

I am inseparable from Modi, for as long as he is PM: Chirag Paswan

STATE TIMES NEWS

PATNA: Union Minister Chirag Paswan on Friday rejected rumours of a rift between his Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) and the BJP, asserting that he views himself as "inseparable" from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In an interview to PTI, Paswan said he was willing to contest the upcoming Bihar assembly polls as an NDA partner "if the BJP so desires", and made light of estranged uncle Pashupati Kumar Paras' recent meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

"My love for Narendra Modi is unshakable. I am inseparable from him, for as long as he is Prime Minister", said Paswan, when asked about speculations triggered by his stance on issues like Wafk Board reforms, lateral entry into bureaucracy and creamy layer and sub-categorisation of Scheduled Castes.

He pointed out "as a matter of fact, my views always reflected the government's



stand. A case in point is sending the Wafk Bill to the Joint Parliamentary Committee".

Speculations have been rife that Paswan, formerly a docile junior ally, had begun to flex his muscles in the backdrop of a decline in fortunes of the BJP, which is now short of majority in Lok Sabha, and depends on allies' support to stay in power.

However, the LJP (RV) chief dismissed the speculations and made it clear that his party was not averse to contesting polls, in states like Jharkhand, as an NDA partner.

"The fact is, our party has an alliance with BJP in

Bihar and at the Centre. So, we will abide by coalition dharma at national level and in my home state. And although we have no strings attached in states like Jharkhand, it does not mean we are averse to a tie-up with BJP there. If the BJP and other NDA partners want us on board, we are game", the Union Minister said.

He also scoffed at rumours that have followed the meeting between Paras, who had in 2021 split the Lok Janshakti Party founded by his late father Ram Vilas Paswan, and Shah earlier this week.

Some leaders in the opposition INDIA bloc have

claimed that Shah was indirectly sending a message across to Paswan that he could ill-afford to defy the BJP which had many aces up its sleeve.

Paswan, however, maintained "He (Paras) has lost all public support. He had been meeting all people ahead of Lok Sabha polls, too. That exercise proved to be of no avail".

Notably, Paras, who heads Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party, had given up his Union cabinet berth in protest against his party not getting any seat to contest in the Lok Sabha polls.

Paswan, who was until then the lone MP of LJP(RV), got five seats, and the party went on to win all of these. Paswan himself grabbed Hajipur, the pocket borough of his late father, leaving Paras, who had won the seat in 2019, in a lull.

The 41-year-old actor was also asked about the recent controversy around Kangana Ranaut, the BJP MP whom he calls an "old friend" and who was his co-

actor in his only shot at Bollywood.

"I think the matter should have been closed once the BJP made it clear that she had expressed a personal view which the party did not agree with", said Paswan, referring to an interview in which Ranaut had alleged that girls were raped at the site where farmers were carrying out their protests, which had created a situation comparable to the restive Bangladesh.

Paswan, however, expressed disgust over Punjab leader Simranjot Singh Mann's taunt that Ranaut seemed to have had an "experience of rape" herself.

"This is unacceptable", said Paswan, adding "we cannot trivialise a crime that causes so much trauma to the victim. Especially at a time when the nation's conscience has been rocked by the horrific incident involving a doctor in Kolkata, which has evoked such strong remarks from the President, the highest constitutional authority".

Justice Hima Kohli fierce protector of rights of women: CJI Chandrachud

STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud hailed Justice Hima Kohli on Friday, saying she is not just a woman judge but also a fierce protector of the rights of women. The CJI was holding a ceremonial bench for Justice Kohli, who is due to retire on September 1. Justice Kohli was the ninth in seniority among the apex court judges. With her retirement, the top court will be left with only two women judges - Justice B V Nagarathna and Justice Bela M Trivedi. "It has been a pleasure to sit with Justice Kohli. We have exchanged very serious ideas and thoughts. There have been times when she supported me. Hima, you are not just a woman judge but also a fierce protector of the rights of women," the CJI said.

Attorney General R Venkataramani said Justice Kohli dedicated her entire life to the cause of justice.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said, "We have always seen a very tough exterior on the bench but we have also seen a very soft, humane and compassionate side of Justice Kohli." "She will always be

remembered through her judgments and my lordships has delivered justice through compassion wherever required," he added.

