

!! Continuations from Page 1 !! TUNNEL MISHAP: 9...

adit tunnel during the day-long hectic search by the rescuers. While one body was recovered on Friday and three rescued, nine more bodies were found on Saturday," the deputy commissioner told PTI.

Islam said all the bodies have been sent to a government hospital for identification and other legal formalities.

He said an immediate ex gratia of Rs 25,000 from the Red Cross fund and Rs 25,000 from the company is being given to kin of two local labourers, who are among the dead. The rest of the dead include workers from West Bengal, Nepal and Assam.

The operation to rescue the trapped workers was launched soon after the incident but had to be suspended on Friday evening due to a fresh landslide and inclement weather.

Over 15 rescuers, including the Station House Officer of Ramsu police station, Nayeem-Ul-Haq, had a narrow escape during this time, officials said.

Senior Superintendent of Police, Ramban, Mohita Sharma said an FIR was registered in the local police station in connection with the incident.

Police have registered a case under IPC Sections 287 (negligent conduct with respect to machinery), 304-A (causing death by negligence), 336 (endangering life or personal safety of others) and 337 (causing hurt by an act of endangering life or personal safety of others) of the IPC, officials said.

However, no one was arrested.

Senior CPI(M) leader and former MLA M Y Tarigami demanded a judicial probe into the incident and Rs 40 lakh compensation for the kin of the deceased

"This is not an ordinary incident. There seems to be criminal negligence. A judicial inquiry should be ordered to probe the horrific incident so that the guilty are identified and brought to justice," he said in a statement.

Jammu and Kashmir Congress president G A Mir also demanded an inquiry into the incident and adequate compensation for the kin of the deceased.

Petrol price cut...

vegetables and cooking oil pushed WPI or wholesale price inflation to a record high of 15.08 per cent in April and retail inflation to a near eight-year high of 7.79 per cent.

High inflation prompted the Reserve Bank, which had been making a case with the government for excise duty cuts and easing import taxes on certain commodities to ease inflationary pressure, to hold an unscheduled meeting to raise the benchmark interest rate by 40 basis points to 4.40 per cent earlier this month.

State-owned fuel retailers will pass on the excise duty cut to consumers despite losing Rs 13.08 a litre on petrol and Rs 24.09 per litre on diesel because of holding rates despite surge in cost of raw material (crude oil).

The excise duty cuts along with Rs 5 cut on petrol and Rs 10 reduction on diesel effected from November 4, 2021, rolls back the Rs 13 per litre and Rs 16 per litre increase in taxes on petrol and diesel, respectively, effected between March 2020 and May 2020 to avoid passing on to consumers the sharp fall in international oil prices.

The excise duty hikes of 2020 had taken central taxes on petrol to their highest level of Rs 32.9 per litre and that on diesel to Rs 31.8 a litre.

After the latest excise cut, the incidence of central tax on petrol will come down to Rs 19.9 a litre and that on diesel to Rs 15.8 per litre.

"We are reducing the central excise duty on petrol by Rs 8 per litre and on diesel by Rs 6 per litre. This will reduce the price of petrol by Rs 9.5 per litre and of diesel by Rs 7 per litre," Sitharaman tweeted. "It will have a revenue implication of around Rs 1 lakh crore/year for the government."

She exhorted all state governments to also cut local sales tax or VAT.

"I wish to exhort all state governments, especially the states where reduction wasn't done during the last round (November 2021), to also implement a similar cut and give relief to the common man," she said.

Post November 2021 reduction in excise duty on petrol by Rs 5 per litre and that on diesel by Rs 10 a litre, 25 states and UTs had cut VAT to give further reprieve to consumers battered by record-high retail prices. However, states ruled by non-NDA parties like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu had not reduced VAT.

Post that reduction, state-owned oil firms held petrol and diesel prices for a record 137-day period during which international oil prices rose from USD 84 per barrel to near 14-year high of USD 140. They finally broke the hiatus with a Rs 10 per litre increase on both petrol and diesel in 16 days starting March 22 but again hit a freeze button after the last revision on April 6 despite not covering all of the cost.

Holding of prices despite rise in cost had led to lower earnings of fuel retailers in the January-March quarter.

"Today, the world is passing through difficult times. Even as the world is recovering from Covid-19 pandemic, the Ukraine conflict has brought in supply chain problems and shortages of various goods. This is resulting in inflation & economic distress in a lot of countries," Sitharaman said.

