

Govt comes under Oppn fire over Tarun Vijay remarks

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10 /- The Opposition in the Lok Sabha today sought stringent action against BJP leader Tarun Vijay for his purported racial remarks, even as the government assured there would be no discrimination based on caste or colour. Seeking to soothe the frayed nerves, senior Union Ministers Rajnath Singh and Anand Kumar said the individual has already apologised and the country is secular. With noisy protests by Opposition members who also demanded lodging of an FIR against him on the issue, the House proceedings were adjourned thrice - once during the Question Hour and twice during the Zero Hour. Attacking the ruling party over the remarks, Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge wondered whether the people from South India were not Indian citizens.

"I want to know whether we are Indians or not... Are we not citizens (of India), Kharge said during Zero Hour. Wanting to know what action would be taken against Vijay who is "not an ordinary person", the Congress leader said he was a former Rajya Sabha member and has also written many books on BJP philosophy. His remarks are a "threat" to the unity of the country and "you want to divide this country", Kharge said, adding that if such things go on, then states would start asserting independence. "It shows your mentality", he said as he sought to compare them to the likes of Hitler and condemned the remarks. "FIR should be lodged against him (Tarun Vijay). He has talked about breaking the nation. It is anti-national", Kharge said. Ascertaining that "Bharat is a secular country", Singh in response said there would be no discrimination based on caste, creed, colour and religion.

"The individual has already said that his remarks are indefensible", Singh said quoting Vijay. Since the individual has already apologised, there is no need to raise any more questions about it, the Home Minister said, adding he would not mention the name. As the protests continued even after Singh's statement, Speaker Sumitra Mahajan said "this (House) is not a court." Parliamentary Affairs Minister Anand Kumar sought to soothe the agitating members saying, "We are all one. The country is one." After the House met again at 12:45 hours, Kumar said the Home Minister has already given the reply and an apology has been tendered by Vijay.

BJP is of the view that "we all are Indians. There is no difference on the basis of colour. We all are one. Congress should not create differences. We are all together." Kharge please don't try to create differences... One India. Great India," he emphasised. Earlier during Question Hour, Kumar urged the Opposition to allow Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to respond to the question posed to her in Question Hour, saying that if the Home Minister said, adding he was satisfied with the Minister's response, Opposition members, including from the Congress and the Left, trooped into the Well shouting slogans.

During Question Hour also, the Opposition members raised slogans in the Well. The Opposition members were heard shouting, "Modi sarkar jawab do-jawab do (Modi government should respond)", "Desh ka vibhajan nahin chalega (Don't allow division of country)" and "We want FIR (against Vijay)".

EC discusses violence, poor voter turnout in Srinagar bypolls

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10 /-

The Election Commission today discussed the unprecedented election-day violence and poor voter turnout in the bypoll to the Srinagar Lok Sabha seat. Eight people were killed yesterday in firing by security forces in the Srinagar Lok Sabha bypoll where only 7.14 per cent of the electorate came out to cast their vote. Sources privy to the meeting said an Election Commission brass met to discuss past precedents and various options available to it, so that the poll panel could take a considered view under these circumstances.

In 2014 general elections, 26 per cent voting was recorded on this seat, while in the polls of 1989, Mohammad Shafiq, Congress candidate, was the only uncontested. The previous lowest turnout in the pres-

tigious seat was 11.93 per cent in 1999 when Omar Abdullah had defeated Mehboob Muttli in a straight contest.