Supreme Court Bar Association president and senior advocate Kapil Sibal said Justice Kohli's stint as an apex court judge was too short.

He added that Justice Kohli has a stern look but an empathetic heart. "I always tell my colleagues when we go to court, know who your judge is. When we go to your court, you are looking with your glasses down on the nose, we know we are in trouble. You have been a pleasant judge. Nobody can finesse you, nobody can bowl a googly to you," Sibal said.

Born on September 2, 1959, in Delhi, Justice Kohli went to the St. Thomas School, New Delhi, and graduated with Honours in History from St. Stephen's College.

She completed her post-graduation in History and thereafter, joined the LLB course at the Law Faculty, Campus Law Centre, University of Delhi, and completed it in 1984.

She was the standing counsel and legal adviser of the New Delhi Municipal Council in the

Delhi High Court from 1999 to 2004. Justice Kohli got enrolled as an advocate with the Bar Council of Delhi in the same year and was appointed the additional standing counsel civil, the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi in the Delhi High Court in December 2004. She was appointed as an additional judge of the Delhi High Court on May 29, 2006, and took oath as a permanent judge on August 29, 2007.

Justice Kohli was appointed as a member of the General Council of the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata, on August 11, 2017. She was appointed as the chairperson of a high-powered committee constituted by the Delhi government on March 26, 2020, in terms of the order dated March 23, 2020, passed by the Supreme Court for decongestion of jails in all states and Union territories in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. Justice Kohli was sworn in as the chief justice of Telangana High Court on January 7, 2021. She was appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court on August 31, 2021.

Gold rises Rs 100; silver remains flat



STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Gold prices rose Rs 100 to Rs 74,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday due to fresh demand by local jewellers.

The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 74,250 per 10 grams in the previous trade.

Silver prices, however, remained flat at Rs 87,200 per kilogram on Friday, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Additionally, gold of 99.5 per cent purity edged up Rs 100 to Rs 74,000 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 73,900 per 10 grams.

Traders attributed the rise in yellow metal prices to a

pick-up in demand by local jewellers and retailers in the domestic market.

Globally, Comex gold is trading at USD 2,557.10 per ounce, down by USD 3.20 per ounce or 0.12 per cent.

"Gold prices traded in a narrow range, as the market is expecting the US Federal Reserve to cut interest rates in September, while on the other hand, better-than-expected data US is capping gains for the same on a higher side," Manav Modi, Senior Analyst of Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

Last week, US Fed Chair Jerome Powell signalled that the interest rate cuts were

imminent in a nod to concerns over the jobs market.

Geo-political tensions also continue to increase and support safe-haven buying, Modi added.

Silver was also marginally down at USD 29.93 per ounce in the international markets. "The bets for any bigger cuts were trimmed after data showed the US economy grew at a faster pace in the last quarter, while jobless claims were down again."

"Along with the US Fed focus will also be on the European Central Bank rate decision next month, as inflation eases futures within Eurozone countries," Pranav Mer, Vice-President of Research (Commodity & Currency) at BlinkX and JM Financial, said.

Traders will focus on the PCE inflation data to be released later on Friday, which is the Fed's preferred data in deciding interest rates and can provide further direction for the bullion prices, Mer added.

STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: With regulatory approvals in place, Air India chief Campbell Wilson on Friday said November 12 has been set as the date for the movement of aircraft and crew of Vistara to Air India.

Vistara, a joint venture between Tata Group and Singapore Airlines, is getting merged with Air India. Post merger, the Singapore carrier will have a 25.1 per cent stake in Tata Group-owned Air India.

The government has approved the foreign direct investment by Singapore Airlines as part of the merger.

In a message to the staff on Friday, Wilson said they are now embarking on the final stretch of the long and complicated merger process. The merger was announced in November 2022.

Wilson said that for

Vistara's aircraft, crew to move to Air India on Nov 12: Campbell Wilson



Vistara flights on or after November 12, the flight numbers will change to Air India ones, even though in nearly all cases the aircraft, schedule and operating

crew will be unchanged until early 2025.

A set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) has also been prepared for passengers to help them with more

information amid the merger process. From September 3, passengers wanting to book flights departing on or after November 12 through Vistara's website will progressively be redirected to Air India's site to complete the booking.

