

Centre sets up high-level committee to examine possibility of lifting AFSPA from Nagaland

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Centre on Sunday constituted a high-level committee, headed by a secretary-rank officer, to examine the possibility of lifting the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in Nagaland, apparently to soothe the rising tension in the north-eastern state over the killing of 14 civilians.

Vivek Joshi, who is Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India, will head the five-member committee while Additional Secretary in the Union Home Ministry Piyush Goyal will be the member-secretary of the panel.

Other members of the committee are chief secretary and DGP of Nagaland and DGP of the Assam Rifles, a government official privy to the development said.

The committee has been set up three days after Union Home Minister Amit Shah held a meeting with Chief Ministers of Nagaland and Assam Neiphiu Rio and Himanta Biswa Sarma respectively.

The December 23 meeting, held in New Delhi, was also



attended by Nagaland Deputy Chief Minister Y Patton and former chief minister of Nagaland T R Zeliang.

The panel will submit its report within 45 days.

The committee will look into the possibility of the withdrawal of the AFSPA in Nagaland, where it has been operational for decades, and a decision will be taken on the basis of its recommendations.

Officials said that disciplinary action is also likely to be taken against the Army personnel, who were directly involved in the botched counter-insurgency operation in Nagaland's Mon district in early December, after a fair inquiry.

The Army personnel may be placed under suspension pending the probe, another govern-

ment official said.

Protests have been going on in several districts of Nagaland for the withdrawal of the AFSPA, ever since an Army unit killed the 14 civilians in Mon mistaking them as insurgents. The AFSPA empowers security forces to conduct operations and arrest anyone without any prior warrant. It also gives immunity to the forces if they shoot someone dead.

The Nagaland chief minister earlier has tweeted: Briefed the media with regard to the meeting chaired by Hon'ble @HMOIndia Shri @AmitShah on Dec 23, 2021 in New Delhi. Grateful to Amit Shah ji for taking up the matter with utmost seriousness. The State Govt. appeals to all sections to continue to maintain a

"peaceful atmosphere".

The Nagaland government will provide government jobs to the next of kin of the deceased 14 people.

The home minister had informed Parliament on December 6 that "a team of 21 para-commandos of the Indian Army laid an ambush for insur-

gents in Mon district of Nagaland on December 4 but it turned out to be a case of mistaken identity.

He also expressed regret over the incident in which civilians were killed by security personnel. Shah had also said that a Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been constituted and directed to complete the investigation within one month.

"Based on inputs received by the Indian Army about the movement of the insurgents near Tiru village in Tizit area of Mon district, a team of 21 para-commandos of Indian Army laid an ambush in the evening of December 4, 2021.

"During the ambush, a vehicle approached the location and it was signaled to stop. However, the vehicle tried to flee, following which the vehicle, suspected

of carrying insurgents, was fired upon resulting in the killing of 6 out of 8 persons travelling in the vehicle.

However, it turned out to be a case of mistaken identity. The two persons who sustained injuries were evacuated to the medical facilities by the Army personnel," he said.

"Upon receiving the news, local villagers surrounded the Army team, burnt two vehicles and assaulted them, resulting in the death of one Security Force (SF) personnel and injuries to several others. To disperse the crowd, SFs opened fire which resulted in the killing of 7 more civilians and injuring some others, he said.

Meanwhile, the Army on

Sunday again expressed regret

over the "sad and unfortunate"

incident. It said the probe is

progressing expeditiously and

all efforts are underway to conclude it at the earliest.

The Army also assured that

action would be taken in the

case in accordance with the law

to "secure justice for all"

and urged the people of the state "to be patient and wait for the findings of the Army inquiry".

France sees over 1,00,000 daily virus infections for 1st time

■ AGENCY

PARIS: France has recorded more than 100,000 virus infections in a single day for the first time in the pandemic and COVID-19 hospitalisations have doubled over the past month, as the fast-spreading omicron variant complicates the French government's efforts to stave off a new lockdown.

More than 1 in 100 people in the Paris region have tested positive in the past week, according to the regional health service.

Most new infections are linked to the omicron variant, which government experts predict will be dominant in France in the coming days. Omicron is already dominant in Britain, right across the Channel.

Meanwhile a surge in delta variant infections in recent months is pushing up hospital admissions in France, and put ICUs under strain again over the Christmas holidays. More than 1,000

PM Modi, Govt has to decide whether to ban political rallies: we will abide by decision: Cong

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Congress on Sunday said it is for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling BJP government to decide whether political rallies should be banned in the wake of the spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus and asserted that it will follow whatever decision is taken.

"Upon receiving the news, local villagers surrounded the Army team, burnt two vehicles and assaulted them, resulting in the death of one Security Force (SF) personnel and injuries to several others. To disperse the crowd, SFs opened fire which resulted in the killing of 7 more civilians and injuring some others, he said.

