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No question of...

has to decide whether the Union of India could do it," he said. Sibal has repeatedly questioned Parliament's power to abrogate Article 370 in the absence of the constituent assembly of Jammu and Kashmir. He has persistently maintained that only the constituent assembly, whose term expired in 1957, was vested with the power to recommend repeal or modification of Article 370, and since it ceased to exist after 1957, the constitutional provision according special status to J&K, assumed a permanent character.

During the third-day of the hearing on the pleas challenging the Centre's August 2019 decision, Sibal repeated his contention before the bench, also comprising Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul, Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai and Surya Kant.

"This court will remember Brexit. In Brexit, there was no constitutional provision (in England) seeking a referendum. But, when you want to sever a relationship which has been entered into, you must ultimately seek the opinion of the people because people are at the centre of this decision not the Union of India," Sibal asserted.

CJI Chandrachud was, however, not impressed. "In a constitutional democracy, seeking the opinion of people has to be done through established institutions. So long as a democracy exists as it does, in terms of constitutional democracy, any recourse to the will of the people has to be expressed and sought through established institutions. You cannot therefore envisage a situation like Brexit type referendum," he told Sibal.

He concurred with Sibal's view that Brexit was a political decision but said, "Within a Constitution like us there is no question of referendum."

Sibal said the repeal was a political decision taken unilaterally by the executive and it cannot be called a decision that was in consonance with the Constitution.

Sibal, who argued through the day, said whether Article 370 was a temporary or permanent provision does not matter now. He said the ultimate question is whether the Union of India can terminate that relationship which was constitutionally recognised under Article 370.

"It is irrelevant. Temporary or permanent does not matter. The manner it was done is a fraud upon the Constitution. It is a politically motivated act. Executive orders are political acts not constitutional acts. Permanent or temporary at the moment is not the issue.

"The reason why I am saying this is because maybe there is a constitutional way of doing it. Though, I am not addressing that (issue) nor have they (Centre) resorted to constitutional methodology. If they resort to it, it will be tested in the court of law," Sibal said.

Sibal has been insisting that Parliament could not have assumed the role of the constituent assembly to repeal Article 370.

He questioned the Centre's decision of dividing the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories and said the Constitution did not allow it.

"You cannot divide Madhya Pradesh or Bihar into two union territories. This is a representative form of democracy. In this case, where are the voices of people of Jammu and Kashmir? Where is the voice of representative democracy? Five years have passed...have you had any form of representative democracy? This way the whole of India can be converted into Union Territories," he said.

Sibal said though the Constitution is a political document, one cannot manoeuvre or manipulate it as courts are not silent.

"That's not how you interpret a Constitution. It is a political document but you cannot misuse it politically. What is a Constitution? It's a set of values. Values on the basis of which people will represent themselves and their voice will be heard. If you do such executive acts and silence the voices of people, what is left of democracy? "All I can say is that this is the historic moment, historic not for the present but for the future of India. And I hope this court is not silent," Sibal said while concluding his arguments.

The hearing remained inconclusive and will continue on Wednesday when senior advocate Gopal Subramanian will advance his arguments for the petitioners.

Several petitions challenging abrogation of the provisions of Article 370 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, which split the erstwhile state into two union territories - Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh- were referred to a Constitution bench in 2019.

Cop among 2...

accused used abusive language while food was being served to them to which his staff objected. The accused, in a fit of rage, opened fire with a pistol and assaulted them physically.

A case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and Arms Act, including attempt to murder, was registered and the accused policeman Joginder Singh of Samba and ex-serviceman Balvinder Singh of Kathua were arrested, the official said.

LG reviews preparedness...

of the campaigns and events planned by the District Administrations and Government Departments in the run-up to the grand celebration on Independence Day.

We all must work together as a single unit for the successful conduct of 'Meri Mati Mera Desh', 'Har Ghar 'Tiranga' across the UT and 'Tiranga Yatra' in Jammu and Srinagar, the Lt Governor said.

I am confident that this year too people in huge numbers will participate in Independence Day events, he said.

He further directed the District Administration and departments to organise activities under 'Har Ghar 'Tiranga Abhiyan'.

The Lt Governor also asked for active involvement of common citizens, Public representatives, Youth Clubs, Civil Society, Self Help Groups, NCC Scouts and Guides, Army veterans, ex-servicemen, prominent citizens and educational institutions in the celebration of Independence Day. He emphasised that the Independence Day celebration is not a government function but the country's most sacred festival which is observed by the entire society with the spirit of oneness, one emotion.

The Lt Governor suggested the Culture Department to come up with the monographs on Martyrs. He directed the officers for Tricolour illumination of prominent buildings, tourist spots, border villages, and organizing activities in the honour of the prominent personalities who contributed in nation building.