J-K former chief minister and National Conference stalwart Farooq Abdullah, who had lost the seat in the 2014 elections, is locked in a straight fight with Nazir Ahmad Khan of the ruling PDP along with seven other candidates. State Chief Minister Ojha Shantmani had yesterday said that a decision on repoll in violence-hit areas will be taken after examining the diaries of the presiding officers. Almost 70 per cent of the polling booths in Budgam district were abandoned by the polling staff due to the spate of violent protests. Several officials in Srinagar had said. (PTI)

Deserted by NRI husband, woman seeks Sushma's help

CHANDIGARH, APRIL 10 /- A 29-year-old woman who was deserted by her NRI husband has sought the intervention of External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in getting him deported from New Zealand. Though her husband, Ramandeep Singh, has been declared a Proclaimed Offender (PO) by the Punjab Police, Chand Deep Kaur has now sought help of the Union minister, saying she wants to set an example so that other NRI cheats his wife. "I have sought Swaraj's help in getting my husband deported who is in New Zealand," Kaur, who is based in Kapurthala, said today over phone. She also wants the passport of her husband to be cancelled.

"I want to set an example so that no other NRI husband can ever dare to cheat a woman. I also want stringent laws in place to check such men," she said. She said she has received a call from the ministry to send relevant documents in connection with her case. "I want him back here for divorce so that I can start my life afresh," she said. Kaur got married to Ramandeep, who was working as an accountant in Auckland, in July 2015. He returned to New Zealand in August 2015, Kaur said.

"I stayed with him at his family's house in Jalandhar," she said. He again came back to India in December 2015 and returned to New Zealand in January 2016, she said. "I spent just 40-45 days with my husband," she said. She alleged that the behaviour of her in-laws changed after marriage. "They told me that they had disowned Ramandeep so I should move back with my parents," Kaur claimed. "I tried calling my husband but he did not respond. I even tried to contact members of my in-laws' family but they also refused to respond and blocked my number," she said.

Kaur then lodged a complaint against her husband in August 2016. He was booked under charges of criminal breach of trust among others. A Look Out Circular was also issued against Ramandeep, she said. A police official in Jalandhar said Ramandeep was declared a PO in February 2017. (PTI)

Pellet guns: SC asks JK lawyers' body to respond to issues raised by the Centre

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10 /-

The Supreme Court today asked the Jammu and Kashmir High Court Bar Association to respond to the issues raised by the Centre which defended the use of pellet guns to quell stone-pelting mobs in Kashmir valley, stressing that the lawyers' body cannot take sides. The apex court sought the Bar's response after the Centre explained to the Supreme Court the circumstances under which security forces use measures like pellet guns. The apex court told the Bar it has to play a very important role in assisting the court in evolving a solution and cannot take sides. The Bar is neither on the side of the security forces nor on the mob's side, the court said and gave two weeks time to the lawyers' body to come out with its submission so that a solution can be found and asked it to file an affidavit. The matter has now been posted for April 28. The apex court noted the submission of attorney General (AG) Mukul

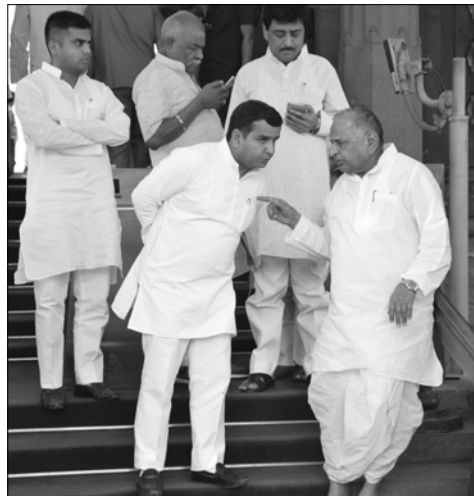
Rohatgi that the security forces try to use minimum force to avoid any damage to life and property and eventually use pellet guns and live ammunition in the final stage when the mobs come in immediate proximity to the security forces. The bench headed by Chief Justice S Khehar also took into consideration the submission made by Jammu and Kashmir High Court Bar Association, Srinagar which contended that the Centre was not coming out with a clear-cut scenario and expressed its willingness to assist the court. The bench also comprising Justices D Chandrachud and S K Kaul said that the Bar was in an effective position to bring out true factual position to assist the court in giving directions which will be meaningful. The bench reminded the Bar body that it has to play a very important role in assisting the court in evolving the solution as the lawyers in the Bar were privileged people. At the outset,