Asked whether the Congress would demand that there should be a ban on rallies, Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala at a press conference said it is for the government to decide on it.

"Who is in power-BJP. Who is Prime Minister-Narendra Modi ji. Who is ruling in Uttar Pradesh-BJP. Who has scientific data available--Modi government. To whom may the on-the-ground information about the Omicron threat be available -- the government," he said.

"Responsibility, authority

to impose restrictions has

been given to whom in the

law and Constitution--the

government. Who has the power to stop rallies or allow it--the government. So how will Congress decide or Samajwadi Party, or Bahujan Samaj Party or Left parties decide?" Surjewala said.

This decision has to be taken by the prime minister and the chief minister, after knowing all the facts, he said.

"Our job, like an aware citizen, is to wake up the country and the government, as Rahul Gandhi has been doing continuously since the first wave of the coronavirus," Surjewala said.

The decision that the Modi government will take, keeping in mind the interest of the people, the Congress will follow it, he asserted.

Asked if Rahul Gandhi, like in the West Bengal polls, will take the initiative to not hold rallies, Surjewala said that everyone has to take responsibility. "In Bengal, when Rahul Gandhi took this decision...we had to suffer politically. We have to pay the political price for it even

today, so we have paid that price. But neither the government of Bengal nor the government of the country thought about it, so... I would humbly tell the countrymen and political parties that the ban cannot be for one person," he said.

"Ban on Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi and exemption for Modi ji to use government money, install government buses, blow crores of rupees and hold rallies and ban Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, this cannot happen, this is double standards," Surjewala said.

Responding to another question on an event organised by the Congress in Lucknow, he said that if Priyanka Gandhi empowers girls and women through a marathon then a ban is imposed and the party accepts it but for Modi's event 25,000 sports persons are called and that is fine.

"So one criterion for Priyanka Gandhi and another criterion for Modi ji to gather 25 thousand sports persons," Surjewala said.

Indian Navy sends ship to friendly nations in Gulf to boost cooperation

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Indian Navy has sent its training ship INS Sudarshni to the Gulf region including Iran and Oman as part of its efforts to enhance bilateral maritime cooperation with the friendly navies.

The ship, on a month-long deployment, has already made port calls at Muscat, Dubai and Bandar Abbas besides engaging in professional interactions with the Royal Oman Navy (RNO), UAE Navy and Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) Navy, officials said.

"The ship built at Goa Shipyard Ltd showcased indigenous shipbuilding capabilities and revisited India's historic maritime linkages with the Gulf," the Navy said in a statement.

"The ship, during the deployment, undertook various training exchanges, wherein sail training was

conducted with the Royal Oman Navy (RNO) and IRI Navy," the Navy said.

It said these deployments were conducted in solidarity with India's extended maritime neighbourhood. The Navy said, "500 tons of food aid has been shipped by INS

Kesari to support the efforts of the government of Mozambique to cope with the ongoing drought and concurrent challenges of the pandemic."

"India also remains committed to supporting the capacity building efforts of the Armed Forces of Mozambique. To this end Kesari is carrying two fast interceptor craft and self-defence equipment to be handed over to the armed forces of Mozambique," it said. INS Kesari, a landing ship tank (Large), had undertaken a similar mission in May June 2020 to provide humanitarian and medical assistance to Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros, including deployment of medical assistance teams of the Indian Navy in multiple locations.

"Since May 2020, the Indian Navy has deployed

ships to 15 friendly foreign countries under SAGAR missions," the Navy said.

"These deployments spanned over 215 days at sea have delivered a cumulative assistance of more than 3,000 MT of food aid, over 300 MT LMO (Liquid medical oxygen), 900 oxygen concentrators and 20 ISO containers," it said.

The Navy said while undertaking these missions, Indian Naval ships have traversed a cumulative distance of close to 40,000 nautical miles which it said is "nearly twice the circumference of the earth".

"With a steadfast intent of making such high quantum of humanitarian assistance reach its destination in time, personnel from ships and shore organisations of Indian Navy have invested close to a million man-hours to deliver succour to our friends overseas," it said.

Hundreds of tourists stuck near Changu Lake in Sikkim amid heavy snowfall, rescue ops on

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SILIGURI: Hundreds of tourists were stuck near the Changu Lake in Sikkim due to heavy snowfall, following which the Army began a rescue operation, officials said on Sunday.

As the Jawaharlal Nehru Road closed due to the heavy snowfall on Saturday, hundreds of tourists were visiting Tsongmo or Changu Lake, near India's boundary with China, during the Christmas holidays.

The Army rescued them and provided them shelter at their camp in the area during the night, officials said.

