

Amit Shah's K'taka visit: Denials on leadership change, hopes of cabinet rejig, ahead of Assembly polls

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

BENGALURU: Denials poured in on change in the leadership in Karnataka, amid buzz over such a move by the BJP high command ahead of the Assembly polls next year, as Union Minister Amit Shah was on a day-long visit to take part in various events in the city on Tuesday.

This even as some party leaders expressed hopes about cabinet expansion or rejig soon, amid mounting pressure and simmering discontent within the ruling party over the delay.

It was widely expected that, during this visit, a month after he set a target of 150 seats for the Karnataka BJP for the 2023 Assembly polls, Shah was expected to assess the BJP's preparations for the polls and may give a strong message to party's leadership and office-bearers.

However, according to party sources his interaction was limited to select BJP leaders over lunch at Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai's official residence.

With his visit coinciding with the birth anniversary of 12th century social reformer Basaveshwara, Shah began his day by paying floral tributes to the bust and statue of the Lingayat saint.

The move is seen as a reach

Char Dham Yatra begins with opening of Gangotri-Yamunotri temples for devotees

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

DEHRADUN: The Char Dham yatra began on Tuesday with the portals of Gangotri and Yamunotri temples in Uttarkashi district thrown open to devotees on the occasion of Akshay Tritiya.

The gates of Gangotri were opened at 11.15 am and those of Yamunotri at 12.15 pm in the presence of thousands of devotees, administrative and temple committee officials.

The idols of goddesses Ganga and Yamuna were brought in ornate palanquins decorated with flowers from their winter abodes before the vedic rituals were started by the priests to mark the opening of the temples.

A record number of pilgrims are likely to visit Char Dham this year as it is for the first time since 2019 that the yatra has begun without the Covid-induced restrictions in force.

New Delhi extended assistance of over USD 3 billion to Sri Lanka in 2022: Indian High Commission

■ AGENCY

COLOMBO: India has committed more than USD 3 billion to debt-ridden Sri Lanka in loans, credit lines and credit swaps since January this year, the Indian High Commission here said on Tuesday, as the island nation tries to navigate through its worst economic crisis since independence.

On Monday, India had extended its current credit line by a further USD 200 million to replenish Sri Lanka's rapidly depleting fuel stocks.

The ongoing crisis in Sri Lanka is caused in part by a lack of foreign currency, which has meant that the country cannot afford to pay for imports of staple foods and fuel, leading to acute shortages and very high prices.

The USD 1 billion credit facility for the purchase of food, medicines and other essential commodities is already operational, a statement from the Indian High Commission said, adding that around 16,000 metric tonnes of rice supplied by India is also being distributed.

Arunachal tops among states in GST revenue collection growth in April

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

ITANAGAR: Arunachal Pradesh has recorded a GST collection of Rs 196 crore in April, registering a year-on-year growth of 90 per cent, the highest among states, an official said on Tuesday.

The northeastern state had mopped up Rs 103 crore in the year-ago month.

The state had registered a 14 per cent GST revenue growth in March this year with a collection of Rs 105 crore, up

out to Lingayats, a dominant community who have significant presence across the state and are considered as a strong vote-bank of the ruling BJP, ahead of Karnataka Assembly polls next year.

Amid buzz over possible change in the leadership, several top BJP leaders including BJP national general secretary Arun Singh, former Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, party's state unit President Nalin Kumar Kateel, ruled out Bommai's exit.

Terming the speculation of leadership change as "hypothetical", Singh said Bommai is a "common man" and people here like him.

Yediyurappa, who was replaced by Bommai in July last year, too said there are no such talks about leadership change and what is going on are mere "speculations".

Kateel said there is no confusion in the party on the leadership issue, and BJP will go to the polls together as a team, under the leadership of Bommai and Yediyurappa's guidance.

However, Bijapur City BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal said the high command is thinking of big changes to make government more effective, speed up development, and to tackle corruption allegations. "It may happen

before May 10."

It may be noted that Yatnal, a known Yediyurappa critic was among the first to predict the state BJP strongman's exit from the CM post.

The fresh round of speculation about leadership change in the state, was following BJP national general secretary B L Santhosh's statement on Sunday that the party's strength lies in the induction of new faces.

Amid murmurs in the party circles that a top-to-bottom overhaul of the cabinet cannot be ruled out, state BJP functionaries are hopeful that a decision is likely soon regarding cabinet expansion or reshuffle, amid talks that several incumbents could make way for fresh faces.