the Attorney General, in response to the last hearing, placed before the bench confidential documents about the deliberations undertaken to evolve options other than the use of pellet guns for tackling mobs which resort to stone-pelting and attacks by petrol bombs, acid bombs and other deadly weapons. The apex court had on March 27 expressed concern over the pellet gun injuries suffered by minors who indulged in stone pelting in Jammu and Kashmir and asked the Centre to consider other effective means to quell the protests as it concerns "life and death". It had conceded that though the use of pellet guns by the security forces was not a judicial issue, it can intervene in the matter to find a solution acceptable to parties concerned. The court had given two weeks time to Attorney General to ponder over the suggestions to look into effective alternatives to the pellet guns. It had said that it is not the subject that has to be de-

ferred by the courts nor can there be a judicial redressal as it is a delicate situation. The court had suggested to the Attorney General to consider other technology-based measures like micro-wave to disperse the protesters and water which tastes and smell awful that will make people go away. The AG had said he will speak to the committee of experts which has prepared an interim report on the use of effective measures in October 2016 and get back to the court after two weeks.

During the last hearing, the bench had expressed its concern over minors indulging in stone pelting and suffering injuries during protests. It had asked the Centre to take some alternative measures to deal with such situations so that minors do not get injured. On December 14 last year, the apex court had said pellet guns should not be used "indiscriminately" for controlling street protests in Jammu and Kashmir and be resorted to only after "proper applica-

tion of mind" by the authorities. It had also sought assistance of the Attorney General on the issue and asked him to submit a copy of the report submitted by the expert committee constituted for exploring other alternatives to pellet guns. The court was hearing an appeal filed by Jammu and Kashmir High Court Bar Association against the high court order seeking stay on the use of pellet guns as a large number of people had been killed or injured due to their use. The Jammu and Kashmir High Court had on September 22 rejected the plea seeking a ban on the use of pellet guns on the ground that the Centre had already constituted a Committee of Experts through its memorandum of July 26, 2016 for exploring alternatives to pellet guns. Taking note of the statement, the high court had disposed of the petition, saying that no further direction was required since the matter was being looked at by the Centre. (PTI)



Samaajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav coming out of Parliament house, in New Delhi

Oppn punches holes in Aadhaar scheme

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10 /-

Punching holes in the Aadhaar scheme, the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha today said it was based on unverified data and violated the Supreme Court order that it should not be made mandatory for schemes which are not linked to subsidies. They also raised concern over data integrity and privacy issues while attacking the government for using the Aadhaar system to "exclude" the beneficiaries for delivery of subsidies and claiming to have made huge government savings. Just before a short duration debate on Aadhaar started in the Upper House, IT and Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said the government saved about Rs 50,000 crore LPG subsidy due to the linking of Aadhaar card with Jhan Dhan accounts. "The World Bank and a UN body have clearly stated that the extra-ordinary technological innovation of India needs to be followed by the world. Surely they (UPA government) started it, but after improvements, it is showing results and the benefits have to be considered objectively," he said. The

Aadhaar scheme was started by the UPA government. "Now there is a robust legislation that has laid down the entire format of how the biometric data will be collected, processed, stored and under what terms and conditions will it be used," Prasad said. If it is unauthorised use of Aadhaar card details, the law provides for prosecution and punishment for up to 3 years, he added. Initiating the debate, Rajya Sabha member Chandrashekar (Ind) expressed concern over fake Aadhaar cards, data integrity and privacy issues and also exclusion of subsidies by making it mandatory. He said he was not against the Aadhaar system but the risks and problems need to be addressed by the government. The government should not take a "rigid position". On fake Aadhaar cards, Chandrashekar said the government has inherited "100 crore unverified database" created prior to bringing the law in 2016. These 100 crore entries do not come under the section 303 of the Aadhaar Act. The section provides for issue of Aadhaar card only after verification, he said. "What has