The meeting also discussed the progress of the ongoing development works and measures taken by the district administrations to meet the targets.

Machail Mata yatra...

about two hours and making the journey less fatiguing compared to the steep and challenging terrains, they said.

The 43-day yatra in the scenic Paddar valley of Kishtwar commenced on July 25 and is scheduled to conclude on September 5.

The footfall at the temple is likely to witness manifold increase with the arrival of holy 'Charri Yatra' from Jammu to Machail on August 18.

"The yatra has been transformed into a more comfortable, enjoyable and safe journey for on-foot pilgrims with the opening of the PMGSY road by district administration Kishtwar on August 5," an official said.

This year, the district administration led by Deputy Commissioner Devansh Yadav has taken far reaching measures to facilitate the devotees to make their yatra a lifetime memorable experience, he said.

These include the installation of a first-of-its-kind 30 KW hybrid solar power plant, a 4G Airtel tower, and electricity to Machail Village, easing the arduous spiritual journey of the devotees, the official said.

Additionally, facilities such as tent city at Machail, Yatri Bhawan, Sapphire guest house and luxury mushroom tents at base camp Gulabgarh have been arranged to accommodate and host the devotees during their pilgrimage, he said.

He said the Machail Mata yatra holds immense spiritual and cultural significance and remains a cherished place of pilgrimage for devotees across the country.

Describing the construction of PMGSY road as a "major milestone", the official said the department concerned successfully cleared the challenging rocky stretch on Machail road in a short span of time.

"Road cutting in a crucial rocky stretch has resulted in achieving significant progress on this road which is now being used by pilgrims up to Hamouri village for on foot journey," he said.

The pilgrims had to foot a distance of about 22 kilometres to reach the shrine but after the construction of the road, the travel time was shortened from 1.5 to 2 hours, the official said.

Additionally, the officials said the installation of railings by the Army on the Mov bridge has significantly enhanced the safety of pilgrims during their journey.

Opposition brought no...

Rajya Sabha, the government got more votes than expected as the debate showed that its bill was guided by the Constitution, the prime minister said.

Modi, sources said, noted that some opposition members had described the voting in Rajya Sabha as a semi-final before the 2024 Lok Sabha polls as he exuded confidence about the BJP's prospects in the national elections.

The Delhi services bill secured parliamentary approval on Monday after the Rajya Sabha passed it with the support of 131 MPs while 101 of them voted against the legislation that will give the Centre control over bureaucracy in the national capital.

Exuding confidence about his return to power following next year's general elections, Modi told MPs that they will not have to push for railway ministry-related works during his third term after Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw made a presentation, indicating that the ongoing development projects will take care of their demands.

The Modi government is now in its second term, with opposition parties forming the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) to prevent the rul-

ing BJP-led NDA from coming to power for a third term under him.

With the ruling party certain to defeat the no-confidence motion in Lok Sabha, where it enjoys a strong majority, Modi told party MPs to hit "sixers" on the last ball before the 2024 polls.

He also referred to his 2018 speech in which he had wryly wished the opposition to bring a no-confidence motion against his government in 2023.

In a swipe at opposition parties, the prime minister said their leaders speak of social justice but harmed it the most with their dynastic, appeasement and corrupt politics.

He reiterated his call for corruption, and dynastic and appeasement politics to quit India.

Meghwal told reporters that the prime minister asked MPs to join the party's programme on August 9 on the call for nepotism, corruption and appeasement to quit India.

He asked them to organise events to mark the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day and also to take out silent marches to highlight the pain and tragedy of India's partition. Other programmes that Modi spoke about was "Har Ghar 'Tiranga" in the run-up to the Independence Day.

Party leaders were also asked by Modi to reach out to households for taking pledge to do their bit to make India a developed country by 2047. People will take collective pledge at different levels, including districts and states, Meghwal said.

A 'amrit kalash yatra' will also be organised as part of the effort under which over 8,500 urns having soil or grain besides saplings will be brought to Delhi for raising an 'amrit vatika' (garden), he said, adding that the exercise is expected to continue till Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's birth anniversary on October 31.

BSF Chief reviews...

review the security scenario along the International Border in the Union Territory, a BSF spokesperson said. The BSF chief was given a detailed presentation covering all critical aspects of border security and domination along the International Border and the Line of Control (LoC) at the Jammu frontier headquarters by Inspector General of the force's Jammu frontier D K Boora on Tuesday morning, he said. During his visit to Samba, the BSF DG was briefed about the recent threats being faced by the personnel of the force, ranging from tunnelling and cross-border smuggling by Pakistan-based elements.