Bommai, who is under pressure to expand or reshuffle his cabinet at the earliest, had earlier indicated that he would try to discuss it with Shah during this visit.

There are currently five positions vacant in the state cabinet, which has 29 ministers, including the chief minister, against the sanctioned strength of 34.

Some legislators have even been advocating a Gujarat-like overhaul of the Karnataka cabinet soon, to make way for new faces, ahead of the assembly elections.

Yediyurappa, expressing hopes about cabinet expansion taking place in a couple of days, told reporters that Shah may announce a decision or do it after discussing with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other leaders in Delhi.

Though Shah as per his itinerary, was expected to meet party office-bearers, state core committee and presidents of party's various wings, according to BJP sources they were cancelled citing a packed schedule.

However, a select few senior leaders of the party were closeted with Shah, during lunch at Bommai's residence.

According to sources, several party leaders, legislators and Ministers who had expected some kind of interaction with Shah, amid speculations about leadership, cabinet and elections, seemed disappointed that it could not happen.

BJP MLC A H Vishwanath, who attended the lunch at the CM's residence said, "nothing...there was good food, Amit Shah gave a handshake asking how do you do? That's all. No issues came up for discussion."

Former Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar said, Shah had come to attend official programmes and in the meantime he was to have discussions with party state leaders,

he met few of them over lunch.

Asked about meetings with party office-bearers and leaders being cancelled, he said, "...I think maybe as other programmes got delayed the meeting might have been cancelled. He (Shah) had addressed the core committee during his last visit itself."

Shah had last visited the state on April 1 and attended the state BJP core committee meeting, during which the 150 seats target was set and discussions were held on induction of leaders from other political parties ahead of the elections, and strengthening the organisation.

The visit of Shah comes amid series of allegations against the state government including 40 per cent commission charge, resignation of senior minister K S Eshwarappa following the alleged suicide of a contractor naming him, and the alleged scam in the recruitment of police sub-inspectors, among others.

It also came after the state witnessed a series of incidents of communal flare ups in the recent past.

Former Chief Minister

Nadda to attend Telangana BJP's public meeting at Mahabubnagar on May 5

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

HYDERABAD: BJP president J P Nadda will attend a public meeting at Mahabubnagar in Telangana on May 5 as part of the state unit president and MP Bandi Sanjay Kumar's ongoing 'padayatra'.



'padayatra' to fight for the people, they added.

The BJP hopes to gain momentum with Nadda's rally.

The second phase of Kumar's 'padayatra' is likely to conclude on May 14 and Union Home Minister Amit Shah is expected to attend a public meeting to be organised on the occasion.

Sanjay Kumar held the first phase of his 'padayatra' last year.

However, gems and jewellery exports dipped by 2.11 per cent to USD 3.3 billion.

Commenting on exports, FIEO President A Sakthivel said that the "highest-ever exports" of over USD 38 billion, during the first month of the fiscal, shows the continuous impressive performance of the exports sector.

"The benefits of the newly signed FTAs and the PLI Scheme will further help us in building on the milestones achieved during the previous fiscal," he said.

Imports during the month

Gold Medal, CNS Trophy for best Green

Practice and Unit Citations will also be

presented," it noted.

The ceremony will be witnessed by the spouses and families of awardees as well as by senior dignitaries of the Indian Navy, it said.

Navy Chief to give gallantry, distinguished services awards at Naval Investiture Ceremony in Kochi

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar will give gallantry and distinguished service awards at this year's Naval Investiture Ceremony at Kerala's Kochi on Wednesday, according to a statement.

In an official statement issued said on

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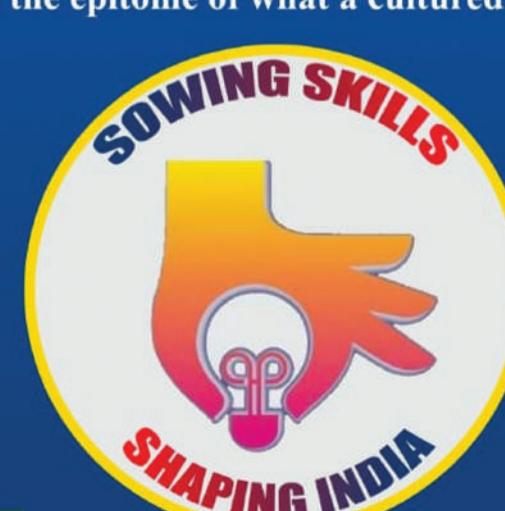
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