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LS passes J&K...

a woman, to the assembly. One seat in the Jammu and Kashmir assembly will be set aside for people displaced from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir; the home minister said. He said after the delimitation exercise in Jammu and Kashmir, there will be 43 assembly seats in Jammu region -- up from present 37 -- and in Kashmir Valley it will be 47 from 46. As many as 24 seats will be kept for the residents of PoK, he said. Talking about the abrogation of Article 370, Shah said it had nothing to do with going back on promise as it was a temporary article and had to go. "You did not have the courage, PM Narendra Modi showed courage and did away with it," he said, referring to the opposition benches. More than 45,000 people have lost their lives due to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir so far, he said.

The Jammu and Kashmir Reservation (Amendment) Bill seeks to change the nomenclature of "weak and underprivileged classes" to "Other Backward Classes". The Union Territory, which has the provision for a legislative assembly, is currently under central rule.

Modi will return...

be successful by 2026. He blamed the previous governments for the continuous terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir for a long period of time and said had terrorism been tackled at the beginning "without considering vote-bank politics", Kashmiri Pandits wouldn't have had to leave the valley. Shah said 45,000 people have lost their lives due to terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir so far.

He also gave statistics on the reduction of terror related incidents in Jammu and Kashmir and said in 2023, there has not been a single stone pelting incident, nor there was a call for 'hartal'. "Every month, the home ministry reviews the situation in Jammu and Kashmir and in every three months, I visit Jammu and Kashmir and review the situation there," he said. The home minister said people who used to say what happened in Jammu and Kashmir are cut off from the ground situation and obviously they would not know what changes have happened in Jammu and Kashmir.

"Those holidaying in England will not notice any change in Jammu and Kashmir," he said. Shah said when terrorism started in Kashmir, people were targeted and they had to flee. "I have seen many leaders who shed crocodile tears and consoled well with words. But Modi is the only leader who has worked to wipe out their tears," he said. He said about 46,631 families and 1,57,967 people were displaced in their own country and were displaced in such a way that they were uprooted from their own homeland and this bill is going to give them rights and representation. He said after the delimitation exercise in Jammu and Kashmir, there will be 43 assembly seats in Jammu region -- up from present 37 -- and in Kashmir Valley it will be 47 from 46.

J&K suffered due...

been part of India. "I support the word that was used here -- Nehruvian blunder. Because of the blunder that was committed during the time of Nehru, Kashmir had to suffer. With responsibility, I want to say that the two big blunders that happened during the tenure of Jawaharlal Nehru, happened due to his decisions, because of which Kashmir had to suffer for years," Shah said.

"Kashmir had to suffer due to Nehruvian blunders. One was that when our Army was winning and as soon as Punjab area was reached, ceasefire was declared and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir was born. If the ceasefire would have been (declared) three days later, PoK would have been part of India," the home minister said.

The ceasefire made without winning the entire Kashmir was one "blunder" and the other was taking the issue to the UN, he alleged.

There was an uproar by the opposition benches over the remarks on Nehru and they staged a walkout but returned later.

After their walkout, BJD leader Bharttruhari Mahtab said the home minister should also talk about the "Himalayan blunder", a reference to Nehru's actions leading up to the war with China in 1962. Shah quipped that his talking about two blunders had upset the opposition benches and if he had used the phrase "Himalayan blunder", they would have resigned.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said the remarks made were not an insult to anyone and were only made to put things in context.

In his remarks, Shah also alleged that the Kashmir matter was taken to the UN in a hurry.

"If at all it had to be taken to the UN, it should have been sent under Article 51 rather than Article 35 of the UN Charter," he said, asserting that he of course believes that the issue should not have been taken to the UN in the first place.

Shah also quoted Nehru as saying later that the ceasefire was a "mistake". Shah added that it was not Nehru's mistake but a blunder. The Home Minister also said that the Congress has done the "greatest harm" to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) over the years and done nothing for their welfare.

Shah alleged that historically, the Congress has opposed the welfare of the backward classes and has only resorted to lip-service for such communities.

He said Narendra Modi was born into a poor family and became the prime minister and he knows the pain of the backward classes and the poor. Shah said the government's focus was on ending the terror ecosystem in Jammu and Kashmir.

Shah said the Congress has done the "greatest harm" to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) over the years and done nothing for their welfare and asserted that it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has relentlessly worked for their overall development.

The home minister also lashed out at the opposition party, saying if any party has harmed backward classes and come in the way of their growth, it is the Congress.

"The Congress has done greatest harm to OBCs. The party has done nothing for the welfare of the OBCs. It is Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has been working relentlessly for the welfare of backward classes," he said.