Welcoming the move, Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said, "I want to highlight the fact despite this 2nd reduction in central excise, price of petrol & diesel in states like Maharashtra, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand & Kerala remain around Rs 10-15 higher than in BJP-ruled states."

Rates differ from state to state depending on incidence of local taxes such as VAT. Andhra Pradesh has the highest VAT on petrol and diesel in the country, followed by Rajasthan and BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh.

"This (high prices in non-BJP ruled states) is due to the refusal of their respective state governments to reduce VAT. It is time for these states to wake up & reduce VAT to provide relief to their consumers," Puri said.

The Congress government in Rajasthan had cut VAT following the November 2021 decision. Punjab, which ruled by the party, had seen the biggest reduction then due to a cut in VAT rates.

"Even during the pandemic, our government set a paradigm of welfare, especially with PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. This is now acknowledged and appreciated the world over," Sitharaman said, referring to a scheme to provide free foodgrains to poor to help them tide over difficulties caused by a nationwide pandemic related lockdown.

"Despite the challenging international situation, we've ensured that there are no shortages/scarcity of essential goods. Even a few developed countries couldn't escape some shortages/disruptions. We are committed to ensure that prices of essential items are kept under control," she said.

The Finance Minister said despite rising fertilizer prices globally, the government has protected farmers from such price hikes.

"In addition to the fertilizer subsidy of Rs 1.05 lakh crore in the budget (for current fiscal), an additional amount of Rs 1.10 lakh crore is being provided to further cushion our farmers."

She said the Prime Minister "has specifically asked all arms of the government to work with sensitivity and give relief to the common man," she said adding the steps announced on Saturday were in line with that.

"We are also reducing the customs duty on raw materials & intermediaries for plastic products where our import dependence is high. This will result in reduction of cost of final products," she said.

"Similarly we are calibrating customs duty on raw materials & intermediaries for iron & steel to reduce their prices. Import duty on some raw materials of steel will be reduced. Export duty on some steel products will be levied."

"Measures are being taken up to improve the availability of #Cement and through better logistics to reduce the cost of cement," she added.

Central excise duty makes up for 26 per cent of petrol and diesel price now. After considering local sales tax or VAT, the total tax incidence in the price is as high as 42 per cent.

The excise tax on petrol was Rs 9.48 per litre when the Modi government took office in 2014 and that on diesel was Rs 3.56 a litre.

The government had between November 2014 and January 2016 raised excise duty on petrol and diesel on nine occasions to take away gains arising from plummeting global oil prices.

In all, duty on petrol rate was hiked by Rs 11.77 per litre and that on diesel by 13.47 a litre in those 15 months that helped government's excise mop up more than double to Rs 2,42,000 crore in 2016-17 from Rs 99,000 crore in 2014-15.

It cut excise duty by Rs 2 in October 2017 and by Rs 1.50 a year later. But it raised excise duty by Rs 2 per litre in July 2019.

It again raised excise duty on March 14, 2020 by Rs 3 per litre each. The government on May 6, 2020, again raised excise duties by Rs 10 per litre on petrol and Rs 13 per litre on diesel.

J&K, Punjab officials...

provision of security check at the confluence point from Basantpur side. Besides, the issue of staff crunch was also discussed during the meeting in response to which both sides agreed to station the required manpower, the spokesman said.

He said the meeting was informed that the work for shifting of Noor bridge coming under the submergence has been allotted and soil investigation has also been conducted. The Rs 2,715.70 crore Shahpur kandi Dam Project once completed would provide assured irrigation water of 1150 cusecs which will irrigate 32,173 hectares of agricultural land falling in Kathua and Samba districts of J&K.

Let's resolve to...

reaffirm our strong commitment to uphold peace and harmony and to defeat the

forces of disruption threatening human lives.

Asserting that no one will be allowed to create disturbances in Jammu Kashmir, the Lieutenant Governor said the society, especially the youth should work actively for isolating organizations and individuals giving shelter and support to the enemy of humanity.

The Lt Governor also paid homage to brave soldiers who sacrificed their lives to uphold country's unity and territorial integrity.

The Day is observed to generate awareness in the country among all sections of people, about the danger of terrorism and violence and its effect on the people, society and the country as a whole.

Sinha administered the pledge to the participants, "We, the people of India, having abiding faith in our country's tradition of non-violence and tolerance, hereby solemnly affirm to oppose with our strength, all forms of terrorism and violence. We pledge to uphold and promote peace, social harmony, and understanding among all fellow human beings and fight the forces of disruption threatening human lives and values".

