

Aiyar calls PM "neech aadmi", Modi hits back

Rahul disapproves, says he expects senior leader to apologise

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 /-- Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar today kicked up a row when he called Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "neech" (vile man), drawing a sharp reaction from the latter who dubbed it as an "insult" to Gujarat and a reflection of "Mughal mentality".

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi too disapproved of Aiyar's remarks and said both he and the party expected the senior leader to apologise. "He (Modi) is 'neech kism ka aadmi' (a vile man) who has no



'sabhayta' (civility), Aiyar, who has often courted controversy with his off-the-cuff remarks said, attacking Modi after the latter accused the Congress of seeking votes in B R

saying parties seeking votes in the name of the architect of the Indian Constitution's name tried to erase his contribution to nation building.

"Such was his (Ambedkar's) incredible strength that when years after his demise efforts were made by such people to crush his philosophy, when efforts were made to erase his contribution towards nation building, his ideals could not be wiped out from people's memory," Aiyar said. He said he would not be wrong in say-

ing that "more people are still influenced by his (Ambedkar's) ideas than the family for which such efforts (to erase his contribution) were made". Aiyar asked Modi:

"What is the need for doing dirty politics on such an occasion?" Modi, who was in Surat, latched on to the Congress leader's comments, saying it was an insult to Gujarat. "It was Mani Shankar Aiyar today said I belong to 'neech' caste. I am 'neech' (vile), this is an insult to Gujarat," he told an election rally. This is

Mughal mentality which hates people who even wear good clothes," he said but asked BJP workers and supporters not to respond to Aiyar's remarks.

Reacting to Aiyar's comment, Congress vice-president later tweeted: "BJP and PM routinely use filthy language to attack the Congress party. The Congress has a different culture and heritage. I do not appreciate the tone and language used by Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar to address the PM. Both the Congress and I expect him to apologise for what he said

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 /-- A Delhi court today framed graft and criminal conspiracy charges against 11 former parliamentarians in the infamous 2005 cash-for-query scam.

Special Judge Kiran Bansal put the 11 former MPs and an individual on trial, which will commence from January 12. The former MPs accused in the case are Y G Mahajan (BJP), Chhatrapal Singh Lodha (BJP), Anna Sahab M K Patil (BJP), Manoj Kumar (BJP), Chandra Pratap Singh (BJP), Ram Sewak Singh (Congress), Narendra Kumar Kushwaha (BSP), Pradeep Gandhi (BJP), Suresh Chandel (BJP), Lal Chandra Kol (BJP) and Raja Rampal (BSP).

A sting operation against the then MPs was conducted by two journalists which was telecast on a private news channel on December 12, 2006. It came to be known as the cash-for-query scam. The prosecution had relied upon CDs/DVDs containing conversations among the accused and others. The court also framed charges against Rampal's then PA, Ravinder Kumar, special public prosecutor Atul Shivastava said.

The proceedings against one of an accused, Vijay Phogat, have been abated as he has passed away. Phogat was alleged to be a middleman.

Centre should disapprove of US move vis-a-vis Palestine: CPM

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 /-- The CPM today accused the US of legalising the illegal occupation of Palestine's territories by Israel and demanded that the Centre strongly disapprove of the decision.

The CPM politburo condemned the decision of US President Donald Trump to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and shift the US embassy there from Tel Aviv. Disapproving of Trump's decision, the Left party said the action went against the international community's stand that East Jerusalem was the capital occupied by Israel since 1967. "An independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is the internationally accepted position. The United States has taken the formal step of legalising the illegal occupation of Palestine's territories by Israel. No other country in the world has given recognition to Jerusalem as Israel's capital," it said in a statement. The party held the US responsible for scuttling any possible peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine. It warned that Trump's decision would trigger further tension and conflicts in the region with global ramifications.

The CPM also slammed the BJP-led central government for refusing to criticise the US decision and said, "It shows the extent of servility of the (Narendra) Modi regime to the United States". The party demanded that the "Modi government should condemn the decision of approving of the US action, as it goes against India's long-standing commitment to the Palestinian cause". The Leftist party today also accused the BJP-led Union government of lacking the political will to deal with crimes against women. Reacting to the latest report of the National Crimes Records Bureau, showing a steady increase in crimes against women and an alarming rise in sexual assaults on children, former CPM general secretary Prakash Karat has said the "figures highlight the all-round failure to provide a safe and secure environment for women and children, a promise made by the BJP in its (2014) Lok Sabha election manifesto".