"All customers already booked on Vistara flights after 12th November will automatically have their reservations converted to Air India flight numbers; this will occur in phases during September, and customers will be individually

informed when this occurs," Wilson said.

He said that with the regulatory approvals now in hand, the movement of aircraft and crew from the Vistara Air Operator Certificate to Air India's has been set for November 12. "As we now embark on the final stretch of this long and complicated process, let's maintain the focus and effort to ensure that our collective customers and colleagues experience the smoothest of transitions," Wilson said in the message.

Reservoir storage levels in India surpass last year's figures, show regional variations: CWC

STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Central Water Commission (CWC) has said the current water storage levels has recorded an increase of 126 per cent compared to last year's corresponding period and 119 per cent of the 10-year average. As of August 29, the total live storage in these reservoirs stands at 144.333 billion cubic metres (BCM), which is 80 per cent of their total capacity. This marks an increase of 126 per cent compared to last year's corresponding period and 119 per cent of the 10-year average, referred to as Normal storage.

The CWC's report highlights a generally favourable water storage situation across the country, with the overall storage position being better than both last year's and the Normal storage levels.

The 155 monitored reservoirs, which include 20 hydroelectric projects, have a combined capacity of 180.852 BCM, contributing to about 70.15 per cent of the nation's total estimated live storage capacity.

Despite the positive national

outlook, the Northern region, encompassing Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Rajasthan, has recorded a decline in storage levels. The region's 11 monitored reservoirs currently hold 11.866 BCM, which is only 60 per cent of their capacity. This is a notable decrease from the 83 per cent recorded last year and the 79 per cent of normal storage.

The Eastern region, including Assam, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland and Bihar, shows improvement.

The region's 25 reservoirs have a combined storage of 13.636 BCM, accounting for 66 per cent of their capacity.

This represents a significant increase from last year's 46 per cent and exceeds the normal storage of 61 per cent.

In the Western region, covering Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa, storage levels have also seen an uptick. The region's 50 reservoirs hold 33.582 BCM, or 90 per cent of their capacity, up from 71 per cent last year and 66 per cent of normal storage.

The Central region, compris-

ing Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, has also shown positive storage trends. The region's 26 reservoirs currently hold 40.478 BCM, which is 84 per cent of their capacity. This is an improvement from last year's 73 per cent and the Normal storage of 71 per cent.

The Southern region, including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, exhibits significant storage gains. The region's 43 reservoirs have a

combined storage of 44.771 BCM, which is 82 per cent of their capacity. This is a substantial increase from last year's 49 per cent and the normal storage of 63 per cent.

The CWC's analysis indicates that several river basins, including the Ganga, Mahanadi, Narmada and Godavari, are reporting better-than-normal storage levels. Meanwhile, basins like the Indus and East Flowing Rivers between Penuar and Kanyakumari are categorised as deficient.

Second case filed against actor Jayasurya for sexual assault

STATE TIMES NEWS

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Kerala police have registered a second sexual assault case against Malayalam film actor Jayasurya within a span of 48 hours, following a fresh complaint from a woman actor alleging sexual misconduct, in addition to the existing case registered against him on August 28.

Police said the new FIR under Section 354 (assault or criminal force on woman with intent to outrage her modesty) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) against Jayasurya was registered at the Karamana police station here on Thursday.

Section 354 C of the IPC, which deals with voyeurism, has also been invoked against the actor based on the complaint by the female actor, police said.

The woman, in a complaint, alleged that he molested her at a movie set near Thodupuzha during 2012-2013.

The cantonment police in Thiruvananthapuram confirmed on Thursday that a case under the same section was registered against Jayasurya in another case.

Multiple FIRs have been registered against many high profile Malayalam film personalities following allegations of sexual harassment against various directors and actors in the wake of revelations in the Justice K Hema Committee report.

A rape case was registered on

Wednesday night against prominent Malayalam actor and ruling CPI(M) MLA Mukesh following a female actor's allegation that he sexually assaulted her years ago.

On August 28, Thiruvananthapuram Museum police had booked actor Sidhique for allegedly raping an actress in a hotel eight years ago.

The first case, under IPC Section 354 was against director Ranjith on a complaint by a female actor from West Bengal regarding an incident which occurred in 2009.

