar on Friday. Courtesy: Twitter

EASTERN ZONAL COUNCIL MEETING

Naveen demands special package for eastern region

SAMPAD PATNAIK
BHUBANESWAR, FEBRUARY 28

AT THE 24th Eastern Zonal Council meeting in Bhubaneswar on Friday, Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik demanded a special economic package for speeding up infrastructural development in the country's eastern region, saying that it lags behind in many sectors despite being endowed with natural and mineral resources.

The meeting was chaired by Home Minister Amit Shah and attended by Patnaik, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

According to a statement released by the Odisha government, Patnaik stated that the eastern zone is at the bottom, nationwide, on tele-density, banking density and rail and road density. "There is a need to double the allotments made to this region," he said.

Highlighting that one of the objectives of Zonal Councils is "national integration, healthy inter-

state and Centre-state relations", Patnaik said, "Integration has to be financial, infrastructural and technological, so it leads and strengthens emotional integration."

He also mentioned that royalty on coal has not been revised since 2012. While saying that there is an urgent need to revise royalty, he also said the proceeds of the clean energy cess must be shared with the state government.

Patnaik also thanked the Centre for its support after the state was hit by cyclonic storm Fani and demanded that Odisha should be declared as a Special Focus State by accepting "vulnerability to natural calamities" as a criterion.

Bengal Chief Minister Banerjee told reporters after the meeting that there was no discussion on the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) or the NRC at the zonal council meeting, but she raised the issue of the violence in Delhi. Banerjee expressed concern over the riots in Delhi and said steps should be taken so that the situation doesn't aggravate further. "I am very sad about what happened in Delhi. A

police constable and an IB official also died. Peace must be restored in Delhi," she told the meeting.

Asked if she would back the demand of Shah's resignation in wake of the riots, she said, "The problem should be solved first and then we will discuss politics."

At the meeting, she raised alleged negligence of the Centre towards her state. She claimed that West Bengal did not get the required assistance during natural calamities such as cyclone Fani and Bulbul, besides several other pending dues from the Centre. "We have not got Rs 50,000 crore from the Centre," she said.

Bihar Chief Minister Kumar demanded special category status at the meeting. He asserted that Bihar must be given "its due" to enable it to make rapid progress and contribute better to the overall development of the country.

Kumar also called for developing a mechanism for resolving interstate issues in the eastern region which shared a common cultural legacy and faced problems of similar nature.

— WITH PTI INPUTS

Oppn inciting people, causing riots: Shah

SAMPAD PATNAIK
BHUBANESWAR, FEBRUARY 28

DAYS AFTER the riots in Delhi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday alleged that the Opposition parties are spreading falsehoods over CAA and inciting people.

Speaking at a rally in Bhubaneswar, he said, "The Opposition is spreading falsehoods. They are inciting people. They are causing riots."

Earlier in the speech he had claimed, "On CAA, the entire opposition — Communists, Congress, BSP, SP, Mamata Didi — all these people are opposing this."

"(They say) minorities will lose citizenship rights. Why are you lying so much? Not a single Muslim or person from minority community will lose citizenship rights because of CAA. CAA is not a law that takes away citizenship, but actually gives citizenship," Shah said.

Speaking about 2019 elections in Odisha, he said, "We got 91 lakh votes. Naveen Babu got 1.1 crore votes. Let me tell you that only one more jump is needed to ensure that the BJP's flag flies permanently in Odisha."

Tathagata cites Tiananmen Square to 'handle' Delhi violence, later deletes tweet

TORA AGARWALA
GUWAHATI, FEBRUARY 28

TWO DAYS after tweeting that "lessons" can be taken from Tiananmen Square to "handle" the violence that affected parts of Delhi, Meghalaya Governor Tathagata Roy has deleted his post.

"Remember Tiananmen Square, Beijing in 1988? And how Deng Xiaoping handled it? Perhaps there is a lesson there on how to handle the engineered disturbances of NE Delhi! I'm sure all comrades will agree!" Roy had tweeted on Wednesday.