Unique Identity Authority of India (UIDAI) done to comply with section 303 for all Aadhaar entries prior to 2016?... Who is responsible for verifying these 100 crore entries before it is used as identity for elections, bank accounts and entering the airports for CISF?" When there is "clear evidence" of fake Aadhaar, he sought to know what safeguards the UIDAI had taken before permitting Aadhaar for use as an identification beyond delivering subsidies. "This needs to be answered," he said. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh attacked the government for violating Supreme Court orders which clearly outlined where to use Aadhaar. Making it mandatory beyond subsidies is in gross violation of the SC orders, he said. Expressing grave concern over implementation of the scheme, he said making Aadhaar mandatory for availing subsidies was resulting in exclusion of beneficiaries and the government cannot claim to have saved huge subsidies by this. Elaborating on implementation of the scheme, he said the government claims

to have saved Rs 49,000 crore LPG subsidies by linking with Aadhaar but a CAG report has debunked this in a recent report. The CAG has found that 82 per cent of the savings in LPG subsidy was due to fall in global crude oil prices and not due to Aadhaar seeding, he said, adding that similar was the case with food subsidy, old-age pension and MNREGA. "You must have had some savings, but saying it was around Rs 50,000 crore subsidy is mind-boggling," Ramesh said, adding that PDS, old-age pension and MNREGA were three schemes where maximum exclusion was taking place. Citing PDS data of Rajasthan, he said 26 per cent of beneficiaries could not draw PDS wheat last month and "that is exclusion and not savings". In case of MNREGA, officials are so much under pressure to achieve 100 per cent Aadhaar seeding that workers are denied of wages. For example in Chitradurga district in Karnataka, Rs 10-15 crore of wages are not paid on time as local functionaries are busy with Aadhaar seed-



Members of Bharatiya Kisan Ganghri raising slogans during a demonstration to press their various demands at Jantar Mantra, in New Delhi.

Tamil Nadu farmers strip in front of PM's office

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10 /-

Resorting to dramatic forms of protest, a group of Tamil Nadu farmers today stripped near South Block here to press for their demands for loan waiver and drought-relief package. The farmers have been protesting at the Jantar Mantra in the national capital since March 14. Police said that they escorted the peasants from Jantar Mantra to Prime Minister's Office (PMO) where they submitted a memorandum of their demands. After coming out, some of them tried to remove their clothes, a senior police officer said, adding that the situation was brought under control and the farmers were dropped at the protest site. The farmers from the southern state have been demanding a drought relief package of Rs 40,000 crore, farm loan waiver and setting of Cereals Management Board by the Centre. (PTI)

