

NEWS ALERT

JANUARY 8-15, 2019



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AGRICULTURE

PIONEER, JAN 9, 2019

Agri projects' delay costs Govt Rs 1.2L cr

As many as 100 irrigation related projects pending for about two decades now due to several issues, including political, have cost the Government exchequer a mind-boggling Rs 1,20,772.05 crore. These projects include some of the famous and significant ones like Sardar Sarovar in Gujarat, Indira Sagar Polavaram project in Andhra Pradesh, Gosikhand irrigation project in Maharashtra, Shahipur Kandi dam in Punjab, Saryu Nahar Pariyojna in Uttar Pradesh, Teesta Barrage in West Bengal, Dhansiri project in Assam, Kosi Barrage in Bihar, Gumani Barrage in Jharkhand and Rukura Indira Irrigation project in Odisha.

A performance audit of the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) revealed several deficiencies in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the scheme. The report was tabled in Parliament on Tuesday. The performance audit revealed that the total cost overrun in 84 major and medium irrigation projects, including 16 completed and 68 ongoing projects was Rs 1,20,772.05 crore which was 295 per cent of their original cost.

According to performance audit, the cost of Sardar Sarovar project was revised from Rs 39,240.45 crore in May 2010 to Rs 54,772.94 crore with stipulated completion by March 2020. This led to an increase in project

cost by Rs 15,532.49 crore (40 per cent) of which increase of Rs 5,722.29 crore alone was attributable to price escalation and Rs 6,384.70 crore was due to change in design and inclusion of additional requirements.

The cost Krishna Koyna LIS of Maharashtra was revised at 2013-14 price level from Rs 2,224.76 crore to Rs 4,959.91 crore. This led to an increase in project cost by Rs 2,735.15 crore (122 per cent) of which Rs 244.64 crore alone was attributable to price escalation, Rs 282.77 crore was due to other causes and Rs 41.51 crore was due to change in design.

The cost of Chokha Rao project in Telangana was revised from Rs 6,016 crore to Rs 13,445.44 crore in 2017. This led to an increase in project cost by Rs 7,429.44 crore (123 per cent) due to changes in the scope of work. The cost of Indiramma flood canal in Telangana was revised from Rs 1,331.30 crore to Rs 5,940.09 crore in 2016 due to change in Standard Schedule of Rates, deviation in the project execution and changes in the scope of work.

Velligallu of Andhra Pradesh, Lower Wardha, Wang and Krishna Koyna LIS of Maharashtra were delayed ranging from four to 25 years in approval of Detailed Projects Reports. These projects were finally approved for a total amount of Rs 7,498.77 crore. The canal length of 3,420 metre of Kachnari Diversion scheme of Madhya Pradesh could not be constructed due to non-availability of actual command area (CCA of 220 ha) on site during execution. This showed that the DPR had not correctly assessed the availability of command area.

The work of concrete lining of the Madhya Ganga Canal project sanctioned in July 2007 at a cost of Rs 117.87 crore was stopped after completion of work up to 31.55 km out of 66.20 km on the pretext of affecting the groundwater recharge. This showed that the requirement and feasibility of providing concrete lining had not been adequately analysed at the DPR stage leading to avoidable expenditure on bed lining, it said. Of the 73 delayed MI schemes, 40 minor projects were completed after delays ranging from two months to 12 years and 33 were ongoing with time overrun ranging from one month to five years.

As per audit report, Rs 179 crore incurred on repairs and maintenance of the Sardar Sarovar Canal network was booked by the project authorities during April 2010 to March 2017 under AIBP.

The CAG performance audit notes that the projects have been languishing due to abject mis-governance-apart from land acquisition issues, the projects has hit inter-state coordination, financial, rehabilitation and resettlement walls.

PIONEER, JAN 11, 2019

Agri Min starts inter-State mandi through e-NAM

The Agriculture Ministry has started inter-State mandi (Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) trade through the electronic National Agriculture Market (e-NAM) to boost farmers income and their produce. The very first inter-state transaction in tomatoes has been

carried out between trader of Bareilly e-NAM APMC of Uttar Pradesh and farmer of Haldwani e-NAM APMC of Uttarakhand.

The inter -state transactions in potatoes, brinjal and cauliflower have been carried out between the e-NAM mandis of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. In all the cases, e-payments have been made through e-NAM portal. This will helps farmers get better market access, more buyers and traders to realise better prices for their produce. Farmers can access the information on e-NAM easily through their mobile phone from anywhere. This online trading platform aims at reducing transaction costs, bridging information asymmetry and helps in expanding the market access for farmers. Earlier trade used to happen either within the APMC or between two APMCs situated within same State.

The ministry has integrated 585 wholesale regulated markets/ (APMC) markets in 16 States and 2 Union Territories (UTs), who have carried out requisite reforms in their State APMC. Currently, seven States - Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Uttarakhand - are working on the modalities to establish interstate trade.

Trade in 585 mandis is currently happening on the electronic network, which helps discover price real time in a transparent manner. The Government aims at integrating 200 mandis this year and another 215 next year with the e-NAM platform. There are about 2,700 APMC mandis and 4,000 sub-market yards in India.

Founded in April 2016, eNAM is a virtual marketplace with a physical market (mandi) at the backend, networking the existing APMC/mandis



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to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities for pan-India electronic trading. Mandis handle huge volumes of farm produce. eNAM provides quick quality assaying solutions (preferably within a minute/parameter) to promote online trading.

Amid thousands of farmers committing suicide every passing year and with the numbers increasing, self-sufficiency in agriculture has been the top priority for the Indian agriculture ministry. eNAM is seen as an important step to transform the existing informal agricultural infrastructure into a more formal and transparent one. It is also viewed as a way to create agripreneurs out of farmers who could also market their produce smartly.

India ranks second in the world in farm output. However, despite the fact that over 55 per cent of the Indian population is dependent on farming, agriculture and allied sectors account for only 17.9 per cent of the country's GDP.

HINDUSTAN TIMES, JAN 15, 2019

Worst price slump in 18 years shows scale of farm crisis

The agrarian crisis is one of the factors that may have resulted in the BJP's loss in three Hindi heartland states of Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in December, according to analysts, and the party clearly doesn't want it to affect its prospects in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

This financial year, 2018-19 could end up being the worst year for farm incomes in almost two decades, government data indicates in a revelation that emphasises the gravity of the ongoing agrarian crisis and highlights a possible fault line for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

According to Wholesale Price Index (WPI) data for the month of December released on Monday by the ministry of commerce and industry, the WPI sub-component for primary food articles has been negative for six consecutive months beginning July 2018. This means their prices are falling.

WPI for primary food articles is a good indicator of farm-gate prices as farmers sell their products in wholesale rather than retail markets. Even the food sub-component of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket has registered negative growth between October and December 2018. The disinflation in wholesale prices is not visible in the non-farm economy though. The overall WPI has shown positive growth in all these months.

Analysts say the asymmetry in inflation ó falling farm-gate prices and rising non-farm prices ó means that farmers have suffered deterioration in their terms of trade. They are selling their products cheaper, but having to buy other things at higher prices.

The WPI sub-component for food components was -0.1% in December. It was -2.1%, -4%, -0.2%, -1.4% and -3.3% in the preceding five months. The last time WPI for primary food articles showed negative annual growth for two consecutive quarters was in 1990. The

disinflation in farm prices has also led to a collapse in nominal farm incomes, which was last seen in 2000-01.

Doubling farm incomes was one of biggest promises of the Narendra Modi government after it assumed office in 2014. It was repeated during a resolution on agriculture adopted by the BJP at its recent national council meeting in New Delhi. The resolution says: "Budget allocation for the agriculture sector has also increased in recent years and this government is fast reaching towards the goal of doubling the farm income." This National Council expresses its confidence that the aim of doubling the farm-income would be achieved in given time period under the BJP government.

The agrarian crisis is one of the factors that may have resulted in the BJP's loss in three Hindi heartland states of Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in December, according to analysts, and the party clearly doesn't want it to affect its prospects in the 2019 parliamentary elections. HT reported on December 29, 2018 that the government is considering a farm package that could include farm loan waiver, direct income support to farmers, crop insurance at a flat premium of Rs 1, and Rs 2,000 per acre transfer to farmers to make up for post-harvest losses.

"The crisis of price growth in agriculture is a political economy problem. The present government has been trying to appease rating agencies and middle class at the cost of domestic economy and farmers by low inflation through keeping food prices depressed," said Himanshu, an associate professor of economics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University. "A hike in kharif MSPs did not help, because there is also a problem of demand deflation in the rural economy. Collapse in rural wage growth

has eroded purchasing power and demand, which cannot be addressed by farm loan waivers and MSP hikes," he added.