Sinha fixes June...

the Departments like Jal Shakti and Power should remain available for providing continuous services during the Yatra.

He stressed on publicizing the measures and efforts to be employed for ensuring plastic-free environment to protect the ecology.

Detailed discussions were also held on ensuring various arrangements including drinking water, pilgrims' movement, RIFD tracking on all routes, Langar stalls, pony movement, and helicopter service.

The Lt Governor also directed for augmentation of health infrastructure and implementation of a meticulous traffic plan.

During the meeting, Dr Arun Kumar Mehta, Chief Secretary impressed on all officers for ensuring impeccable Yatra arrangements. He said that Shri Amarnathji Yatra has a significant impact on the economy of Jammu Kashmir:

He asked the concerned Deputy Commissioners to check the functionality of public utilities along the Highways and install Welcome Boards and signs for pilgrims coming for the holy yatra of Shri Amarnathji while putting special focus on cleanliness.

The Chief Secretary also asked the concerned officers to take the PRI members onboard for making Yatra arrangements in their respective Districts. He also said that feedback should also be taken from the visiting pilgrims.

Pertinently, the Holy Yatra of Shri Amarnathji will commence from June 30 this year from both Pahalgam and Baltal routes.

R K Goyal, Additional Chief Secretary, Home Department; Nitishwar Kumar, Principal Secretary to Lt Governor & CEO SASB; Divisional Commissioner Kashmir; IGP Kashmir; Deputy Commissioners, Superintendents of Police, Heads of the Departments, besides senior officers of Civil, Police Administration and SASB were present in the meeting.

Troops must remain...

end on Sunday, was briefed on the security situation and operational preparedness, it mentioned.

The formation commanders also briefed the Army chief on the existing ceasefire agreement on the LoC, development work on field fortifications, counter infiltration grid, operational preparedness and Army-citizen connect in border areas, it said.

"The Army chief, while interacting with the formation commanders, laid special emphasis on being vigilant and maintaining the sanctity of the Line of Control," it mentioned.

During his interaction with the troops, Pande complimented them for their high morale and professional competence, it noted.

On his arrival at Chinार Corps headquarters, Pande was briefed by Aujla on the overall security situation prevalent along the LoC and hinterland, it mentioned.

"The Army chief highlighted that it was the dawn of a new era of development, peace and prosperity in Kashmir and applauded Chinार Corps for their high level of morale and contribution to peace building in Jammu and Kashmir," it noted.

Pande complimented the excellent synergy exhibited by all sections of the civil administration, Jammu and Kashmir Police, Central Armed Police Forces and other security agencies in "projecting a whole of government approach" that has resulted in improvement in the security situation conducive for fostering a new era of development in the Union Territory, it mentioned.

Tourism boom in...

and link it with the (improved) situation, he said.

I give full credit for the tourism boom to the almighty as the rising temperatures in Delhi and the rest of the country prompted people to look for cooler environs in Kashmir, Shimla and elsewhere, Azad told reporters here.

Azad reached Jammu on a two-day visit and presided over a function at the party headquarters to pay tributes to former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on his death anniversary. He is scheduled to return to Srinagar on Sunday.

Flanked by senior leaders including J&K Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC) president G A Mir and working president Raman Bhalla, Azad said the mercury in Delhi touched 49.9 degrees Celsius and it was hovering between 47 and 48 degrees C in most parts of the country.

The people started fleeing to hill stations even ready to spend their time in tents or on roads to beat the heat, he added.

There is no role of the state in the increased tourist footfall (in Kashmir), he said.

The veteran Congress leader expressed concern over the growing terror activities in Kashmir and said we all need to join hands to finish militancy (in Jammu and Kashmir) .

The genuine demands of the vulnerable sections of the society, whether they are Kashmiri pandits, Sikhs or Muslims who are on the hit list (of terrorists) should be accepted. We should not put them in harm's way, he said.

Asked about the Delimitation Commission report which took effect in Jammu and Kashmir with the issuance of a notification by the Union law ministry on Friday, Azad said he and other Congress leaders have made it clear that they are not satisfied with the report which contradicts the ground realities.

It is a tailor-made report and prepared in such a way to benefit some and cause loss to whom they intend to, the Congress leader said.

The panel's two orders -- one of March 14 dealing with the number of constituencies reserved for various categories and the second one of May 5 dealing with the size of each constituency -- came into effect together from May 20.

The Commission's report will form the basis for future assembly polls in the Union territory. The delimitation panel had given six additional assembly seats to the Jammu region and one to Kashmir Valley and brought areas of Rajouri and Poonch under the Anantnag parliamentary seat.