Shah alleged that historically, the Congress has opposed the welfare of the backward classes and has only resorted to lip-service for such communities. "The Congress only chants the name of backward classes but does not support any welfare measures for them, he claimed. "I say this with full responsibility, this is the historic truth. If any party has opposed the welfare of the backward classes, then it is the Congress," he said.

The home minister said it was the Congress government that had delayed the report of the Kakasaheb Kalelkar Commission, which was set up to investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes.

"Many Congress leaders chant 'backward class'. Then there are some who are given a piece of paper and they keep reading it for six months until handed over a fresh piece of paper. They visit gram sabhas chanting the name of backward classes. They do not know what their party has done. Who sat on the Kaka Kalelkar report," he said. Shah said even the Mandal Commission report granting reservation to the OBCs was implemented when the Congress was voted out of power. "Then too it was the then leader of the opposition -- Rajiv Gandhi -- who had opposed the move," he said. His sharp attack on the Congress over the OBC issue came against the backdrop of the grand old party making caste census an issue during the assembly elections to five states, which were held last month. The Congress lost the elections in key states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh.

Since the election results on Sunday, the BJP has been attacking the Congress for trying to divide the country on caste and religious lines. Congress-led governments have never bothered to grant Constitutional status to the OBC Commission, Shah said. "The Congress never granted reservation to OBCs in central education schemes," he said. Shah asserted it was under Modi's leadership that OBCs were granted reservation in Sainik schools, NEEET and in central schools to study with dignity. Prime Minister Modi also ensured 10 per cent quota for economically weaker sections from unserved classes, he said.

Sachin Tendulkar, Virat Kohli, Amitabh Bachchan among 7,000 invited for Ram Temple consecration

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

AYODHYA: The Ram temple trust has invited 7,000 people including cricket legends Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli, Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan, and billionaire industrialists Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani to the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple, sources said on Wednesday.

Actors Arun Govil and Dipika Chikhlia, who played the roles of Lord Ram in the famous TV serial "Ramayan", have also been invited to the ceremony that will be held on January 22, 2024.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already been invited.

The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth

Kshetra Trust has sent invitations to 7,000 people, including 3,000 VVIPs, for the consecration. The families of kar sevaks killed in the police firing in Ayodhya will also be invited to the ceremony, the sources said.

Among the VVIPs are RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, Yoga guru Ramdev, industrialists Mukesh Ambai, Ratan Tata and Gautam Adani, they said.

The trust has also invited 4,000 seers from across the country.

Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust general secretary Champat Rai said, "Efforts are also being made to invite one representative each from 50 countries for the consecration ceremony."

"Family members of the 50 kar sevaks who lost their

lives during the Ram temple movement have also been invited. Invitations have also been sent to judges, scientists, writers and poets," he said.

Besides, saints, priests, shankaracharyas, religious leaders, former civil servants, retired Army officers, lawyers, musicians and Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan awardees have been invited.

VHP spokesperson Sharad Sharma said, "We have also invited journalists who supported the Ram temple movement through their newspapers, writings and reporting. Without them, this struggle for the Ram temple would have been incomplete."

VVIPs will get entry through bar code passes. "Out of the 7,000 invitees,

about 4,000 will be religious leaders from across the country and the remaining 3,000 will be VVIPs from different areas. A registration link will be shared with the invitees ahead of the ceremony. Once they register, a bar code will be generated and it will serve as the entry pass," Sharma said.

Champat Rai, secretary of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, said, "Ramlala will be seated in the Ram temple as a 5-year-old boy. For this, three idols are being carved from two rocks - one each from Karnataka and Rajasthan."

"The idols are 90 per cent ready and are being given the final touches. The most attractive idol will be selected for the consecration," said Champat Rai.

BJP MPs, including Union Ministers, elected to assemblies quit Parliament; likely to join state governments

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Union ministers Narendra Singh Tomar and Prahlad Singh Patel resigned from Lok Sabha on Wednesday as the BJP decided that all of its 12 MPs recently elected to state assemblies will quit Parliament, amid strong indications that they may join the new governments in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

The move has given rise to the view that the party leadership may bring in new faces at the helm in all the three states. Senior leaders, however, declined to comment on such a development.

BJP president J P Nadda accompanied 10 of them as they tendered their resignations from Parliament. Two others, Union minister Renuka Singh and Mahant Balaknath, will also be quitting, party leaders said.

Other MPs who quit are Rakesh Singh, Uday Pratap Singh and Riti Pathak from Madhya Pradesh; Kirodi Lal Meena, Diya Kumari and Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore from Rajasthan and Gomati Sai and Arun Sao from Chhattisgarh.