Along with their adverse distributional impact on farmers, disinflation in food prices will also have a macro impact on the Indian economy. Fall in nominal rural incomes due to falling prices and low rural wage growth, are bound to put a squeeze on consumption demand in the economy. At a time when consumption growth is already decelerating, this will have an adverse impact on overall growth figures as well, said Niranjana Rajadyaksha, research director and senior fellow at IDFC Institute, Mumbai.

"The disinflation in food prices shows that terms of trade have worsened for agriculture. This also underlines the fact that the crisis in the rural economy is of incomes and not wealth. The government thinks that it can address the rural crisis by aiding wealth creation by promoting construction of houses and toilets. This is not going to work and it is also too late for the government to address the crisis in farm incomes," said Praveen Chakravarty, chairman of the Congress data analytics department.

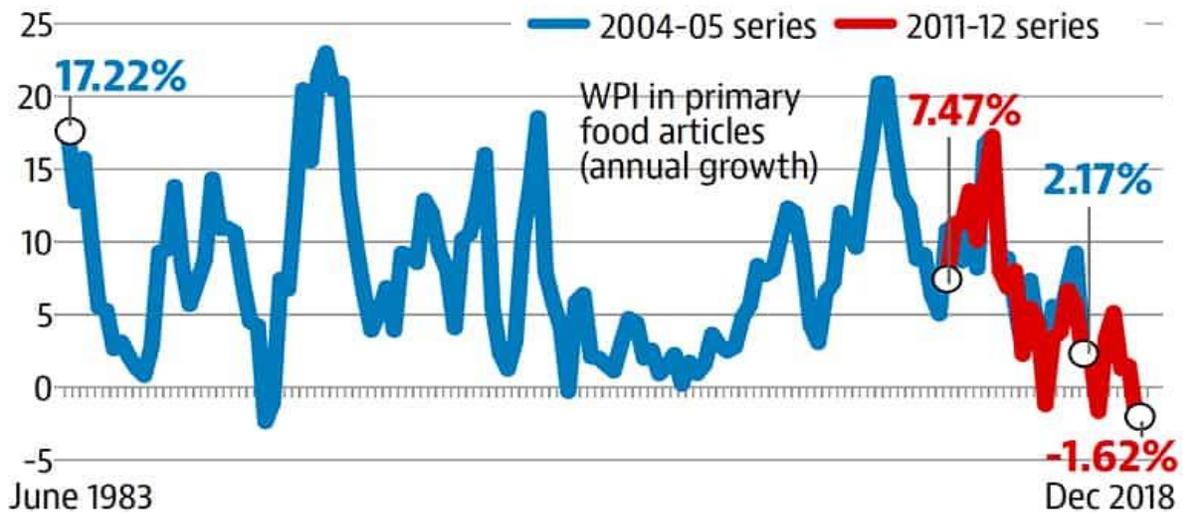
The BJP offered a different view. "Falling inflation is always a welcome sign, as it is pro-poor. But rising inflation does not always mean that the farmers are getting a good price for produce, because of inefficiency and gaps in supply chain. Falling inflation will also help the Reserve Bank of India cut down interest rates and catalyse faster growth," said BJP spokesperson Gopal Agarwal.

To be sure, the current crisis in farming is related more to a crash in farm prices rather than output growth.

In July, 2018, the government increased the minimum support prices (MSPs) of 14 crops to give farmers a 50% return over their cost of production.

According to quarterly WPI data from June 1983 onwards from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) database, the last time WPI for primary food articles showed negative annual growth for two consecutive quarters was in December 1989 and March 1990. This analysis has used both the 2004-05 and 2011-12 series of WPI.

Farm-gate prices have been declining since July 2018

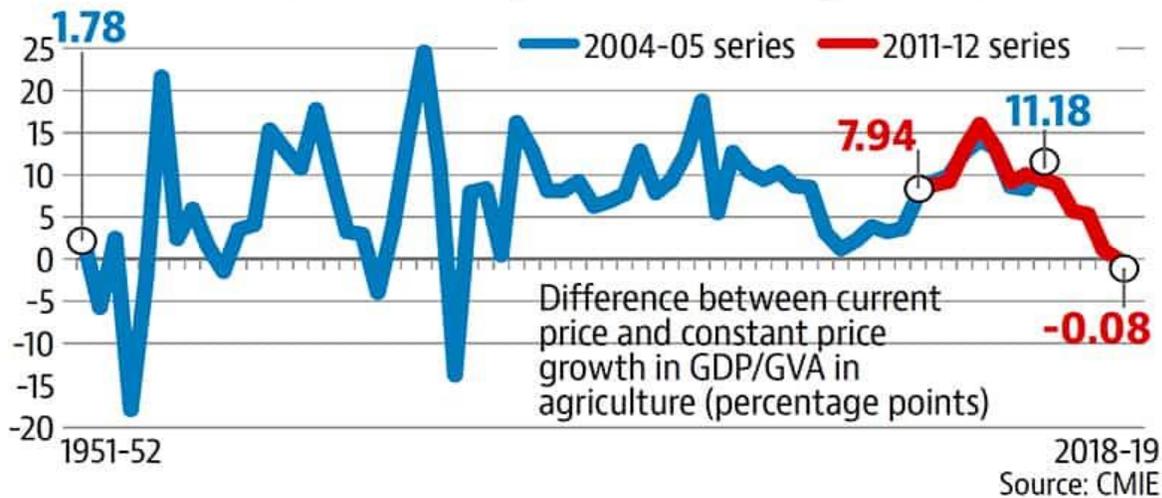


That disinflation in farm-gate prices has put a squeeze on farm incomes can be seen from a comparison of growth in agricultural GDP at current and constant prices. The first advanced estimates of GDP figures for 2018-19, which were released by the Central Statistical Office (CSO)

last week, show that the difference between current and constant price growth in Gross Value Added (GVA) in agriculture and allied activities was -0.1 percentage point. This differential is 4.8 percentage points for overall GVA. While constant price incomes are a useful way to make long-term comparisons, a collapse in current price income in one sector is bound to impose significant hardships on incomes and consumption of those employed there.

A comparison of agricultural growth figures for both the 2011-12 and 2004-05 GDP series shows that such a collapse in current price growth in agriculture has not happened since 2000-01.

Nominal farm income expected to be negative in 2018-19



To be sure, the first advanced estimates are based on only about two quarters of actual economic data, and can change at a latter stage. This also means that if the present trend of disinflation in farm-gate prices continues, nominal agricultural income growth could fall even more.

These statistics are particularly disturbing for the government, as they have come in the wake of the highest hikes in Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) since 2014. MSP for paddy, the most important Kharif crop, was increased by 12.9% for the 2018-19 cropping season compared to a growth of 3.7%-5.4% between 2014-15 and 2017-18. The failure of MSP hikes to arrest the decline in farm-gate prices was taken note of by RBI as well. The prices of several food items are at unusually low levels and there is a risk of sudden reversal, especially of volatile perishable items. Secondly, available data suggest that the effect of revision in minimum support prices (MSPs) announced in July on prices has been subdued so far, the RBI monetary policy committee held between December 3-8, 2018, noted in its minutes.

Recent WPI statistics also question the received wisdom of middlemen being the cause of low farm-gate prices, as WPI growth for manufactured-food items has also been in negative territory in September and December quarters.

A silver lining for the government in these numbers is that depressed food prices have kept overall inflation under control. Food items have a more than 40% weight in the overall Consumer Price Index (CPI) basket.

BACKWARD CLASSES

BUSINESS STANDARD, JAN 14, 2019

10% quota for general category poor may benefit 51.5 million households

More than 40% of these are in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra

An Act to provide 10 per cent reservations to the economically weaker sections (EWS) of forward/general category households could potentially benefit around 51.5 million households, an analysis by Business Standard shows. Of these, 9.35 million are Brahmin households, while 42.1 million belong to other forward/general caste households (at 2016-17 income levels).

A closer look at the data reveals that 42 per cent of these households are in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. This analysis is based on extrapolating data from India Human Development Survey (IHDS).

CIVIL AVIATION

PIONEER, JAN 10, 2019

Govt eyes about \$1 bn from Air India sale

The Government is eyeing around \$1 billion (about Rs 7,000 crore) from the sale of national carrier Air India in the next financial year, a Government official said.

The Government will initiate the process of strategic disinvestment of Air India in the second half of 2019-20 and in between it would work towards selling some of its subsidiaries and monetise assets.

Air India has a debt burden of Rs 55,000 crore. In November last year, a ministerial panel headed by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had approved transferring Rs 29,000 crore debt to a special purpose vehicle (SPV) - Air India Asset Holding Company. "We are eyeing \$1 billion from the sale of Air India," the official told.