Two Pakistani intruders were shot dead by the BSF in two separate incidents in the Rangarh sector of Samba and the Arnia sector of Jammu on July 25 and 31, respectively. Over four kg of heroin and some Pakistani currency were recovered from the slain intruder in Rangarh. "A special emphasis has been given to drone threats posed by Pakistan from across the border," the spokesperson said, adding the director general of the BSF was also shown the all-round domination strategy of the force on the International Border. He said that in the evening, Agrawal took part in a 'Prahari Sammelan' and lauded the Jammu frontier for maintaining the highest degree of professionalism in dominating the border effectively. The director general also interacted with javans on the ground and praised them for their dedication and professionalism, the spokesman said.

If elected to...

choose their representatives. Jammu and Kashmir which was one of the oldest states of the country cannot be governed administratively. We need development, good governance and public participation to keep democracy alive in this part of country," he said while addressing a gathering of workers at Bhagwah, Dessa in Doda. Azad said whatever good he had done in Jammu and Kashmir as Chief Minister; the present regime is destroying it brick by brick.

"Be it Roshni scheme, or other socioeconomic projects all have been targeted and people are systematically disempowered," he said.

Under the Roshni scheme people were empowered to secure their livelihood and the hospitals were built for proper treatment of patients, roads were built to connect people and economy.

"You can see now not only land rights were snatched, these hospitals have staff deficiency, roads are not maintained which has hit the economy of common people," he said. Azad promised his workers, if he is elected to power, he will restore the Roshni scheme and will create abundant job opportunities for the local youth, also assured employment to labourers since they are forced now to migrate to other states to earn their livelihood. He also criticized those who are opposing Article 370 and said that he is hopeful of a positive outcome from the Supreme Court where the batch of petitions are being heard on day-to-day basis. "Those who oppose Article 370 are actually ignorant of Jammu Kashmir's history, politics and geography. Article 370 was aimed to benefit the UT not any particular community, religion or region. We are hopeful Supreme Court will restore it since its abrogation was illegal," he said. Among others who were present in the meetings were G.M Saroori Vice Chairman, Ab Majeed Wani General Secretary, Retd IGP P.R.Manhas Zonal President, Ramesh Parihar Sr DPAP leader, Asif Gattu Distt President DPAP and others.

CS launches 'Aspirational Panchayat' dashboard for monitoring rankings of 4291 Panchayats

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: Chief Secretary, Dr Arun Kumar Mehta on Tuesday launched the Planning, Development and Monitoring Department dashboard for monitoring the progress of panchayats of J&K under 'Aspirational Panchayat Development Programme (APDP)'. During the launch ceremony, the Chief Secretary felicitated the Planning Department for coming up with the monitoring mechanism for keeping track of the development of Panchayats. He observed that tools like these are the sure way of bringing efficiency in the governance and advised the developers to programme other such tools in future. CS called this dashboard a mirror to find out the areas of concern for each panchayat. He remarked that it would make the interventions more directional with requisite outcomes to be monitored in real time. He exhorted upon all to carry forward this exercise of updating this portal periodically and not to turn such efforts into ritualistic affair only.

Dr Mehta made out that the

data available over this dashboard together with the plans of each panchayat available over the 'Janbhagadari' portal can be used to develop separate portals for each panchayat. He further added that the statistics relating to population and institutions present there should also be captured to make these portals informative for general public. The Chief Secretary also enjoined upon the officers to ensure that the 'Prabhari Officers' of each panchayat go through the reports about their concerned Panchayats each month in order to have fair idea about the status of development there. He directed for making it one of the benchmarks to assess their performance annually.

Dr Mehta also asked the officers to work in coordination with each other to realize the goal of 'Zero Poverty' in J&K by 2024. He asked them to study the panchayat models adopted by the states like Kerala, Telangana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to adopt best practices implemented

there. He directed formulating a plan that is more suitable and realistic for meeting our targets and expectations at large. Those who were present included Commissioner Secretary, RDD; Commissioner Secretary, IT; Secretary, PD&MD; DG, Planning; CEO, JaKeGA besides other concerned officers. On the occasion the Secretary, PD&MD, Raghav Langar informed the participants about the unique features of the dashboard. He made out that each of the Panchayat is evaluated across 9 sectors having 100 indicators. He informed that the dashboard has a feature to filter top and bottom Panchayats in each district across different sectors.

It was also brought out that the data entry for each month has to be done at the Panchayat level which has to be validated at Block and authenticated at District level. It was revealed that for the capacity building of the staff, a training module has been conceived for them to make this exercise efficient.

PRI member charred to death in accidental fire at home

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

UDHAMPUR: A 38-year-old Panch was charred to death in an accidental fire that damaged his home in a village in Udhampur district, a police official said on Tuesday. Gyan Chand, an elected Panchayati Raj Institution member, got trapped when his house caught fire at Katti village in the Panchari area on Monday. His charred body was recovered by rescuers, the official said. A buffalo was also killed in the fire, he said, adding that the cause of the fire was accidental.