Oppn in RS alleges CBI, ED being used for political purposes

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10 /-

Opposition Congress today forced two adjournments of Rajya Sabha proceedings in the pre-noon session over alleged misuse of ED and CBI against Chief Ministers belonging to non-BJP parties. The Congress members sought suspension of business to discuss alleged "unleashing" of Enforcement Directorate and CBI against Chief Ministers and former Chief Ministers belonging to opposition parties and the enforcement agencies turning a blind eye to alleged "nepotism", "corruption" and "money laundering" by their BJP counterparts. But when their notices under rule 267 was disallowed, Congress members trooped into the Well of the House raising slogans. Deputy Chairman P J Kurien first adjourned the proceedings for 10 minutes. But when House reassembled and similar unruly scenes were witnessed again, he was forced to adjourn the proceedings for another five minutes. When the House met for the day, Anand Sharma (Cong) said bonafide decisions are taken by elected Chief Ministers and the state governments for allotment of land and there is no state which is exception to this rule. Without naming anyone, he said the central government, in "blatant" abuse of authority, was using ED to target former Chief Ministers belonging to the opposition parties and FIRs are being registered against them. His reference was apparently to the attachment of properties belonging to Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh and BJP summoning him in connection with an alleged money-laundering case. "Government is protecting the wrong-doings of its own Chief Ministers" who face accusations of "money laundering, nepotism and corruption", Sharma said. In states like Madhya Pradesh, land allotted for a newspaper has been converted for commercial use, while in Haryana, land has been allotted to a commercial organisation Patanjali, he alleged, saying change of land use was being allowed in BJP-ruled states. "CBI, ED is being used for political vendetta," he charged. "They can have secret 'rules and laws' for opposition ruled states and the BJP-ruled ones. He said BJP-ruled states face serious cases of "nepotism, corruption and money laundering". As Kurien said the notice on the issue was not permitted, Leader of Opposition Ghulam Nabi Azad also alleged that the CBI and the ED were being unleashed against non-BJP chief ministers. He said the "wrong-doings" of BJP Chief Ministers were being ignored while enforcement agencies were being "let loose against opposition Chief Ministers." Kurien said in the wrong doings of Chief Minister have to be discussed in the respective state assemblies but not in Parliament. Dissatisfied, Congress members trooped into the Well of the House and shouted slogans. "You cannot force me by coming to the Well and shouting," Kurien said. "Even if you come and shout here, I am not going to be cowed down by that. I am not going to allow (notice under rule 267)." He asked members to go back to their seats saying there were 11 zero hour notices that he has received. As members were unrelenting, he adjourned the proceedings for 10 minutes. When the House met again, similar scenes were witnessed. Kurien said once he has not allowed, Sharma however said the land given to newspapers in BJP-ruled states was being converted into commercial complexes. Amid slogan-shouting by Congress members in the Well, Kurien called Sambhaji Shahu Chhatrapati (Nominated) to make his Zero Hour submission. In the din, he raised the issue of pollution of Ganga river. Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation said Rs 20,000 crore has been provided through a non-lapsable fund. As much as Rs 13,000 crore has been provided for new projects like sewage treatment plants, industrial effluent treatment plants and crematorium. "We will complete the projects on time," she said amidst the din. Kurien then went on to call other members who had given Zero Hour notices but the din continued. "I have got 11 notices with me. I am seeing majority of members are sitting and a handful of members are holding the House to ransom," he said. As members like Tapan Sen (CPI-M) refused to make their Zero Hour submission in the din, Kurien said he was not to be blamed for it. "I am not responsible. If members are not behaving, Chair is not responsible," he said before adjourning the proceedings for the second time for 5 minutes. (PTI)

Modi, Turnbull visit Akshardham Temple

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10 /-

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Malcolm Turnbull today visited the iconic Swaminarayan Akshardham Temple in Delhi using metro ride to reach the landmark. The two leaders were welcomed by priests with garlands upon their arrival at the temple. A priest also read a prayer to their wrists as Modi explained its significance to Turnbull. Before stepping into the temple, the two leaders obliged photographers too. "Visited the magnificent Akshardham Temple with PM Narendra Modi and Malcolm Turnbull along with a set of photographs. They shared a Metro ride from Mandi House to Akshardham station. They also took a tour on a golf cart to see other attractions within the temple complex. As they walked on the temple steps, a priest, who they flanked, ac-

quainted them with its architecture. Turnbull was seen admiring the temple structure, adorned with arches and gables. The temple is run by priests from the Swaminarayan sect and was opened to the public in 2005. Both leaders also sat on the steps of the temple and were seen chatting. Swaminarayan sect is a modern spiritual tradition. A sub-sect of Vaishnava Hinduism, it originated in Gujarat. Its followers devote to and worship Swaminarayan as a form of Parabrahma. The sect has temples in various parts of the world, including in the US and Australia. The sect has temples in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth are among other cities which have Swaminarayan temples. The Australian Prime Minister arrived New Delhi yesterday on a four-day visit. Meanwhile, Turnbull who is on his way to India, will be visiting the city tomorrow.