After a botched attempt to sell Air India in May last year, the Jaitley-led panel in June decided to scrap the stake sale plan for the time being. It was decided to infuse more funds into the carrier and cut down debt by raising resources by selling land assets and other subsidiaries.

The government had initially planned to offload 76 per cent equity share capital of the national carrier as well as transfer the management control

to private players. The buyer was required to take over Rs 24,000 crore debt of the carrier along with over Rs 8,000 crore of liabilities.

However, the stake sale failed to attract any bidders when the bidding process completed on May 31. In August 2018, the Government had received Parliament nod for Rs 980 crore equity infusion in Air India under a òturn around planö. Earlier this month, Parliament approved a further Rs 2,345 crore equity infusion into the airline. The ministerial panel has already cleared strategic sale of Air India's ground handling subsidiary, Air India Air Transport Services. Plans are afoot for selling another subsidiary, Air India Engineering Services.

The proceeds from sale of subsidiaries and land and building assets would go to the SPV and will be utilised towards lowering the debt burden of the airline. The national carrier had in September last year invited bids to sell its properties located across India.

The airline had put up for sale 28 flats in Mumbai, seven flats in Ahmedabad, and two flats and an office space in Pune, besides several other properties across the country. On December 27, the Civil Aviation Ministry told the Lok Sabha that the Government has prepared a revival plan for Air India.

A comprehensive financial package, including transfer of non-core debt and assets to a SPV, implementation of robust organisational and governance reforms by the board and differentiated business strategies for each of the core businesses of Air India, are part of the plan.

CIVIL SERVICE

PIONEER, JAN 8, 2019

IAS officer who beat up youth sent on leave

Hours after a video footage showing an IAS officer and his wife mercilessly beating up a youth for posting lewd comments on Facebook went viral, the erring officer was sent on leave, sources at the State Secretariat Nabanna said.

The alleged bawdy comments were about the wife of the said officer.

Nikhil Nirmal the erring 2011 batch IAS officer and District Magistrate of Alipurduar was promptly sent on leave after instructions came from the topmost level came, sources said adding the incident had been taken note of.

The video footage showed the erring officer raining blows on the hapless youth Shankar with the senior officer's wife lending her husband a helping hand.

The man was picked up by the police and brought to the Falakata Police Station where he was beaten up inside the chamber of the local inspector in-charge who only did the precious little by managing to thwart an attempt to use lathi on the victim who continuously cried for mercy but apparently not getting it.

The officer had since then remained incommunicado, neither police IC Soumyajit Roy was available for comments. “The political leadership has taken the incident very seriously and will take stringent action against the accused,” a Trinamool Congress MLA from North Bengal said.

The DM was not only beating up the man but was repeatedly heard threatening him with dire consequences, sources said. “In my district no one will talk over me,” the DM reportedly told the man. Even as he begged for mercy the officer told him how “I can enter your house and kill you there.”

The better part of the incident was that when the wife of the erring officer who also allegedly slapped the victim asked someone to bring a lathi from the vehicle parked outside the police officer present there advised against using sticks.

Shockingly the incident unfolded inside the police station without any complaint or FIR being drawn against the man.

“Why did they beat him up like this? Anything could have happened to my son. The DM sahib could have arrested him and taken legal actions but why beating up like this? We want justice and we will move the court for justice,” said the victim’s parents.

Meanwhile, human rights activists took up the issue demanding penal action against the top officer. “Thankfully someone had posted it on the social media. Had it not been so it would have been another incident of bureaucratic excesses passing off without any protest,” said human rights activists and member of APDR Ranjit Basu.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

PIONEER, JAN 9, 2019

JNU 'diversion', timed to polls

Sedition chargesheet against Kanhaiya and others in 2016 case

Delhi police have charged Kanhaiya Kumar and several other former and current JNU students with sedition, three years after the campus shined an unsparing light on the Narendra Modi government and a few months before the general election.

The chargesheet accused the 10 defendants of raising seditious slogan during a stand-off over an event on February 9, 2016, the third anniversary of the execution of Parliament attack convict Afzal Guru.

The 10 accused include Kanhaiya, now a CPI national council member and a potential Lok Sabha election candidate from Begusarai in Bihar; Anirban Bhattacharya, who works for an NGO; and Umar Khalid, who is associated with an NGO campaigning against hate.

The three young men had emerged as the collective face of dissent in the country three years ago when few, including large sections of mainstream media, were willing to publicly call the Modi government to account. Campuses had filled the void by standing up to the Sangh parivar ecosystem that labelled critics õanti-nationalsö.

The chargesheet is scheduled to be examined by Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Deepak Sehrawat on Tuesday. He will decide whether it can be admitted.

Umar and Anirban said in a statement that "the government once again wants to deflect attention from its failures by raking up this issue just before elections. They need to bury their failures under these lies".

Kanhaiya told **The Telegraph** that the chargesheet would "expose the political conspiracy of the Modi government and its misuse of the police to harass students for three years".

All three were scathing on the media, with Umar and Anirban describing them as "cheerleaders who would celebrate lies".

The others charged by a special cell of the police are Mujeeb Gattoo, now a lecturer in Kashmir; Khalid Bhat, a Kashmir student; Umair Gul, a university teacher in Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir; Basharat Ali, a freelance journalist; Muneeb Gattoo, Aligarh Muslim University student and Mujeeb's brother; Aqueeb Hussain, a dentist; Rayees Rasool, a rights activist.

The strongest charge of sedition (Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code) carries a maximum punishment of imprisonment for life. The other charges are voluntarily causing hurt, unlawful assembly, unlawful assembly with common object, rioting) and criminal conspiracy. Umar Khalid has additionally been charged with forgery and using a forged document as genuine.

In addition, 36 people have been named in column 12 of the chargesheet, against whom sufficient evidence has not come on file so far to launch trial.

The 36 include former JNU Students Union office-bearers Ashutosh Kumar, Rama Naga, Shehla Rashid, Aparajitha (CPI leader D. Raja's daughter) and Banojyotsna Lahiri.

On Monday afternoon, police officers deposited a stainless steel trunk full of documents along with the chargesheet before Metropolitan Magistrate Sumeet Anand at the Patiala House Courts here.

On February 9 three years ago, Umar and Anirban had organised a poetry reading session based on *The Country Without a Post Office*, Agha Shahid Ali's poem. It was the anniversary of the hanging of Guru.

Permission was withdrawn by the JNU administration, and students, including Kanhaiya, staged a protest march amidst clashes with the RSS's Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) which tried to disrupt the event.

In the crackdown that followed, the three student leaders were arrested and Kanhaiya was beaten up inside the courtroom. A BJP legislator and three lawyers were arrested over the assault and immediately granted bail, and the case is not known to have made much progress since then. Last year, the Supreme Court rejected a petition to act against the attackers and the police, which could not prevent the assault.

On Monday, sources said the evidence cited in the chargesheet include at least 10 video clips, including that on seditious sloganeering that were telecast, as well as CCTV footage.

An inquiry by New Delhi district magistrate Sanjay Kumar, soon after the incident, had found that three out seven such TV news videos to be doctored. The inquiry also found that three witnesses in JNU's internal probe had given false statements. These include two guards who testified against Kanhaiya and Umar.

Punishments given by the JNU administration have been stayed by Delhi High Court. The magisterial probe found no proof that seditious slogans were raised by Kanhaiya, Umar and Anirban, and attributed them to outsiders and possibly Kashmiri students.

Kanhaiya told this newspaper over phone from Begusarai: "I welcome the chargesheet and hope for a speedy trial. This will expose the political conspiracy of the Modi government and its misuse of the police to harass students for three years. The people of Begusarai have already realised the role of certain news channels to create hatred against students who have opposed the destruction of higher education under this government."

The JNU Students' Union said: "We see this submission of the chargesheet after a hiatus of three years as a clear case of vendetta and well-planned instruction from the Prime Minister's Office to whip up a frenzy and browbeat those who have emerged as critical voices to the Prime Minister and exposed the BJP government's utter failure in running this country just before the Lok Sabha elections due to take

place this year. JNUSU stands in solidarity with each and every student who are being accused in this bogus case.ö

Former JNUSU joint secretary and ABVP leader Saurabh Sharma, who led the campaign against anti-nationalsö, called the chargesheet öa tight slap to the Congress and all other political people supporting them like Rahul Gandhi and Kejriwal.ö

Rahul, along with Congress, CPM and CPI leaders, had visited the campus soon after the arrests. They faced brickbats from suspected ABVP supporters in which former minister Anand Sharma and a police officer were injured. Kejriwal had ordered the magisterial probe, and his government filed a case against TV channels that aired doctored footage of anti-India slogans being raised.

