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### 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, Nayee-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 Shalpur 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 Chinar 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 Chinar 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.

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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.

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

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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.

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