Rajouri Chikri Wood Craft, Anantnag's Mushqbudji rice receive GI tag

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: In a significant developments, Rajouri Chikri Wood Craft from Rajouri district and Mushqbudji Rice of Anantnag district of have received the Geographical Indication (GI) Tag.

The process for GI Tagging of nine products was started by NABARD in consultation with Department of Handicrafts & Handloom and Department of Agriculture in December 2020, during the difficult times of COVID. The GI tags have now finally been granted to these two products after a long legal process. In total, four products have been

granted GI tag with NABARD support.

Chikri is a pale, honey colored , fine grained soft wood found in hill ranges of Rajouri district of Jammu province. The Chikri woodcraft of Rajouri is characterized by intricate carving and detailing.

Similarly, Mushqbudji Rice is a premium variety of short bold aromatic rice grown in higher reaches of the Kashmir valley especially in Anantnag district. The cooked Mushqbudji Rice is unique and possesses a harmonious blend of taste, aroma and rich organoleptic properties.

Geographical Indications

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: JKPCCL leaders congratulated Rahul Gandhi on being reinstated as Member of Parliament and appreciated his indefatigable fight for cause of the nation and his determined grit for people.

Vikar Rasool Wani JKPCCL President, Raman Bhalla JKPCCL Working President, Tariq Hameed Karra CWC Member, GA Mir Ex President JKPCCL, Ex DyCM Tara Chand, Former Minister Peerzada Mohd. Sayeed on Tuesday met Rahul Gandhi hailed his relentless fight to restore democracy, secularism and unity in the country.

They appreciated his indefatigable fight for the cause of the nation and his determined grit for the people continued to rekindle hopes among millions of people across the nation, justice took its course and delivered a verdict that brought back hopes and happiness to many, they added.

They expressed confidence that his participation in the Parliamentary process will once again go a long way in

voicing the concerns of the people of the nation.

In this regard, they extended their 24x7 support to fight harder to uphold democracy and secularism in the country.

In this direction, they also extended their moral support to the no confidence motion brought in the Parliament.

"This is a crucial step in the fight to revive and salvage the democratic and the secular fabric of the nation that is being threatened in a most dangerous way," they added.

Later Former Congress President Rahul Gandhi in presence of AICC President Kharage,AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal, Rajani Patil Rajya Sabha MP and Incharge J&K, Manoj Yadav AICC Jt Secretary Incharge J&K, discussed the overall political and security situation in Jammu and Kashmir with JKPCCL leaders and asked them to launch an offensive against the BJP for its "failure" on various fronts.

The meeting was attended by top Congress leaders like JKPCCL Chief Vikar Rasool Wani, JKPCCL Working

President Raman Bhalla, former JKPCCL Chiefs GA Mir, Peerzada Mohd Sayeed, former MP and AICC Member Tariq Hameed Karra,former Dy CM Tara Chand

Rahul Gandhi asked the JKPCCL leaders to unitedly fight the anti-people and anti-youth policies of the ruling BJP and defeat their divisive agenda in Jammu and Kashmir, to strengthen the party and gear up their activities keeping an eye on the forthcoming Panchayat and Local Body elections.

He asked leaders to concentrate in their respective areas and be amongst the people to highlight their problems. He appreciated JKPCCL leaders and cadres for their struggle and commitment to fight against the communal and divisive forces in Jammu and Kashmir. He appreciated JKPCCL leaders after 21 leaders, including key figures from other parties, have joined the party in Delhi which is seen as a setback for the Democratic Progressive Azad Party and Aam Aadmi Party in the region.

Pak's top election body disqualifies Imran Khan for five years following his conviction in corruption case

■ AGENCY

ISLAMABAD: In a fresh setback to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, Pakistan's top election body on Tuesday disqualified him for five years following his conviction in a corruption case.

In a notification issued on Tuesday, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said that the Chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was disqualified after being found guilty of corrupt practices under Section 167 of the Elections Act, 2017 and his sentencing for three years.

The ECP declared Khan, 70, disqualified under Article 63(1)(h) of the Constitution read with Section 232 of the Elections Act, 2017.

"Therefore, Mr Imran Ahmed Khan Niazi is disqualified for a period of five years and is also de-notified as a returned candidate from constituency NA-45 Kurram-I," said the notification, a copy of which is available with PTI.

An Islamabad trial court on Saturday sentenced Khan to three years in prison in the Toshakhana corruption case in which the embattled former prime minister is accused of profiting from selling expensive state gifts when he was in power. Khan was subsequently arrested by Punjab police from his Zaman Park residence in Lahore.

Earlier on Tuesday, Khan challenged his conviction in the Toshakhana corruption case in the Islamabad High Court, saying the verdict by a "biased" judge was a "slap in the face due process and fair trial" and "a gross travesty of justice".