Tathagata Roy

Roy was referring to the bloody crackdown on thousands of student protestors by the Chinese government on June 4-5, 1989 at Beijing's Tiananmen Square, which led to the death of

hundreds, if not thousands, of civilians.

However, on Friday, he deleted the tweet, and put up another post, saying, "Comrades of different hues, from card-holding communists to fellow-travellers, are making strange hurt noises after my tweet on Tiananmen Square in the capital of their fatherland. So, out of tender concern for them I have deleted my tweet-after all they are Indian, aren't they!"

Asked if he stood by the tweet, Roy told *The Indian Express*, "I have deleted it from Twitter and from my memory. Apparently my tweet about

Communists' fatherland had caused them a lot of pain. So I better not give these poor fellows a reasons to cry- since they already have enough reasons to cry."

Roy is no stranger to controversy. After the 2019 Pulwama terror attack, Roy had taken to Twitter to endorse a retired Army officer's suggestion to boycott Kashmir and Kashmiris economically.

In December that year, during the Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests, Roy tweeted that those who do not want "divisive democracy" could go to North Korea.

Plea in HC seeks NIA probe into 'anti-India' CAA protests

Separate plea calls for FIR against Sonia, Rahul, Priyanka for 'hate speech'

PRITAMPAL SINGH
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 28

THE DELHI High Court Friday sought the response of the Centre, Delhi government and the Delhi Police over a plea seeking an NIA probe to uncover the "anti-national" forces who are "funding and sponsoring" the "anti-India" protests over the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and are "openly threatening to kill" Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

The plea was filed by activist Ajay Gautam, who contended that anti-CAA protests have led to large-scale violence and destruction of public property.

While raising anguish over the Delhi riots, Gautam goes on to submit, "...it is clear that what is going on Shaheen Bagh, Seelampur, Jafraabad, Jheel Khureji, Inder Lok and other places of Delhi is not a normal protest and it is well plan conspiracy against the state, anti-national powers are involved behind the protest, funding from

illegal sources is coming to run these protest."

The court has listed the case for hearing on April 13.

A bench of Chief Justice D N Patel and Justice C Hari Shankar also issued notice to the Centre and Delhi Police on separate pleas seeking registration of FIRs against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, among others, accusing them of making "hate speeches" in the run-up to the communal violence in Delhi.

The petition, filed by Lawyers Voice, a lawyers' collective, sought the constitution of an SIT to look into the alleged hate speeches.

The bench also sought the government's stand on a petition filed by Lawyers Voice, which urged the court that direction to be given to lodge FIRs against Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, MLA Amanatullah Khan, AIMIM leaders Waris Pathan and Akbaruddin Owaisi, and advocate Mehmood Pracha for alleged making hate speeches.

Will give befitting reply in court, says Cong

New Delhi: As the Delhi High Court on Friday sought the response of the Centre, the Delhi government and police on pleas seeking FIRs against political leaders, including Congress's Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, for allegedly making hate speeches, the Congress said the party will give an "extremely strong, befitting and comprehensive" reply in court.

"The whole world is receiving FIRs, but, the whole world does not include the great and only Kapil Mishra, the whole world excludes the great and only Anurag Thakur and Pravesh Verma. Not even an FIR now after months and, of course, after years not an FIR against Giriraj Singh, against Chinmayanand, against Sangeet Som of UP... Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said. **ENS**

MoS: So much of demand, where is economy failing?

Panaji: Minister of State for Railways, Suresh Angadi, on Friday questioned the narrative of a "failing economy" and said marriage halls are still booked for all seasons and tickets are still being purchased.

Speaking at a technical seminar in Panaji, "Most of the media, most people say economy is failure. You just imagine, you go to any hotel, you go to any marriage hall, you go to any flight... Even railways, everyday (there is

a) complaint... When you are not getting tickets, always demand is there. So when so much of demand is there, where is the economy a failure?"

He, however, pointed to the manufacturing sector not doing well and said it could have a lasting impact. "Only thing we are not working sincerely, we are not working hard. We have to go for production. We have to go for manufacturing sector also," he added. **ENS**