Demand to sack Sibal from Cong for his appeal on Ayodhya case

LUCKNOW, DEC 7 /-- A senior Muslim Congress leader today wrote to party president Sonia Gandhi demanding that Kapil Sibal be sacked from the party for moving the Supreme Court seeking to defer the Ayodhya hearing.

"Sibal should be sacked or he should resign from the party on moral grounds. At a time when the party has unanimously proposed to make Rahul Gandhi its president, his statements in court are damaging," former Congress MLC, vice-president and chairman of the party's minority department Siraj Mehdi said. He said party spokesman Ranjit Singh Surjewala's statement that it was a personal view of Sibal and not of the Congress party would not do. "Sibal's statement came when Gujarat elections are going on and Assembly elections are due in many states next year. He has always given statements which are damaging for the party," Mehdi said. All sides agreed to abide by the apex court's advice of resolving the Ayodhya dispute through talks, he said. "Other people nor parties (in Ayodhya dispute) agree to Sibal's statement in court," Mehdi added. Senior Congress leader and lawyer Kapil Sibal had moved the top court seeking to defer the hearing of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid title dispute till after the 2019 general polls.

Posters seeking support for Ahmed Patel as CM stir controversy in Surat

SURAT, DEC 7 /-- Posters appealing Muslims to vote for Congress to make Ahmed Patel the chief minister came up in some minority dominated areas here on the last day of campaigning for first phase of Gujarat polls, but Patel called it a "dirty trick" by the BJP and said he was not in the race.

Patel, who is Congress president Sonia Gandhi's political advisor, stressed that he was not a candidate for the chief minister's post and "never will be". The posters that came up in old city area and Surat-East constituency of the diamond and trading hub which goes for poll, Saturday carried photos of Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi and Ahmed Patel. "Muslims are requested to vote for Congress party to maintain unity of the community and make Ahmed Patel wazir-e-alam (chief minister) of Gujarat," read the posters.

Trashing the posters, Patel alleged that such acts show the "utter desperation" of the BJP as it fears defeat. "Putting up fake posters and organising rumour campaign shows the utter desperation of the

BJP. "Fearing defeat, do they have to rely on such dirty tricks? I have never been a candidate for CM and will never, ever be," Patel tweeted. He said the BJP is trying to divert the narrative from its performance to a divisive agenda. "The moot issue is that BJP is trying very hard to divert the narrative from its performance of last 22 years to a divisive agenda. Hence their reliance on lies & propaganda. But people of Gujarat have made up their mind this time," Patel said in another tweet. Congress leader RPN Singh today said Patel will not hold any post in Gujarat if that is what he is doing.

"We have seen fake banners that have come up at many places in Gujarat (in the name of Congress, claiming Ahmed Patel will become the chief minister). There has to be a certain level of politics in a democracy, and Rahul Gandhi and Congress party do not go below that level," Singh said. "But doing something like putting up posters of opposition parties and deciding that Ahmed Patel will be our chief minister is not right," he told newsmen in Ahmedabad.

country had supported Sinha's agitation.

"We (referring to Uddhav Thackeray) too spoke to Sinha over phone. The question is about farmers' life and death and thus not worrying about what will happen to power, we supported his agitation," the party said in an editorial in a monthly magazine 'Saamana'. The Sena said that Sinha was never a mass leader but a "bureaucrat-turned-politician". "Yes, if farmers supported his agitation, it should ring alarm bells for the BJP and the government. The government should fulfill the demands of farmers of Akola while it has the time," it opined.

Seeking to know what issues of farmers were resolved by the BJP-led government at the Centre and in Maharashtra, the Sena claimed that farm loan waiver was announced by the state government only

Rajkot City Congress Committee

Press Meet with Dr. Manmohan Singh



Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with senior Congress leaders addressing a press conference in Rajkot on Thursday.