All except Meena are Lok Sabha members. Meena is a Rajya Sabha member.

Patel said the 10 MPs took Prime Minister Narendra Modi's blessings before tendering their resignations.

All three Union ministers will also be quitting the Modi government as a procedural formality. Tomar is a Cabinet minister handling the crucial agriculture portfolio, and their departure have sparked a fresh buzz within the party on whether Modi will induct new members in his council of ministers ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Tomar, a seasoned organisation man, and Patel, who comes from politically significant Other Backward Classes, are seen as possible chief ministerial choices in Madhya Pradesh along with the incumbent Shivraj Singh Chouhan, who has been at the helm in Madhya Pradesh since 2005 except for 15 months when Kamal Nath headed a Congress government after the 2018 assembly polls.

Amid speculation within the party that its leadership may pick one of the outgoing MPs as the new chief minister of Rajasthan, where veteran leader Vasundhara Raje is also in race, its senior functionaries said political factors involving social equation will be a key consideration in naming three chief

ministers.

Raje (70) is a two-term former chief minister but her equation with the party's national leadership has not been very smooth.

Sao, an OBC, and Sai, who comes Scheduled Tribes, are seen as serious contenders due to their social background, image and relatively young profile. Raman Singh (71), a three-term former chief minister, is also being talked about but there is a view that the BJP leadership is looking for a generational change in leadership.

A party leader noted the prime minister's recent exhortations that women, youth, poor and farmers are the four biggest castes for him, adding that this may play a role in final decision.

With Lok Sabha elections less than five months away, the party is likely to send a larger message about its social agenda with its chief ministerial choices. Sources also did not rule out the possibility of having deputy chief ministers in the states to balance social equations and add to administrative left.

The BJP has swept to power in the three Hindi-speaking states, dismissing the challenge from the Congress in all of them as it raced to a two-thirds.

Cold condition intensifies in Kashmir; night temperature below freezing point

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: The minimum temperature across Kashmir settled below the freezing point as the cold conditions intensified in the valley, officials said on Wednesday.

Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 2 degrees Celsius, down from minus 1.4 degrees Celsius the previous night, they said.

Pahalgam in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, which serves as one of the base camps for the annual Anarnath yatra, saw the mercury settling at minus 5.1 degrees Celsius, they said. It was the coldest area in the Valley on Tuesday night. Gulmarg in Baramulla district recorded a low of minus 2.2 degrees Celsius, the officials said.

Bomb threat at DPS Jammu, turns out hoax

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Police on Wednesday conducted a massive sanitization operation inside a private school here after the institute received a bomb threat via a phone call, officials said.

No suspicious object was found at Delhi Public School (DPS) premises at Residency Road in the heart of the city and the purported threat turned out to be a hoax, the officials said.

"The Jammu Police acted swiftly on bomb threat by an unidentified caller to a private school.

"Police conducted extensive searches and sanitised the area. The threat turned out to be a hoax and an FIR has been registered," a police official said.

The officials said a police contingent along with bomb disposal squad and dog squad moved inside the DPS Jammu complex immediately after its management informed the police station concerned about the phone call threatening a possible bomb attack.

A thorough sanitizing operation under the supervision of an SP-rank officer was carried out but nothing suspicious was found, the officials said, adding the students were not disturbed and continued attending their classes.

They said police have started an investigation to trace the origin of the caller to bring him to book.

Fake army major chargesheeted for job fraud in Jammu

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: The Economic Offences Wing, Crime Branch of Jammu and Kashmir Police on Wednesday filed a chargesheet against an impersonator posing as an Army major for allegedly duping a job aspirant in Samba district, an official said.

A 313-page charge sheet in case FIR No. 53/2023 U/S 419, 420 IPC P/S EOW was filed against the accused Deepak Kumar, son of Parshotam Lal, resident of Village Nathel Chak, Sanji Morh Tehsil Hiranagar District Kathua, in the court of law for judicial determination, a spokesperson of the agency said.

He said Darshan Kumar of Mansar village of Samba in his written complaint to the crime branch Jammu had alleged that the accused by impersonating as an Army Major took away Rs 5 lakh from him on the pretext of arranging a job for his brother-in-law in Military Engineering Service (MES).

On receipt of the complaint, a preliminary verification was conducted and the allegations levelled were prima facie established leading to the registration of a formal case under the relevant sections of law for an in-depth probe, the spokesperson said. During the investigation, he said all material evidence in the form of documentary records was collected from concerned quarters besides statements of the complainant and witnesses were recorded. The accused is also involved in two more cases for the commission of crime of similar nature, the spokesperson said.