Jammu division will now have 43 assembly seats and Kashmir 47 in the 90-member house.

In response to a question on the row over the use of speakers at religious places, Azad said the aim behind the campaign was to weaken the "ideology of tolerance to create a rift in society.

In the 1500-year-old history of our country, Hindus and Muslims have lived together and they will remain so till the end of this world. The temple bells, azan' (call for prayer) from mosques and the prayer meetings at churches and gurdwaras is all about Bharat and if it stops, Bharat is not going to remain the same, he said.

He said the beautiful recitation of bhajans' from temples and azans' from mosques in the early hours makes one proud of the pluralistic country.

The controversy was meant to weaken this ideology of tolerance. The idea of love and respect for each other needs to be strengthened. All of us - Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and others accept each other and that is what India is, Azad said.

Azad visits family...

district on May 12.

Accompanied by senior party leaders including several former ministers, Azad visited the bereaved family at Ban Talab in the outskirts of Jammu and expressed his condolences to the father and other members of the deceased, the leader said.

India, Singapore call..

terrorists, countering radicalisation, combating the financing of terrorism and tackling terrorist use of the internet.

"The JWG also exchanged views on national, regional and global terrorism threat assessments, cybercrimes, drug trafficking and the nexus between transnational organised crime and terrorism," the MEA said.

"It agreed to strengthen cooperation between Singapore and India in dealing with these challenges," it said.

The two sides also exchanged views on deepening cooperation in multilateral fora such as the UN, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and the FATF (Financial Action Task Force).

"India and Singapore are committed to further cooperation and collaboration between their respective agencies, particularly in the sphere of sharing of information and best practices, law enforcement and capacity building to counter-terrorism and transnational crimes," the MEA said.

Mahaveer Singhvi, Joint Secretary for Counter-Terrorism at the MEA and Puah Kok Keong, Deputy Secretary (Policy) at the Ministry of Home Affairs of Singapore co-chaired the meeting.

Rahul maligns India...

"He keeps making such comments frequently and it will not be wrong to say that this amounts to betraying the country," Bhatia said.

At the 'Ideas for India' conference organised by non-profit think-tank Bridge India, Gandhi was at pains to explain away his remarks targeting the regional parties, saying the Congress respects them and does not want to play "the Big Daddy".

The former Congress chief asserted his party will coordinate with regional outfits to launch a nationwide movement against the ruling dispensation and reach out to people in a big way.

"We have to coordinate with our friends in the opposition. I don't view the Congress as the 'Big Daddy'. It is a group effort with the opposition. But it is a fight to regain India," he said at the conclave. A video of the event was released by the Congress on Saturday.

"The point I made in Udaipur, which was misconstrued, is that this is an ideological battle now. It is a national ideological battle, which means that of course we respect the DMK as a Tamil political organisation, but the Congress is the party that has the ideology at the national level," Gandhii said.

So, the Congress will have to think about itself as a structure that is enabling the opposition, he said during the hour-long interaction.

"In no way is the Congress superior to the other opposition parties, we are all fighting the same battle. They have their space, we have ours, but an ideological battle is taking place between the national vision of the RSS and that of the Congress," Gandhii added.

Gandhii's remarks on regional parties, which came in the presence of opposition leaders like Sitaram Yechury and Tejashvi Yadav, are in sharp contrast to his comments at the Congress' three-day 'Chintan Shivir' in Udaipur.

There he had said that it is only the Congress that can fight the BJP at the national level and regional outfits cannot fight this battle as they do not have an ideology. Gandhii also said the BJP has a "100 per cent control" over media, and communication and broad control over the institutional framework.

"We will not be able to match the funds they have, we will have to think of communication and funding in a completely new way. We have to think about an organisational structure that is much closer to the masses.

"We will have to think of a large-scale mass movement on issues like unemployment, prices and on regional matters," he said, adding the Congress will seek the support of regional parties for this.

At the London conclave, when asked about the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Gandhii drew parallels with the Chinese actions in Ladakh.

Bhatia berated Gandhii for comparing the situation in Ladakh to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, alleging the Congress leader insulted the sacrifices of Indian soldiers in the Galvan Valley.

"Being in opposition does not mean that one should damage India in hate," he said. Bhatia called Gandhii a "habitual offender" who always commits a bigger mistake than the last time.

Lashing out at the Congress leader, he said Gandhii should not compare India with Pakistan which has been under military rule for over half the time it has been in existence and goes around with a "begging bowl" for survival.