Like a magnet, Rahul will attract parties to fight BJP, says Moily

HYDERABAD, DEC 7 /-- Rahul Gandhi, who is poised to become the Congress president, has the capability to bring together other like-minded parties for a joint fight against the BJP, senior party leader M Veerappa Moily said today.

The former Union minister also said that the Congress vice-president had acquired certain qualities of his great grandfather Jawaharlal Nehru and grandmother Indira Gandhi. Moily rejected the criticism that the Congress indulged in a "dynamic rule" within the party, saying that if Rahul Gandhi wanted to become the prime minister, he could have done so (during the 2004-2014 UPA rule). "Rahul is known for his humility and the other parties would definitely cooperate with him, given his absolute sense in taking democracy, secularism and socialism forward," the former Karnataka chief minister told news agency PTI.

He (Rahul) is more like

a magnet to attract the parties, which do not believe in communal politics. Such parties will have a natural tendency to go along with Rahul," the Congress leader said. "Apart from consolidating the Congress, he (Rahul) will ensure that there is a proper understanding between all the like-minded parties, an understanding to jointly fight the communal elements," he added. The former Union law minister said Rahul had undergone a lot of "trials and tribulations", gained experience in governance and strengthening the organisation and evolved as a "dynamic leader".

He (Rahul) has acquired the qualities, particularly of Jawaharlal Nehru, his vision for the country, for secularism and socialistic values, with an excellent rooting in the heritage of the country which Nehru possessed. "Rahul could have even become the prime minister or a powerful minister (during the UPA rule), but he preferred to strengthen the organisation in a big way, which is a great quality," the former Union minister said.

Navy extends help to Singapore vessel

KOCHI, DEC 7 /-- The Indian Navy engaged in search and rescue operations in Cyclone Ockhikhi seas off Kerala and Lakshadweep extended help by giving fuel to a foreign vessel stranded off Minicoy Island.

INS Shardul encountered tug 'Bes Power' of Singapore stranded due to the cyclone 35 nautical miles north-east of Minicoy Island late on Wednesday night. On interrogation, the tug crew requested 45 tonnes of fuel to continue passage to Maldives.

"Fuel was transferred to the tug in true naval ethos of being the first responder to all," a defence spokesman said here today.

Meanwhile, a Dornier aircraft and a ship of the Navy have left for rescuing a boat stranded with 15 persons near Lakshadweep islands after receiving a message through an aircraft flying near Kochi, the spokesman said.

He also said a Coast Guard Ship Vaibhav has recovered two bodies off Alappuzha.

Yashwant's protest for farmers issues an alarm bell for Govt: Sena

MUMBAI, DEC 7 /-- The Shiv Sena today said the response garnered by BJP veteran Yashwant Sinha's agitation in Maharashtra over farmers' issues should set off alarm bells for the state government.

The former Union minister, who has had frequent run-ins with the current BJP leadership, was detained on Monday evening while protesting outside the Akola district collector's office against the state government's "apathy" towards the farmers of Vidarbha. Shiv Sena president Uddhav Thackeray had spoken to the 80-year-old leader over phone on Tuesday and discussed farmers' issues. Sinha had on Wednesday called off his three-day-old protest in Akola, saying chief minister Devendra Fadnis had assured him that their demands will be met. The Sena today noted that prominent leaders of the

India, NZ share common values, common concerns: Envoy

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 /-- India and New Zealand have warm and long-standing relationship and share common values and concerns, including in areas of counter-terrorism and cyber security, New Zealand's envoy Joanna Kempfers today said.

Addressing a gathering at the New Zealand-India Sustainability Challenge 2017 here, the High Commissioner also noted that "Hindi is now the fourth most spoken language in New Zealand." "We both share common values, such as democracy, and sustainability, and we also have some worries. So, that means (working on) counter-terrorism and cyber security," Kempfers said. She said the Indian community in New Zealand was contributing to the growth story of his country. Sustainability is of important to us. A large part of energy in the country is sourced through renewable resources, she said. "Over 80 per cent of the electricity is sourced from renewable source. Also, New Zealand is planning to go carbon-free by 2020. So, we are on the path," the envoy said.