AAP MP Sanjay Singh tweeted: öThe Modi police took three years to file a chargesheet in this highly publicised case. The police, which is an expert in trapping Modi's opponents, has filed the chargesheet to please their master Modi before polls. Now Modi ji will clap and proclaim everyone a traitor in his meetings.ö

Shehla, who led a stir for the release of the three in 2016 said: öThe fact that they've put in names of people against whom they admittedly have no evidence shows that they are taking dictation from RSS. Where are the names of the ABVP people who were engaging in violence that day?ö

Umar and Anirban said in a statement: öLying is an art. It's not enough to just lie. One also have to time it well. A sense of timing, of placement, is what makes one a master liar. And of course, one also needs to stage

one's own cheerleaders who would celebrate each of one's lies. That is the role of most of the media today under this regime.

But the people of the country have been dealing with these Sanghi Thugs of Hindustan long enough now. It's been five years, nearly. They know by now that it would be raining lies as it gets closer to the elections: mandir, statues, 10% reservation, anti-national

The statement by Umar and Anirban added: "If the last four years saw the people of the country grappling with one jumla after the other, the closing months would be seeing the crescendo in the symphony of lies. Even with us, around the JNU row as they call it, it's not that they didn't have their lies ready three years back. But of course, they needed to submit them in the form of a chargesheet in the last hundred days. As the people of this country have prepared their own chargesheet against this anti-people, anti-poor and communal government, the government once again wants to deflect attention from its failures by raking up this issue just before elections. They need to bury their failures under these lies."

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

PIONEER, JAN 9, 2019

India's GDP expected to grow at 7.3 pc in 2018-19

India's GDP is expected to grow at 7.3 per cent in the fiscal year 2018-19, and 7.5 per cent in the following two years, the World Bank has forecast, attributing it to an upswing in consumption and investment.

The bank said India will continue to be the fastest growing major economy in the world.

China's economic growth is projected to slow down to 6.2 each in 2019 and 2020 and 6 per cent in 2021, according to the January 2019 Global Economic Prospects report released by the World Bank on Tuesday.

In 2018, the Chinese economy is estimated to have grown by 6.5 per cent as against India's 7.3 per cent. In 2017, China with 6.9 per cent growth was marginally ahead of India's 6.7 per cent, mainly because the slowdown in the Indian economy due to demonetisation and implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the report said.

"India's growth outlook is still robust. India is still the fastest growing major economy," World Bank Prospects Group Director Ayhan Kose told PTI in an interview.

"With investment picking up and consumption remaining strong, we expect India to grow 7.3 per cent in the fiscal year 2018-2019, and average 7.5 per cent in 2019 and 2020. India registered quite a bit of pick up in doing business ranking. The growth momentum is there (in India)," Kose told PTI.

In India, the growth has accelerated, driven by an upswing in consumption, and investment growth has firmed as the effects of temporary factors wane, the World Bank said in its latest report.

Domestic demand has strengthened as the benefits of structural reforms such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST) harmonisation and bank recapitalisation take effect.

"India's growth accelerated to an estimated 7.3 per cent in FY2018/19 (April to March) as economic activity continued to recover with strong domestic demand. While investment continued to strengthen amid the GST harmonisation and a rebound of credit growth, consumption remained the major contributor to growth," the World Bank said.

According to the report, India's GDP is forecast to grow by 7.3 per cent in FY2018/19 and 7.5 per cent thereafter, in line with June forecasts. Private consumption is projected to remain robust and investment growth is expected to continue as the benefits of recent policy reforms begin to materialise and credit rebounds.

Strong domestic demand is envisioned to widen the current account deficit to 2.6 per cent of GDP next year. Inflation is projected to rise somewhat above the midpoint of the Reserve Bank of India's target

range of 2 to 6 per cent, mainly owing to energy and food prices, the bank said.

It said in India the recent introduction of the GST and steps toward demonetisation are expected to encourage a shift from the informal to the formal sector.

"India's recent growth numbers suggest that the economy remains robust despite temporary setbacks (due top demonetisation and GST)," Kose said.

The World Bank's estimate suggest that India's potential growth rate is around seven per cent, and is expected to remain around seven per cent, he said in response to a question.

"The fact is that Indian economy is being able to deliver growth slightly above its potential is a very good sign,ö he added.

Refraining from commenting on the economic performance of the Modi Government that too in an election year, the World Bank official said growth performance of India as compared to other emerging markets has been quite impressive.

"India's growth performance has been quite impressive. Year after year it has delivered strong numbers around its potential growth," he said.

EMIGRATION

PIONEER, JAN 9, 2019

Citizenship Amendment Bill: 3 AGP Ministers resign from Assam Govt

Three Asom Gana Parishad(AGP) Ministers resigned from the Assam Cabinet on Wednesday, two days after their party exited the Government over the Citizenship Amendment Bill.

Agriculture Minister Atul Bora, Water Resources Minister Keshav Mahanta and Food and Civil Supplies Minister Phanibhushan Choudhury submitted their resignations to Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal at the Janata Bhawan (state secretariat) here, Bora told reporters after tendering his resignation.

The strength of the BJP-led coalition Ministry, led by Sonowal, has been reduced to 15, of whom 12 are from the saffron party, including the Chief Minister, and three BPF Ministers. "The Centre's obstinacy not to withdraw the bill forced us to take a decision to come out of the Government as we cannot go against the interest of the Assamese people," Bora, who is also the AGP president, said.

The AGP is a "party formed by the blood of martyrs (shahider tez) who sacrificed their lives to protect the existence and identity of the Assam. We cannot disrespect their sacrifice by remaining in power when the

Centre decided to go ahead with the bill. "We tried our best till the last minute to convince the Centre not to go ahead with the bill but when Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh made it clear that the Centre would not budge from its obstinate stand, we decided to withdraw from the Government," he said.

Bora said, "We are with the people and will join in their struggle to protect their interests at all cost."

The AGP president also thanked the people and expressed the party's gratitude for electing them in 2016 and said respecting their verdict, they had joined the Government with the BJP and the BPF.

"We respect and are grateful to the people of Assam for giving us a chance to serve them," he added.

Asked what the chief minister told them about the resignation, Bora said he talked about constitutional safeguards in the bill.

PIONEER, JAN 8, 2019

Union Cabinet clears Citizenship Amendment Bill

The Union Cabinet on Monday cleared the redrafted Citizenship Amendment Bill, which seeks to provide Indian citizenship to non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, cleared the Bill and it is expected to be tabled in Lok Sabha on Tuesday. The move came within hours of the presentation in Lok Sabha of a report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the bill that was first introduced in

Parliament in 2016. The fresh bill seeks to amend the Citizenship Act 1955 to grant Indian nationality to people from minority communities – Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians – from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan after six years of residence in India instead of 12 even if they don't possess any proper document. This was an election promise of the BJP in 2014.

Many parties and organizations in Assam and other North-Eastern States have been protesting against the bill, saying it would nullify the 1985 Assam Accord under which any foreign national, irrespective of religion, who had entered the state after 1971 should be deported.

The JPC report was prepared with a majority vote as Opposition members have opposed the move to grant citizenship on the basis of religion saying it is against the Constitution. Speaking in Silchar in Assam on Friday, the prime minister reiterated the Centre's commitment to pass the Citizenship Amendment Bill. "The Citizenship Bill is an atonement of the wrong that was done during India's Partition. I hope this Bill is passed soon in Parliament. India will safeguard all who had been victims of the Partition," he said.

The Congress, Trinamool Congress, CPI(M) and a few other parties have been steadfastly opposing the bill claiming that citizenship can't be given on the basis of religion as India is a secular nation. Interestingly, BJP's ally Shiv Sena and JD(U) have announced that they would oppose the Bill in Parliament.

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

HINDU (BUSINESS LINE), JAN 15, 2019

FinMin wants PSU banks to bring down govt equity to 52%

The dilution to help banks meet 25% public float norms and follow the prudential lending norms

In a bid to align with the best corporate practices, the Finance Ministry has asked the public sector banks to gradually bring down the government's equity to 52 per cent, a top official said. "The government is essentially a major shareholder. So, this need to be aligned to the best corporate practices. The shareholding needs to come down to at least 52 per cent in the first phase. As and when market condition allows, banks will take step in that direction. They have all the permission in hand," Financial Services Secretary Rajiv Kumar told PTI.

Dilution of government stake will help banks to meet 25 per cent public float norms of market regulator SEBI. Some of the public sector banks have government's holding beyond 75 per cent. Besides, it will encourage the banks to follow the prudential lending norms.

Steps being taken

The country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) has already initiated step for Rs 20,000 crore share sale through qualified

institutional placement (QIP). Post QIP, the government stake will be diluted from the existing 58.53 per cent. Last month, shareholders of the bank approved sale of shares to fund the business growth.