Following the allegation by the actor, Ranjith had resigned from his post as chairman of the state-run Kerala Chalachitra Academy.

Sidhique had also resigned as general secretary of the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists (AMMA) following the allegations against him.

The Justice Hema Committee was constituted by the Kerala government after the 2017 actress assault case, and its report revealed instances of harassment and exploitation of women in the Malayalam cinema industry.

Amidst allegations of sexual harassment and exploitation cropping up against several actors and directors, the state government on August 25 announced the establishment of a seven-member special investigation team to probe them. Subsequently, more complaints surfaced.

Was scientific study done before deciding height of Shivaji Maharaj's statue: Danve asks CM Shinde

STATE TIMES NEWS

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Ambadas Danve on Friday targeted the Maharashtra government over the collapse of Shivaji Maharaj's statue and asked Chief Minister Eknath Shinde whether a scientific study was carried out before deciding the specifics of the statue like its height.

He also sought to know if a specific height of the statue was maintained to fulfil the political ambitions of someone.

A political row has erupted after the 35-foot statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, built at Rajkot fort in Malvan tehsil of coastal Sindhudurg district, collapsed on August 26.

The Maharashtra government has set up a technical committee comprising engineers, IIT experts and Navy officials to probe the reasons behind the statue collapse. Police have arrested Chetan Patil, the structural consultant named in the FIR along with artist Jaydeep Apte, from Kolhapur.

Questioning the government over the issue, Danve, who is the Leader of



Opposition in Maharashtra Legislative Council, said in a post on X, "The chief minister formed a committee over the collapse of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's statue after we (opposition members) went to the Rajkot fort. This issue is linked to the soul of Maharashtra. If the CM respects Shivaji Maharaj, he would answer my questions."

Danve asked whether the members of the committee formed by the government have even made clay idols of Lord Ganesh in their lives. "Are they eligible and competent to study the collapsed

statue?" he said. "Was any scientific study carried out to decide the height of the statue? Was the strength of the island on which it was to be erected considered? Or was the height of the statue fixed just randomly to fulfil the political ambitions of anyone?" Danve asked.

He also sought to know if the remains of the Rajkot fort were damaged to construct a new red coloured fortification around the structure.

The leader of the Uddhav Thackeray-led party asked whether some experts were not included in the committee for the love of some other members.

EXCLUSIVE: Manipur can't be broken, won't allow separate administration for Kukis: Biren Singh



STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh has emphatically rejected the demand by Kuki groups for a separate administration, presenting himself as a champion of the state's interest and one who will not allow its identity to be diluted.

In an interview to PTI Videos on Thursday, he described Manipur as a small, hardworking state and said "our forefathers" have a history of 2,000 years. "Many sacrifices were made to make this state. This state can't be broken or have a separate administration. We will not allow this," the chief minister stated.

This is the first unequivocal rejection of the demand by Kukis. At a press conference on Thursday in New Delhi, some representatives of Kuki-zo com-

munities demanded the creation of a union territory with a legislature along the lines of Puducherry, arguing that it is the only way out of strife.

Singh, a Meitei accused by Kukis of siding with his community in the ethnic violence which erupted in May last year and polarised Manipur society like never before, has, however, expressed his support for a special development package for the state's hilly region where Kukis live.

"We can look at what can be done through the autonomous councils (present in hill districts) with focus on development," he said.

Singh said he will also appeal to the Centre for a special package and acknowledged the need for the development of hilly areas.

He rejected the allegation of

bias in dealing with the crisis, asserting that he is chief minister of every community, be it Meiteis, Kukis or Nagas.

Singh claimed his government's crackdown on drugs, illegal immigrants and forest encroachers was used by some elements to stoke social unrest which blew up into a full-blown ethnic violence after a high court order favouring Scheduled Tribes status for Meiteis.

The order was never implemented and has since been withdrawn.

"Whatever I have done was to protect Manipur and its people," the chief minister said.

Tagged by critics as a Meitei favouring his community, he said he allowed his position "to be diluted" and let the Centre take the lead in restoring peace through talks and security measures.

Singh expressed confidence that peace and reconciliation will be restored in five-six months, with the Centre playing a key role and applying "finishing touches" in brokering ethnic rapprochement.