Six finalists, whittled down from 90 shortlisted teams, presented their ideas today to a jury at the event. "Each team consisted of two students from Indian institutions and one from a university in New Zealand, who worked under a mentor," said an official of TERI, a partner of the competition. The ideas pitched ranged from clean energy to waste management. The three partnering universities from New Zealand are University of Canterbury, University of Otago and University of Waikato.

Delhi HC seeks JD-U MP's response on Sharad Yadav faction plea for symbol

NEW DELHI, DEC 7 /-- The Delhi High Court today sought the response of Janata Dal-United (JD-U) leader Ramachandra Prasad Singh on a plea by K Rajasekaran, the newly-appointed president of Sharad Yadav faction of the party, against the poll panel's order on the allotment of the 'Arrow' symbol.

Justice Indermeeet Kaur issued notice in the matter to the Election Commission (EC) and Singh, JD-U MP in Rajya Sabha, on Rajasekaran's plea which also challenges the Election Commission's finding that the faction led by Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar was the real JD-U. The EC counsel said since it has passed a reasoned order on November 25 supporting his decision, it would not be filing a reply in the matter, which the court listed for hearing on February 19. The lawyers for Singh argued that Rajasekaran was not a party in the case when it was before the EC. They also said that the Yadav faction had on November 23

withdrewn their earlier plea on the same issue. To this, senior advocate Kapil Sibal and advocate Nizam Fasha, appearing for Rajasekaran, said the earlier plea was withdrawn as the poll panel had not given reasons for its decision in its earlier order of November 17.

Kumar and Yadav had parted ways after the former had decided to join hands with the BJP in July, triggering a battle for the control of the party. The Sharad Yadav faction had earlier moved the High court against the EC's November 17 order which had ruled in favour of Kumar's faction with regard to which group was the real JD-U, but the poll panel had not given reasons for arriving at the decision. The poll panel gave a reasoned order on November 25, Rajasekaran, in his plea, has sought the setting aside of the November 25 order of the EC. The earlier plea was moved by Gujarat MLA Chottubhai Vasava, who was then the acting president of the Yadav faction of the JD-U.

VISAKHAPATNAM, DEC 7 /-- President Ram Nath Kovind today inaugurated the Naval Maritime Aircraft Museum here, featuring the maritime patrol aircraft Tupolev-142M, which served the Navy for almost three decades.

The museum, located at the famous Beach Road, will feature the reconnaissance and anti-submarine warfare aircraft which was decommissioned in March this year.

With four engines and eight propellers, the TU-

Centre has got commitments of Rs 1,500 cr from corporate, industrialists for Ganga cleaning: Gadkari

MUMBAI, DEC 7 /-- Union minister Nitin Gadkari today said the Centre has garnered commitments worth Rs 1,500 crore from international and domestic corporates, and industrialists for cleaning of river Ganga.

Gadkari, who was in the city to promote the cause of Ganga rejuvenation, had invited over 150 industrialists, chief executive officers and managing directors to discuss the issue. "I was in London last week to kick off a roadshow to promote the (Ganga rejuvenation) project. We have got commitments worth Rs 1,000

crore from various institutions and the UK-based business community," the minister for river development and Ganga rejuvenation told newsmen here.

"In addition, we have commitments worth Rs 500 crore from the domestic industry as well," he said.

Gadkari said that the riverfront regeneration and development of ghats in Patna, Kanpur, Haridwar and Kolkata have been taken up by leading industrialists from the UK. He said he also planned to visit major cities, including Chennai, Bengaluru and Kolkata, subsequently, he



20,000 crore, he said. So far, around 97 projects have been announced of which about 55 have been initiated, Gadkari said. About 15 of these are under the public-private partnership model under which operations will be maintained by the private sector, he said.

"We will float tenders for the remaining projects, and plan to get them all underway by March 2018," he said. On the development of over 4,500 villages and towns along the Ganga, Gadkari said the government is working on an integrated development project of these villages.

erment spent Rs 10 crore over four months for the museum project, the official said, adding the Visakhapatnam Urban Development Authority will look after the museum.

"With four engines and eight propellers, the TU-

President inaugurates naval maritime aircraft museum

142 was the most formidable aircraft in the world while in service, an official said. The Soviet era aircraft had an accident-free record and served in various operations including aerial war, he added. The Andhra Pradesh gov-

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