Many other banks are planning to raise capital through some means or other, depending on the market condition. Some of the lenders like Syndicate Bank, Union Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, and Oriental Bank of Commerce among others have already issued or in process of issuing Employee Share Purchase Scheme (ESPS).

RRBs

He further said the government has also initiated the process for consolidation of Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) to better serve the needs of the rural India. Recently, the Centre has amalgamated three RRBs -- Punjab Gramin Bank, Malwa Gramin Bank and Sutlej Gramin Bank -- into a single RRB with effect from January 1.

The central government, after consulting the sponsor banks of the three RRBs, felt that in the interest of the banks and the areas served by them, they should be amalgamated into a single RRB. Besides, Punjab Gramin Bank (PNB), and Uttar Bihar Gramin Bank (UCO Bank) has been amalgamated with Madhya Bihar Gramin Bank (PNB).

While the consolidated RRB in Punjab is called Punjab Gramin Bank, with headquarters at Kapurthala, the one in Bihar has been rechristened as Dakshin Bihar Gramin (based in Patna).

These banks were formed under the RRB Act, 1976 with an objective to provide credit and other facilities to small farmers, agricultural labourers

and artisans in rural areas. Currently, the Centre holds 50 per cent in RRBs, while 35 per cent and 15 per cent are with the concerned sponsor banks and state governments, respectively.

PIONEER, JAN 9, 2019

Jalan panel examines reserve size of RBI

A high-level panel led by former RBI governor Bimal Jalan Tuesday held its first meeting to decide on an appropriate size of reserves that the central bank should maintain and the dividend it should give to the government.

The six-member panel is likely to submit its report in April, sources said. The panel has been entrusted with the task of reviewing the best practices followed by central banks worldwide in making assessment and provisions for risks which a central bank balance sheets are subject to. The panel having former economic affairs secretary Rakesh Mohan as its vice chairman will propose a suitable profit distribution policy taking into account all the likely situations of RBI, including the situation of holding more provisions than required.

The government and RBI under previous governor Urjit Patel had been at loggerheads over the Rs 9.6 lakh crore surplus capital with the central bank. The finance ministry was of the view that the buffer of 28 per

cent of gross assets maintained by RBI is well above the global norm of around 14 per cent.

Following this, the RBI board in its meeting on November 19, 2018 decided to constitute a panel to examine Economic Capital Framework.

The committee also includes Economic Affairs Secretary Subhash Chandra Garg and two members of RBI central board -- Bharat Doshi and Sudhir Mankad. RBI Deputy Governor NS Vishwanathan is the sixth member of the committee.

In the past, the issue of the ideal size of RBI's reserves has been examined by three committees - V Subrahmanyam (1997), Usha Thorat (2004) and YH Malegam (2013).

While the Subrahmanyam committee recommended that contingency reserve should be built up to 12 per cent, the Thorat committee said the reserve adequacy should be maintained at 18 per cent of the total assets. While the RBI board did not accept the views of the Thorat committee, it decided to go ahead with the recommendation of the Subrahmanyam panel. The Malegam committee recommended that adequate amount of profits should continue to be transferred each year to contingency reserves.

ECONOMIC TIMES, JAN 14, 2019

FinMin wants PSU banks to bring down government equity to 52%

In a bid to align with the best corporate practices, the Finance Ministry has asked the public sector banks to gradually bring down the



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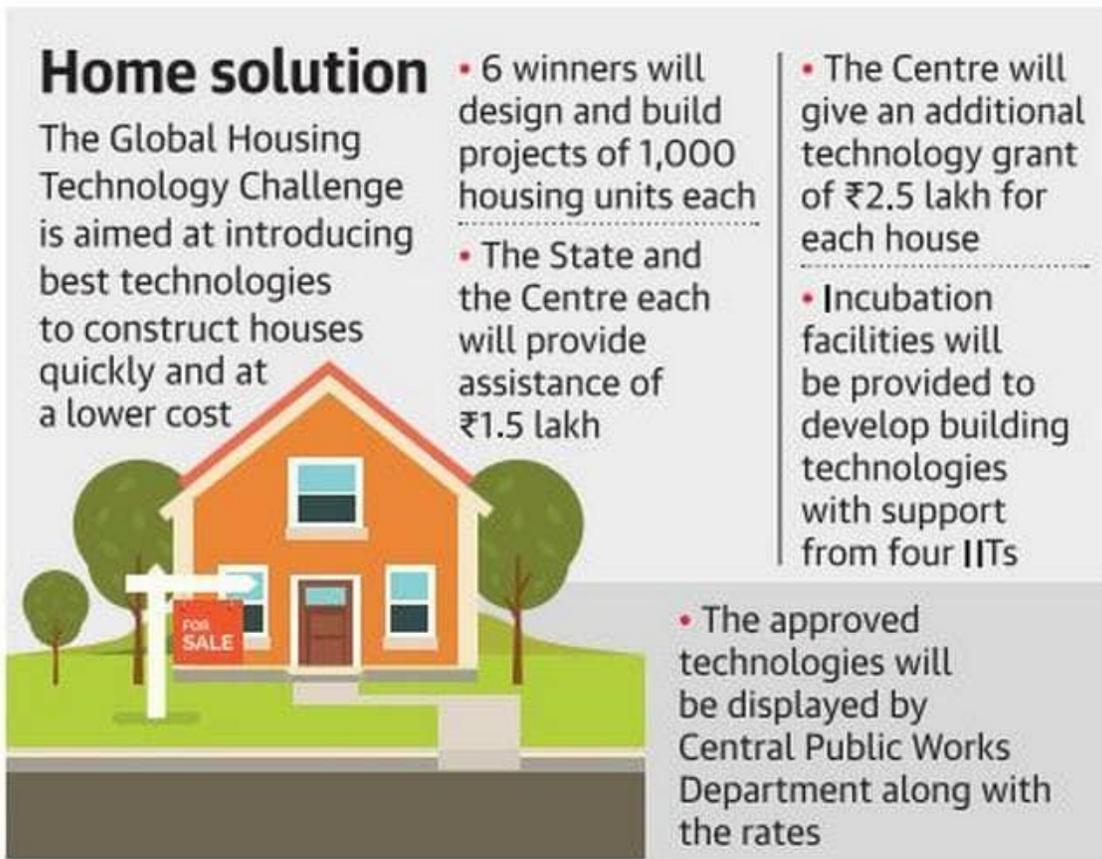
government's equity to 52 per cent, a top official said. "The government is essentially a major shareholder. So, this need to be aligned to the best corporate practices.

The shareholding needs to come down to at least 52 per cent in the first phase. As and when market condition allows, banks will take step in that direction. They have all the permission in hand," Financial Services Secretary Rajiv Kumar told.

HOUSING

HINDU, JAN 14, 2019

Helping build urban homes faster, cheaper



Home solution

The Global Housing Technology Challenge is aimed at introducing best technologies to construct houses quickly and at a lower cost

- 6 winners will design and build projects of 1,000 housing units each
- The State and the Centre each will provide assistance of ₹1.5 lakh
- The Centre will give an additional technology grant of ₹2.5 lakh for each house
- Incubation facilities will be provided to develop building technologies with support from four IITs
- The approved technologies will be displayed by Central Public Works Department along with the rates

The Centre will offer about ₹150 crore as a technology innovation grant to build 6,000 homes ó cheaper, faster and better -- using alternative

technologies and materials under the Global Housing Technology Challenge launched on Monday.

However, the Challenge may not do much to actually speed the pace of construction under the urban section of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana or Housing for All, which has completed just over 10% of its target as the scheme reaches its halfway point.

“We cannot meet urbanising India’s housing needs with existing technologies,” said Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant, pointing out that most Indian developers take three years to complete a project. “Houses must be completed in four to five months time. What we need is not technology leapfrogging, but pole-vaulting.”

After a global expo and conference in March, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs will invite bids and identify proven demonstrable technologies from around the world, which are to be adapted and mainstreamed for use in the Indian context. By July, six winning bidders will be invited to design and build lighthouse projects of 1,000 housing units each. Apart from state and Central assistance of ₹1.5 lakh each, the Centre will offer an additional technology innovation grant of ₹2.5 lakh for each house, PMAY (Urban) mission director Amrit Abhijat told .

Another section of the Challenge will identify potential future technologies which may not yet be market ready, and offer incubation facilities and accelerator support in collaboration with four of the IITs.

[Mindset change](#)



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Once innovative technologies have been tested and proved, they will be included in the Central Public Works Department list, with an approved schedule of rates. However, they will still be optional for use, and there is no guarantee they will be adopted by private or government builders, or even used to construct PMAY homes.