Two OGWs arrested with arms, ammunition in Rajouri

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

RAJOURI: Two overground workers (OGWs) of terrorists were arrested along with arms and ammunition in Rajouri district, police said on Wednesday. Mohd Farooq and Mohd Nazir were arrested during a search and cordon operation in Behrote village in the Budhal area, they said. A pistol, two magazines, 30 bullets, two hand grenades and some other items like clothes and a wire cutter were recovered from a nearby forest at their disclosure.

Land identified as proceeds of terrorism attached in Bandipora

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: Land belonging to the family of a terror associate of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) in Bandipora district was on Wednesday attached under the anti-terror law UAPA, police said. The action was taken after the land was identified as proceeds of crime. "Bandipora Police has attached 14 marla of residential land at Ashtengoo Bandipora in case FIR No.43/2022. The land had been identified as proceeds of terrorism and was attached under the UAPA," Bandipora Police said in a post on X. The police said the land belongs to the family of a terror associate of LeT, Irfan Ahmad Bhat. His brother had exfiltrated to Pakistan in 2000, the police added.

Bus overturns in Rajouri; one dead, 22 injured

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

RAJOURI: A bus overturned in Rajouri district on Wednesday leaving one passenger dead and 22 others, including 14 students, injured, officials said.

The accident took place near Radha Soami Ashram in Thandikassi village along the Rajouri-Jammu national highway. The bus was on its way to Rajouri from Manjakote and hit two cars before overturning, they said. The injured were rushed to the Government Medical College Hospital Rajouri. Meanwhile Deputy Commissioner Rajouri Vikas Kundal to persons injured in a minibus accident at Thandikassi area. Soon after receiving the news of the road mishap, he rushed to GMC&AH to inquire about the condition of the injured passengers shifted to the hospital. The DC engaged with injured and assured best treatment and adequate assistance from the district administration.

The Deputy Commissioner engaged with the injured, inquiring about their health and offering words of solace and encouragement. Furthermore, he directed the medical team to provide the injured with the most comprehensive and effective treatment, minimizing the risk of complications and ensuring a smoother path to recovery.

The DC extended a heartfelt promise to the injured and their families, assuring them that the District Administration would stand by their side, offering unwavering support and all the necessary assistance required during this difficult and trying time. Medical Superintendent District Hospital, Dr. Mehmood Bajar and officials of the Health Department accompanied the Deputy Commissioner during his visit.

District Congress Committee has expressed shock and sadness over death of one person and injuries in a road accident that took place at Thandikassi in Rajouri district. District Congress Committee President Shabir Ahmed Khan has expressed sympathies with the bereaved family and prayed for early recovery of the injured. He sought adequate compensation/ Ex-gratia to the family of the deceased and the injured.



■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo on Wednesday while discussing the traffic scenario and its effective management in the UT with the concerned authorities made out that it should be the duty of every traffic cop to man the road for better traffic management in the UT.

The Chief Secretary further maintained that the city roads and those going to popular tourist destinations need to be given more focus as most of the traffic movement happens on these roads. He called for analyzing the traffic data and divert sufficient manpower to the areas that are more congested and prone to choking of traffic.

Regarding the traffic management in the twin cities of Srinagar and Jammu, the Chief Secretary stressed on having a very strict enforcement against wrong and road side parking. He asked for efficient utilization of IT tools for reducing this men-

ace besides identifying the repeated offenders.

He advised for framing a comprehensive strategy for at least reducing the road fatalities by half in next year and working for bringing them down with each passing year. He emphasised on taking inputs from all the concerned including the Transport, Police and Traffic departments to ensure that the traffic regulations are religiously observed by the citizens here.

Dulloo expressed that there

should be certain penalties imposed on every offence which should eventually lead to cancelation of driving license of repeated offenders. He asked for fixing timelines for employing the renewed mechanism for automatic challannging of drivers breaking traffic rules in addition to bringing out plan for having disciplined driving on our roads by resorting to multifaceted strategy from issuance of driving licenses to use of IT tools for identifying and booking traffic vio-

lators.

During this interaction the Chief Secretary was apprised that this year the UT has realized an amount of Rs 17 Cr from the violators till November. It was further given out that till the end of the ensuing financial year a robust city surveillance system besides the Intelligent Traffic Management Systems (ITMS) would be fully functional across the cities of J&K which is going to have significant impact on the smooth plying of traffic on roads.

It was further given out that besides making the testing and trails for securing of driving licenses more meaningful and transparent the Department together with Traffic Police is going to have a more result-oriented plan of action to bring respite to commuters besides reducing the occurrence of mishaps on the roads for saving the precious lives of the people here in J&K.