As the weather conditions improved a bit on Sunday

morning, the tourists were divided into small groups and Army personnel were guiding them to reach Gangtok, around 40 km away, on foot, officials said.

The rescue operations, which were underway till the last reports were received, are likely to continue till Monday as hundreds of tourists were visiting Tsongmo or Changu Lake, near India's boundary with China, during the Christmas holidays.

Among those stuck were around 250 people from different districts of West Bengal, including Kolkata, officials said.

Salman Khan discharged from hospital after non-venomous snake bite, Bina Kak says actor is 'healthy'

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

MUMBAI: Bollywood superstar Salman Khan is "happy and absolutely healthy" after he was discharged from a hospital on Sunday following a non-venomous snake bite, said actor-politician Bina Kak, a close family friend.

According to sources, the snake bite was received, are likely to continue till Monday as hundreds of tourists were visiting Tsongmo or Changu Lake, near India's boundary with China, during the Christmas holidays.

Among those stuck were around 250 people from different districts of West Bengal, including Kolkata, officials said.

Khan was back to his farmhouse, where

he will be ringing in his 56th birthday on Monday.

Kak, who has worked with Khan in films like "Maine Pyaar Kyun Kiya?" and "God Tussi Great Ho", shared a health update of the actor on Instagram later in the evening.

"Birthday tomorrow, all good and cheerful, happy and absolutely healthy today. Happy to be surrounded by family. I call him Khuda ki 'Nainat'. All our blessings for a happy, healthy, long and meaningful life ahead," Kak wrote alongside a selfie with Khan. Khan was recently seen on the big screen in "Antim: The Final Truth", which released last month.

He is also seen as the host of the Colors TV reality show "Bigg Boss" and has the third installment of his film "Tiger 3", tentatively scheduled for a release next year.

No plan to bring back repealed farm laws, says Union minister Tomar; slams Rahul for 'cheap politics'

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

MORENA (MP): Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Sunday made it clear that the central government has no plan to reintroduce the three withdrawn farm laws, and accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of doing "cheap politics" and misleading people.

Tomar's statement comes a day after the Congress alleged that the Centre was hatching a conspiracy to reintroduce the three farm laws after the upcoming assembly polls.

The Congress had made the

allegation after Tomar, during an event in Paddal ground in Mandi. The state BJP president Suresh Kashyap claimed that at least one lakh people from across the state would attend the rally.

HP Congress president Kuldeep Singh Rathore, however, alleged that the government machinery was being misused to gather people to attend the PM's rally.

He alleged that the state-run Himachal Road Transport Corporation buses have been misused to bring people to the PM's rally which has caused a lot of inconvenience to commuters.

politics. These people have tried unsuccessfully to mislead the country by misquoting my statement. There is no such proposal to bring back the repealed laws," Tomar told reporters at Morena on Sunday when asked about Congress allegations. In Nagpur, Tomar had said that the Centre brought agriculture amendment laws, but some people did not like these laws which were a big reform brought about 70 years after the Independence under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.

"But the government is not disappointed, we moved a step back and we will move forward again because farmers are India's backbone," Tomar had said.

After this statement, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi had said in a tweet in Hindi on Saturday that the country's agriculture minister has insulted PM Modi's apology. "If anti-farmer steps are taken again, then satyagraha will take place. Had defeated arrogance, will again defeat it," he had said. Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala, while referring to Tomar's remarks said the "concerted conspiracy" to bring back the three "anti-farmer" agricultural laws now stands exposed again by the statement made by Tomar.

The Centre had repealed the three farm laws which were passed by Parliament in September last year with an objective to bring reforms in the agriculture sector, especially marketing of farm produce. These three farm laws were Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020.

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI/SHIMLA: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Monday address a rally in Mandi and inaugurate a completed hydroelectric project besides laying foundation stones of some new ones, including the one pending for the last 30 years, to mark the fourth anniversary of the BJP government in Himachal Pradesh.

Besides inaugurating and laying foundation stones of the hydroelectric power projects totalling Rs 11,281 crore, the Prime Minister will also preside over the second groundbreaking ceremony of the Himachal Pradesh Global Investors' meet, the PMO said on Sunday.

The investors' meet is expected to give a boost to investment in the region through the start of projects worth around Rs 28,000 crore, it added.

The Himachal BJP government led by Chief



Another project for which he will lay the foundation stone is the Dhaula Sidh hydropower project.

This will be the first hydropower project of Hamirpur district. The 66 MW project will be built at a cost of over Rs 680 crore. It will lead to the generation of over 300 million units of electricity per year, which has caused a lot of inconvenience to commuters.

Modi will inaugurate the Sawra-Kuddu hydropower project.

The 111 MW project has been built at a cost of around Rs 2,080 crore. It will