“We cannot make it mandatory, we can only encourage states and developers to adopt them. If they are better and cheaper, we expect them to be used. But there is also a mindset change needed,” said Mr. Abhijat. He added that so far, only 12 lakh houses sanctioned under the PMAY (U) scheme have used one of the 14 alternative technologies already on CPWD’s approved list.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

PIONEER, JAN 9, 2019

Nilekani panel to boost digital payments

The Reserve Bank of India Tuesday constituted a high-level committee under Aadhaar architect Nandan Nilekani to suggest measures to strengthen the safety and security of digital payments in the country.

The five-member panel on deepening of digital payments has been constituted with a view to encourage digitisation of payments and enhance financial inclusion through digitisation, the RBI said in a statement.

“The committee shall submit its report within a period of 90 days from the date of its first meeting,” it added.

The panel has been tasked with reviewing the existing status of digitisation of payments in the country, identifying the current gaps in the ecosystem and suggesting ways to bridge them and assessing the current levels of digital payments in financial inclusion.

It will also “suggest measures to strengthen the safety and security of digital payments... (and) a road map for increasing customer confidence and trust while accessing financial services through digital modes”.

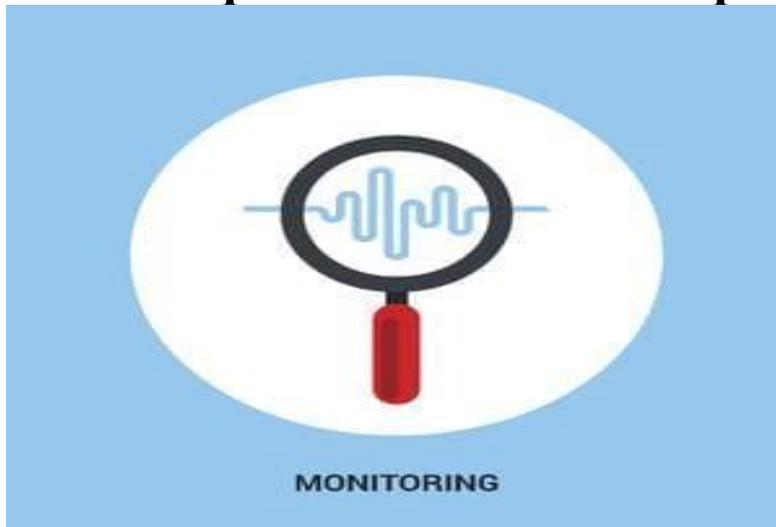
It has also been asked to undertake cross country analyses with a view to identify best practices that can be adopted in our country to accelerate digitisation of the economy and financial inclusion through greater use of digital payments.

Another term of reference of the panel, the RBI said is to suggest a medium-term strategy for deepening of digital payments. Besides Infosys co-founder Nilekani, other members of the panel are former RBI deputy governor H R Khan, former MD and CEO of Vijaya Bank Kishore Sansi and former secretary in ministries of IT and steel Aruna Sharma.

The fifth member is Sanjay Jain, chief innovation officer, Centre for Innovation, Incubation & Entrepreneurship (CIIE), IIM Ahmedabad.

HINDU, JAN 14, 2019

Fewer requests for data interception now



Home Ministry official says it has been the trend since 2014

As a petition was filed in the Supreme Court against Home Ministry's order authorising 10 Central agencies for the purposes of interception, monitoring and decryption of any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer, a senior Home Ministry official clarified that Government had not given blanket power to any agency and they will have to adhere to rules.

According to the ministry official, the number of interception has gone down since 2014 even though the number of mobile phone connections in the country has gone up and is now around 120 crore. The number of electronic messages had also grown exponentially.

The December 20 notification means that websites and web-based applications visited by a suspect on a computer or a mobile handset can be intercepted by telecom service providers on the request made by the authorised agency after it has been cleared by the Union home secretary.

The service provider will be liable to share the information with the agency under Section 69 (1) of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

“There is no new law or procedure and there is no blanket authorisation. There is no change of even a comma or a full stop in the existing rules and regulation (framed in 2011),” the official said.

The official said that while listing the 10 agencies, the Home Ministry had reiterated the Standard Operating Procedures of 2011, which mandates that every such interception requires prior approval of the



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competent authority: the Union Home Secretary or State Home Secretary.

“The December 20 notification is nothing but a list sent to the telecom service providers to ensure that only authorised and designated agencies can request for interception of the communication and there is no misuse by unauthorised agencies or unscrupulous service providers,” the official said.

The 10 agencies that were authorised by Centre are the Intelligence Bureau, Narcotics Control Bureau, Enforcement Directorate, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (for Income Tax Department), Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Central Bureau of Investigation, National Investigation Agency, the Research and Analysis Wing, Directorate of Signal Intelligence (in service areas of J-K, North East and Assam) and the Delhi Police.

INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

PIONEER, JAN 9, 2019

India, Norway to collaborate on SDGs, ocean economy

India and Norway on Tuesday agreed to closely collaborate on ocean economy and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, while also vowing to step up cooperation in combating terrorism, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with his Norwegian counterpart Erna Solberg.

Modi and Solberg held delegation-level talks and discussed ways to give "new energy and direction" to bilateral ties.

The two countries also signed an MoU for holding an India-Norway Ocean Dialogue and decided to establish a joint task force on blue economy.

Solberg, who arrived here Monday on her maiden India visit, was accorded a ceremonial reception at the Rashtrapati Bhavan this morning before talks with Modi.

"We reviewed all areas of our cooperation, and discussed ways of giving new energy and direction to bilateral ties," Modi said in his press statement after the talks.

India and Norway have strong cooperation at the international level and both the countries coordinate closely on issues such as UN Security Council reforms, multi-lateral export control regimes and terrorism, Modi said.

The two sides stressed the need for reform of the UN, including of the UN Security Council, and its expansion in both permanent and non-permanent seats to make it more representative, accountable, effective and responsive to the realities of the 21st century, a joint statement released after the talks said.

Norway agreed that India is a strong candidate for a permanent seat in a reformed Security Council expanded with both permanent and non-permanent members, it said.

Norway also supported India's application for membership to the Nuclear Suppliers' Group and reaffirmed its commitment to work constructively within the elite nuclear trading group with the aim of reaching a positive outcome regarding Indian membership at the earliest opportunity.

During the talks, the two sides strongly condemned terrorism in all forms and manifestations, and agreed to cooperate in combating international terrorism.

They also urged the international community to work towards early finalisation of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism mooted by India at the UN, the statement said.

Solberg, in her press statement, said given the importance of India's economy and the size of its population, the world will not be able to reach the sustainable goals unless "India is on board".

"I have seen impressive improvements on the work done in India, especially on women's empowerment," she said.

Talking about the Sustainable Development Goals, Modi said they were completely in consonance with India's development goals.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 global goals set by the United Nations in areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption and peace and justice.

PIONEER, JAN 10, 2019

India playing key role in Afghanistan: Russia

Russia on Wednesday said India's role in Afghanistan is indispensable and complimented it for carrying out various developmental initiatives.

The comments by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov about India's engagement in the war-ravaged country came days after US President Donald Trump mocked New Delhi's role in Afghanistan.

The Minister, currently visiting India, was also critical of the US and some other countries for their tendency to display raw power in some cases, without thinking of the consequences.



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“In all countries, where we see domestic conflicts, the issue of development is the number one issue. Wars can be won, but peace cannot be ensured without any material investment into economic development, social stability,” he said in response to a question on India’s role in rebuilding of Afghanistan.

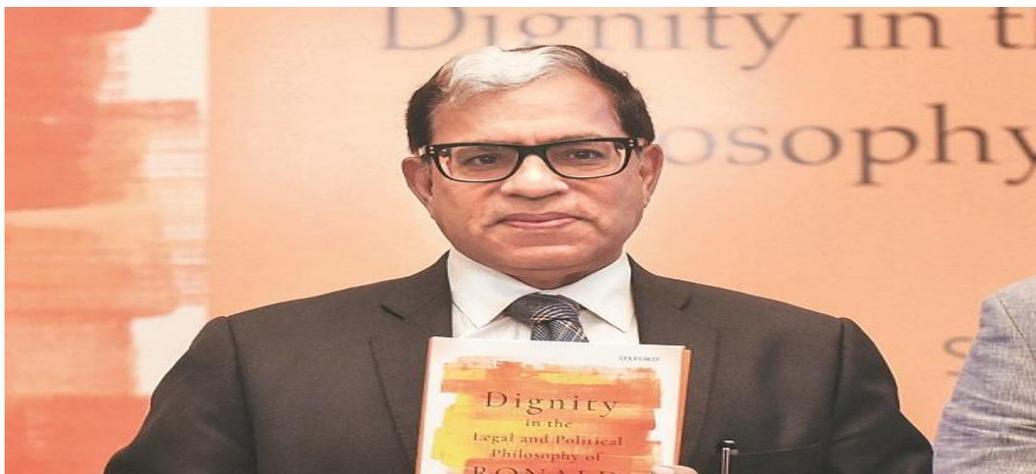
Indian efforts and that of other countries in the area of material support to Afghanistan is an “indispensable one”, Ryabkov said at a Press conference. “Unfortunately, our colleagues in the US and some other countries are so much attached to, what we describe as “raw power”, military power, and resort to military means, in some cases, without thinking sufficiently of consequences of it... It itself becomes a destabilising factor,” he said.