"Beware! Rahul Gandhii in comparing India with Pakistan. India was, is and will remain great," Bhatia asserted.

J&K records 15...

said. Eleven cases were reported from Jammu division and four from Kashmir; they said.

Sixteen of the total 20 districts did not report any fresh cases.

There are 55 active cases of COVID-19 in the Union Territory, while the number of recovered patients is 4,49,384, officials said. The death toll due to the pandemic is 4,752.

There are 51 confirmed cases of mucormycosis (black fungus) as no fresh case was reported since Friday evening.

GGM Science College Jammu organises International Online Talk

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: The Department of Environmental Sciences, GGM Science College Jammu organised an International Online Talk on "Environmental Careers- Global Perspectives and Opportunities under the patronage of Dr. Ravender Tickoo, Principal of the College.

The online talk was delivered by Dr. Amita Fotedar, Policy Advisor - Climate Change Systems Strategy Team - Ministry for Primary Industries - Natural Resources Directorate. Government of New Zealand; Co-founder and Research Advisor - RM Collections Limited, New Zealand. During her talk Dr. Fotedar shared her professional experiences and journey with the students to motivate and inspire them. She highlighted the various pathways for the students to follow so as to seek scholarships in Foreign Universities. The event was joined by students of the college who also interacted with the resource person regarding various prospects in the field worldwide.

The event began with the welcome address by Prof. Preeti Dogra, Head, Department of Environmental Sciences, GGM Science College, Jammu. The vote of thanks was presented by Dr. Arti Sharma, Assistant Professor; Department of Environmental Sciences.

Vertical interaction course on terrorism & counter insurgency concludes at SKPA Udhampur

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

UDHAMPUR: The three Day Vertical Interaction Course on "Terrorism and Counter Insurgency" concluded on Saturday at Sher-i-Kashmir Police Academy Udhampur.

Around 20 officers from different units of J&K Police are participating in the training programme.

V.K Jamwal, SSP, Dy. Director (Outdoor) SKPA was the chief

guest on the occasion. In his valedictory address, he summed up the agenda of the course and laid emphasis on the tactical preparedness to deal with terrorism and counter insurgency. He reiterated that threats on internal security was one of the major challenges for the law enforcement agencies and asked the participants to equip themselves with all legal frameworks to deal with all such challenges. He asked the participating officers to implement the learning on ground to curb the nefarious designs of the ANEs/ASEs.

During the training programme, faculty from Academia including that from the Police Academy Udhampur shared their experience on different subjects with the participants. The course was coordinated by Sukhvir Singh, Dy:SP & Insp: Sandeep Mahajan, Member faculty SKPA Udhampur.

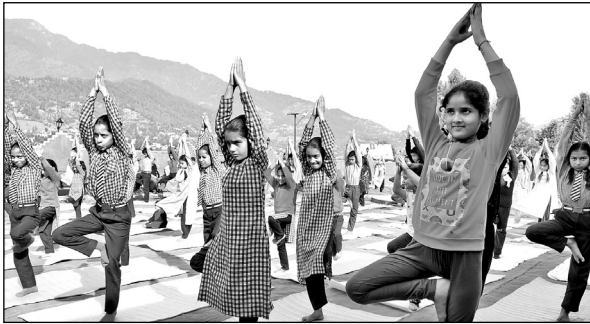
Army organises yoga workshop for students to promote 'Fit India Campaign'

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

BHADARWAH: Continuing with 'Fit India Campaign' Indian Army's Rashtriya Rifles unit based at Bhadarwah organised a Yoga Workshop for Students, villagers and jawans at Shaheed Chunnai Lal Park Bhara - Khellani in Bhadarwah as part of the celebrations of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Maha Utsav'. The workshop in which beside 200 students drawn from different schools of Bhalla tehsil, villagers and Army Jawans also participated

was primarily aimed at to raise awareness about the importance of Yoga especially after Covid Pandemic to promote 'Fit India Campaign'.

"The workshop is also a prelude and run up to International Yoga



Students performing yoga at Bhadarwah.

Day, which is celebrated on 21 June and this year to commemorate the 75 years of Independence, 75 crore Indians will perform Yoga on that day," said an Army officer of 4 Rashtriya Rifles. During the workshop, the children and villagers were introduced to various Asanas, with due emphasis on Surya namaskar and various breathing exercises by yoga instructor Faizan Haq Matto. " The children are showing great enthusiasm and excitement while learning about Yoga," said Faizan.