JUDICIARY

BUSINESS STANDARD, JAN 14, 2019

Justice Sikri declines govt offer to nominate him to Commonwealth Tribunal

Justice Sikri was part of the three-member panel along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and senior Congress leader Mallikajurn Kharge which decided on removal of Verma from the post of CBI Director



Justice AK Sikri Sunday withdrew his consent to a government offer to nominate him for president/member in the London-based Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal (CSAT).

The government is understood to have recommended Supreme Court Justice Sikri's name for CSAT late last year.

Sikri's consent was "taken orally for a vacancy" in the Commonwealth tribunal, sources said.

Sources close to the second senior-most judge after the Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi told PTI that the consent was withdrawn Sunday evening when the judge wrote to the Law Ministry, seeking withdrawal of his consent.

The insinuation linking the CSAT assignment with Justice Sikri's participation in the committee, which decided on the ouster of Alok Verma as CBI director, was wrong, they said.

"Since this consent was taken in the first week of December 2018, it has no connection with the CBI matter for which he became the CJI's nominee only in January, 2019," the sources added.

They said "a totally unjust controversy" has been raised by connecting the two.

"True facts are that sometime in the first week of December 2018, Justice Sikri's consent was taken orally for a vacancy in Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal (CSAT).

"CSAT is meant to decide service disputes between the employees of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Secretariat itself," sources close to Sikri said.

Justice Sikri was part of the three-member panel along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and senior Congress leader Mallikajurn Kharge which decided on removal of Verma from the post of CBI Director.

Sikri's vote proved crucial to remove Verma from his post as Kharge opposed the move strongly while the government was pushing for Verma's removal.

On the CSAT issue, the sources said, "It is not an assignment on regular basis. There is no monthly remuneration. There may be two to three hearings in a year. There was no question of staying in London or at any other place."

The government has not got back to him on the CAST assignment, they said.

"The government had approached him for the part-time assignment last month. He gave his consent. The job required attending two to three hearing per year and came without emoluments," the sources said.

Sikri wrote a letter to the competent authority in the government withdrawing his consent.

"He (Justice Sikri) has withdrawn his consent, he has given no reasons. He just wanted to be away from the controversy," a source close to Justice Sikri said.

The source said Justice Sikri "is a man of very simple nature" and he felt that there should not be any controversy over his appointment and that is why he wants to keep himself away from the controversy."

Hitting out at the government, senior Congress leader Ahmed Patel said the Centre has a "lot of explaining to do" on the nomination of Sikri to CSAT.

"The Government has a lot of explaining to do (sic)," Patel said in a tweet tagging a media report.

Official sources said nomination of Sikri, who retires on March 6, was made last month following an internal process carried out by the Law Ministry.

The External Affairs Ministry communicated to CSAT about India's nomination, the sources said.

There was no reaction from either the Ministry of External Affairs or the Ministry of Law and Justice on it.

The Commonwealth Secretariat, established in 1965, plays the role of an arbiter in case of disputes among its 53 member-countries.

The CSAT has a total of eight members, including its president. The members are picked up on the basis of regional representations. A CSAT member has a tenure of four years.

POLICE

TRIBUNE, JAN 14, 2019

SC to examine plea seeking probe into ‘police encounters’ in UP

The Supreme Court on Monday agreed to examine in detail a plea seeking a court-monitored CBI or SIT probe into incidents of alleged police encounters and killings in Uttar Pradesh.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justices Ashok Bhushan and SK Kaul perused the material on record and said issues raised in the petition by the People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) required ‘serious consideration’ and fixed the hearing on February 12.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the Uttar Pradesh government, however, claimed all norms and procedures were followed by the state administration.

Earlier, the apex court had sought response from the state government on the PIL filed by the NGO, alleging that there were about 1,100 encounters in 2017 in which 49 people were killed and 370 injured.

The NGO, in its plea, referred to news reports quoting Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, his deputy Keshav Prasad Maurya and ADG (law and order) Anand Kumar justifying encounter killings of criminals in the state.

It sought a probe into the encounters by an independent agency--the Central Bureau of Investigation or a Special Investigation Team comprising police officers of integrity and who have not served in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Quoting the figure provided by the state to the NHRC, it said 45 people died between January 1, 2017 and March 31, 2018. PTI

HINDU, JAN 14, 2019

Appointment of Nageswar Rao as interim Director of CBI challenged in SC

Petition filed by NGO Common Cause seeks a direction to quash the January 10 order.

A petition was filed in the Supreme Court on Monday, challenging the appointment of M. Nageswar Rao as interim CBI Director.

It said the government completely bypassed the statutory requirement to consult the high-powered selection committee of the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice of India (CJI) before appointing Mr. Rao.

The NGO, Common Cause, and activist Anjali Bhardwaj, termed the January 10 order of the government handing over the charge and work of the CBI Director to Mr. Rao as illegal.

“The Government of India has attempted to stifle the independence of the institution of the CBI by appointing the Director of the CBI in an arbitrary and illegal manner,” the petition, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, contended.

It said the mandatory requirement under Section 4A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act of 1946 to consult the high-powered selection committee was a statutory measure to make the appointment process of the CBI Director free from government interference.

“The DSPE Act, as amended by the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, provides for the appointment of the CBI Director by a high-powered selection committee, which does not have a preponderance of the government and its representatives. The committee consists of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition and the Chief Justice of India or any Judge of Supreme Court nominated by him,” the petition said.

Besides, it argued that Mr. Rao’s earlier appointment as interim CBI Director following the ouster of Alok Verma on October 23 was quashed by the Supreme Court in a judgment on January 8. Yet the January 10 order has stated that the Appointment Committee of the Cabinet approved the appointment of Mr. Rao “as per the earlier arrangement.”

“The October 23 order making Mr. Rao interim CBI Director was quashed by the Supreme Court on January 8 for violating the procedure for appointment of CBI Director as defined in the DSPE Act. However, the government still invoked its earlier order which had been quashed, to once again make Shri Nageshwar Rao Interim Director of



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the CBI even though it was not the competent authority and did not have any powers to make the appointment,ö the petition said.

Lack of transparency in the appointment of the CBI Director allows the government to exercise undue influence in the appointment process, especially at the stage of shortlisting of candidates, the petition said.

POLITICS & GOVERNMENT – WEST BENGAL

PIONEER, JAN 8, 2019

Lukewarm response to Bharat Bandh in Bengal

With the Trinamool Congress (TMC) Government taking a õstrong stance against bandh cultureö, the first day of Left trade unions-sponsored 2-day Bharat Bandh evoked mixed response on Tuesday in Bengal.

While life remained nearly normal in Kolkata reports from districts, particularly industrial towns of Barrackpore, Howrah, Hooghly and Durgapur-Asansol region witnessed low attendance of workers though the factories remained open, sources said.

In Kolkata buses, metro railways and ferry services functioned near-normally presenting a diametrically opposite picture than what it used to be like even a decade ago. While State Government offices saw near total presence of employees, central government offices and banks remained completely closed apparently giving people a trying time.

Railway services particularly the suburban train services were partially affected with the strikers blocking tracks and disrupting power supply at many places in Howrah and Sealdah Division.

Notwithstanding a near-normal picture in most parts of the State strikers clashed with Trinamool supporters and the police at various places even

as they vandalised buses and other vehicles at Jadavpur, Sodpur, Rishra, Uttarpara, Barasat, Basirhat, Siliguri etc.

Senior CPI(M) leaders including party Legislative party Leader Sujan Chakrabarty and former State Minister Anadi Sahoo were arrested and later released on bail, police said.

Reacting to the bandh call Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said òwe have taken a stand of not supporting any bandh. Enough is enough. In the past 34 years the Left have destroyed the State calling bandhs. Not any more.ö

BJP State president Dilip Ghosh thanked the State Government for taking a proactive part in thwarting bandh culture and added òthe CPI(M) is trying to find some oxygen before the elections by calling such bandhs but that will not sustain them.ö

POLLUTION

PIONEER, JAN 11, 2019

Govt finally unveils National Clean Air Programme

After missing several deadlines, much-awaited Rs 300-crore National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) was finally unveiled on Thursday focusing on 102 cities beginning with a modest target of reduction of 20 to 30 per cent in particulate matter (PM) by 2024 with 2017 as the base year.

The 102 cities under NCAP that include Chandigarh, nine cities from Punjab, Delhi, seven from Himachal Pradesh, two from Jammu & Kashmir and two from Uttarakhand are those which did not meet the annual national standards of clean air from 2011 to 2015.

Taking into account the available international experiences and national studies, the tentative national level target of 20 per cent to 30 per cent reduction of PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ concentration by 2024 is proposed under the NCAP taking 2017 as the base year for the comparison of concentration, said Union Environment Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan after the release of the plan at an event here.

Overall objective of the NCAP is comprehensive mitigation actions for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution besides augmenting

the air quality monitoring network across the country and strengthening the awareness and capacity building activities,ö the Minister added.

The NCAP, a nation-wide pollution abatement step, will focus on 102 polluted cities with a budget of Rs 300 crore for financial years 2018-19 and 2019-20 ô about Rs 2.9 crore per city.

Under the programme, the Government will set up a national inventory, issue guidelines for indoor air pollution, expand air quality monitoring network in cities and in rural areas and conduct air pollution health impact studies.

CK Mishra, Union Environment Secretary added, òOur plans to combat air pollution have been NCR-centric so far, but with launch of the NCAP we have tried to reach out to different parts of the country.ö

CEO NITI Aayog , Amitabh Kant termed the NCAP as -a path breaking initiativeø and one of the most critical and most significant programme as it addresses one of the most alarming challenges of urbanisation i.e. air pollution.

òToday cities occupy just 3 per cent of the land, but contribute to 82 per cent of GDP and responsible for 78 per cent of Carbon dioxide emissions; cities though are engines of growth and equity but they have to be sustainable and it is in this context that NCAP being a very inclusive program holds special relevance,ö Kant said.

However, green activists like Sunil Dahiya, senior campaigner with Greenpeace India expressed doubt on its success, saying that the òNCAP



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is not backed with a strong legal mandate and clear accountabilities, implementing it on the ground will be a big challengeö.

Nevertheless, the NGO added that, considering the level of India's air quality, the fact that our country now has an action plan to combat air pollution is worth celebrating.

SOCIAL MEDIA

PIONEER, JAN 11, 2019

EC panel's report on social media & polls submitted

In a move to maintain campaign silence during last 48 hours before the conclusion of polling in the light of the increasing influence of digital and social media, a high-level committee set up by the Election Committee (EC) on Thursday submitted report to it. The committee headed by deputy election commissioner Umesh Sinha suggested modifications and changes in the provisions of the Section 126 and other sections of the Representation of the People Act 1951, provisions of Model Code of Conduct.

Sources said the recommendations made by the Committee, when implemented (after adoption by the EC with necessary modification or additions), will help in minimising the possible interference of activities which aim at indirectly influencing voters during the valuable silence period of 48 hours provided to them.

The Committee had detailed consultations with all major stakeholders including various political parties, nominees/ representatives of the Press Council of India (PCI), the News Broadcasters Association (NBA), the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) as well as representatives of several



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intermediaries and technology companies including Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, and Google. The Committee also had several rounds of discussions and consultations with the legal and other divisions within the ECI.

The committee has examined the present provisions of the Section 126 and other related Sections of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and identify difficulties/critical gaps to regulate the violation of the said provisions of the act, particularly during the prohibitory period of 48 hours before the completion of the poll, mentioned in section 126 and suggest necessary amendment/modification. The committee has also Impact of new media platforms and social media during the prohibitory period of 48 hours before the close of poll and its implication in view of the provisions of section 126.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

PIONEER, JAN 8, 2019

Lok Sabha passes Bill to remove leprosy as ground for divorce

Leprosy patients and human rights activists across the country had a reason to rejoice on Monday as the Lok Sabha passed a Bill seeking to remove the crippling disease as a ground for divorce. Now, the legislation awaits clearance from the Rajya Sabha.

Meanwhile, the Rajya Sabha saw introduction of two Bills -- the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill 2019 and the National Commission for Homoeopathy Bill, 2019.

Replying to a discussion on 'The Personal Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018' in the Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Law, PP Chaudhary said, "Leprosy is being removed as a ground for divorce as it is now a curable disease as against the earlier notion of it being incurable."

The Bill which was introduced in Lok Sabha in August 2018 seeks to remove leprosy as a ground for divorce in five personal laws - Hindu Marriage Act, Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, Divorce Act (for Christians), Special Marriage Act and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act.

Chaudhary said leprosy as a ground for divorce is a discriminatory provision. The Human Rights Commission and judgements of various courts had also underlined the need to amend the laws to remove this discrimination. The Bill ensures elimination of discrimination against leprosy-affected persons and provide for their integration into the mainstream of the society.

“Leprosy patients were isolated and segregated from society as the leprosy was not curable and the society was hostile to them. However, as a result of intensive healthcare and availability of modern medicine to cure the disease, the attitude of the society towards them began to change,” states the Bill.

The Law Commission in its report had also recommended repeal of laws and provisions which were discriminatory against leprosy affected people. Besides, India is a signatory to a UN Resolution which calls for elimination of discrimination against persons suffering from leprosy.

However, in the Rajya Sabha, amid the din, Minister of State for AYUSH Shripad Yesso Naik introduced two Bills -- the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill 2019 and the National Commission for Homoeopathy Bill, 2019.

The Medicine Bill provides for a medical education system that improves access to quality and affordable medical education and ensures availability of adequate and high quality medical professionals of Indian System of Medicine in the country.

The Homeopathy Bill provide for a medical education system that improves access to quality and affordable medical education, ensures



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availability of adequate and high quality Homoeopathy medical professionals.

Naik also moved three Bills for Withdrawal including the Indian Medicine Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2005; The Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2005; and The Homoeopathy Central Council (Amendment) Bill, 2015.

TAXATION

PIONEER, JAN 11, 2019

GST exemption limit doubled to Rs 40 lakh

In a òmassive reliefö to small businesses, the GST Council on Thursday doubled the limit for exemption from payment of goods and services tax (GST) to Rs 40 lakh and announced that the higher turnover cap of Rs 1.5 crore for availing composition scheme of paying 1 per cent tax will be effective from April 1.

The Council also allowed Kerala to levy a 1 per cent calamity cess on intra-state sale of goods and services for a period of up to two years to mobilise revenues to meet the cost of rehabilitating parts of states that were ravaged by floods last year.

Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said the taxpayers with an aggregate turnover of Rs 40 lakh would now be exempted from the GST. For the north eastern states, the exemption would now be Rs 20 lakh. Currently, businesses with a turnover of up to Rs 20 lakh is exempt from GST registration, while the limit for hilly and north eastern states is Rs 10 lakh.

Sources said the annual revenue loss on account of doubling exemption limit to Rs 40 lakh, considering that all states implement it, is Rs 5,200 crore.

Jaitley said the GST Composition Scheme, under which small traders and businesses pay a 1 per cent tax based on turnover, can be availed by businesses with a turnover of Rs 1.5 crore, against the earlier Rs 1 crore, with effect from April 1.

Also, service providers and suppliers of both goods and services up to a turnover of Rs 50 lakh would be eligible to opt for the GST composition scheme and pay a tax of 6 per cent.

The twin decision under the composition scheme would have an annual revenue impact of about Rs 3,000 crore.

“The GST Council in its 32nd meeting today accorded massive relief for MSME sector,” Jaitley tweeted.

On GST rate for real estate, the council has decided to form a seven-member group of ministers after differences of opinion emerged at the meeting, he said, adding there were diverse views on lottery. A ministerial panel will look into it as well.

Businesses opting for the composition scheme would have to file just one tax return annually but pay taxes once every quarter. Also free accounting and billing software will be made available to small assesseees up to Rs 1.5 crore turnover.

Jaitley said: “A very large part of GST comes from formal sector and large companies. Each one of these decisions is intended to help the SMEs. You have given them various options. If they are in services sector, they can get 6 per cent compounding, if they are in



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manufacturing and trading up to Rs 1.5 crore they can get 1 per cent compounding. They can make use of exemption of up to Rs 40 lakh.

The finance minister said there would be two thresholds - Rs 40 lakh and Rs 20 lakh - for exemption from registration and payment of the GST for the suppliers of goods, with the facility that one can opt up or opt down depending on revenue.

Few states had a view that if the turnover threshold is hiked to Rs 40 lakh, their assessee base gets eroded. So if they inform the Secretariat within a week then they would be given the option to opt down. Puducherry has kept this option... This is a one time exception and does not affect businesses with inter-state supplies, Jaitley told reporters.

Revenue Secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey said even though currently the exemption limit is Rs 20 lakh, but still there are about 10.93 lakh taxpayers who are below Rs 20 lakh but are paying taxes.



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