



THE ECHO OF INDIA



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Sitharaman-Rahul duel over Rafale

HENNAI, NOV 18 /-/- Defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman today slammed the previous UPA government for not taking a decision on the Rafale fighter jet deal for about 10 years and said she could not spell out in detail what happened due to the delay as it involved the nation's security. Sitharaman said no decision was taken in the matter between 2004 and 2013, during the UPA dispensation after several rounds of discussion. "After being in power for 10 years...you (Congress party-led UPA) went without taking a decision," she said. The minister said she could not spell out in detail about what happened due to the decision as the issue involved the nation's security. The minister said that after the NDA assumed power in 2014, the inter-governmental route was opted for expeditious procurement of 36 Rafale fighter jets in fly-away condition with France after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's discussions with the Air Force. Stating that the UPA government could not complete the procurement, she said the BJP-led dispensation did it, "considering our necessity and in view of urgency." The procurement order was placed "properly" and "by not slipping away" from any procedures. The Cabinet Committee on Security nod was obtained and all formalities were complied with, Sitharaman told newsmen responding to a question on the sidelines of a CUE event. "This government is functioning without any sort of corruption," she said when asked why the Congress party was raising the issue now. Hitting back at the defence minister over the multi-core deal, Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi today claimed that it was "shameful" that her boss was "silencing" her. Rahul also asked whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi had taken permission from the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) before announcing the purchase of the Rafale fighter aircraft in Paris. The Congress had raised several questions on the deal, accusing the government of compromising national interest and security while promoting "crony capitalism" and causing a loss to the public exchequer. "Dear RM, what's shameful is your boss silencing you. Please tell us. Final price of each Rafale jet? Did PM take CCS permission before announcing purchase in Paris? 3. Why PM bypassed experienced HAL and gave the deal to AAR defence businessman with no defence experience", the Congress leader tweeted.

Five militants gunned down, IAF Garud commando killed in Bandipora encounter

DGMO asks Pak counterpart to take steps to ensure peace along LoC

SRINAGAR, NOV 18 /-/- Five militants were gunned down in north Kashmir's Bandipora district today in an encounter in which a Garud commando of the Indian Air Force (IAF) was also killed, a defence spokesperson said. Security forces cordoned off and launched a search operation in Chandroger village in Hajin area of the district after receiving specific intelligence input about the presence of militants in the area, a police official said. The search operation resulted in an encounter when the militants hiding there, fired on the search party of the security forces, who retaliated. "Five terrorists have been killed in an ongoing encounter at Hajin," Srinagar-based Defence spokesman Col Rajesh Kalia said here. An IAF Garud commando was killed and an Army soldier was injured in the encounter, he said. The Garud Commando Force is

the special force unit of the IAF. The operation was on and further details were awaited, Kalia said. Meanwhile, Indian Army's Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) today asked his Pakistani counterpart to take steps to ensure peace and tranquillity along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir. During a telephonic conversation, Lt Gen A K Bhatt told his Pakistani counterpart that there appeared to be a "disconnect" between the Pakistani Army's reiteration about the desire for peace and the action of its troops, official sources said. Citing various incidents, Bhatt said that Pakistani troops resort to heavy firing without provocation, they said. The telephonic conversation between the two DGMOs took place following a request by the Pakistani side. Lt Gen Bhatt impressed upon the Pakistani DGMO Maj Gen



Sahit Shamsah Mirza that there appeared to be a "disconnect" between the intent at the Pakistani General Headquarters which reiterates its desire for peace and the actions of Pakistani troops along the Line of Control, who resort to heavy firing without

provocation," a source said. Bhatt further exhorted his Pakistani counterpart to resolve this "existent credibility gap" to ensure that peace and tranquillity is maintained along the LoC. The Pakistani Army DGMO alleged that Indian security forces have

resorted to unprovoked firing and targeted civilians along the LoC in the Poonch sector. Bhatt, however, made it clear that the Indian Army always maintains impeccable standards of professionalism and does not target civilians in any manner.

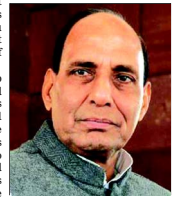
Rajnath asks J&K govt to shift juveniles from jails to remand homes

New Delhi, Nov 18 /-/- Union home minister Rajnath Singh has asked the Jammu and Kashmir government to move all juveniles, arrested for pelting stones and other unlawful activities, from jails to remand homes and review their cases sympathetically, officials said. The decision is considered to be an attempt to reach out to the people of Jammu and Kashmir by the Union government after the appointment of Dineshwar Sharma as the Centre's special representative to initiate talks with all stakeholders. The issue was discussed in detail at Wednesday's meeting of the core group on Kashmir, chaired by the union home minister and attended by defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman and national security advisor Ajit Doval, where it was decided to ask the Jammu and Kashmir government to work on the cases of juveniles.

After the core group meeting, the Jammu and Kashmir government has been asked to shift all juveniles, who were arrested for pelting stones and other crimes, to remand homes and review their cases sympathetically, a home ministry, privy to the development, told news agency PTI. The state government is expected to take the initiative to shift the juveniles to remand homes and review their cases soon, the official said. Top officials of ministries of home and defence, chiefs of intelligence agencies, besides Sharma also attended the meeting.

The Centre's special representative also briefed the union home minister and others about his first round of talks he had with various sections of the society there last week. Sharma will again visit the state soon to continue his mission of holding a sustained dialogue process. However, the anti-militancy operations in Jammu and Kashmir will go on even though the central government has appointed the special representative to initiate talks with all stakeholders in an effort to bring a lasting peace in Jammu and Kashmir with violence by Pakistan-based militants groups continuing unabated. Director General of Police of Jammu and Kashmir S P Vaid had recently said that around 170 militants were gunned down by the security forces in Jammu and Kashmir this year.

Two Army soldiers were killed and a CRPF jawan suffered injuries in an encounter in Pulwama district of the state on November 2. Three militants were gunned down in Pulwama in an encounter in which an Army jawan was also killed on November 6. Three militants, including Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Maulana Masood Azhar's nephew, were gunned down by security forces in Pulwama district on November 7.



Chidambaram mocks at Govt's sudden love for Moody's Nothing to celebrate rating, says Yechury

Mumbai, Nov 18 /-/- Mocking at Union government's elevation over the sovereign rating upgrade by Moody's, ex-finance minister P Chidambaram said only a few months ago the regime had flayed the rating methodology. "Just some months ago, government had said the Moody's methodology was all wrong... A long letter was written by Shaktikanta Das (ex-economic affairs secretary) questioning Moody's ratings methodology, saying they've revised their methodology as it's all wanky," Chidambaram told the Tata Literature Live here today. Moody's had on Friday upgraded the sovereign ratings by a notch to Baa2 with stable outlook, citing the Modi government's various reform programme and higher growth prospectus. The last rating upgrade was in 2004. Ridiculing the way government has reacted to the upward rating revision, the senior Congress leader recalled that for the government Moody's, whose methodology was all wrong circa 2016. "On higher growth, which was cited by the agency as one of the key reasons for the rating action, he said the same agency and government project growth at 6.7 per cent for the current financial year. "It was 8 per cent in 2015-16, 7.1 per cent in 2016-17 and will be 6.7 per cent in 2017-18. Is that North or South, you conclude," he said. According to him, there are three key indicators - gross fixed capital formation and within that private sector investment; credit growth, especially for small businesses, and jobs - which are critical to assess the health of an economy. "But the dashboard is flashing red on all these three indicators," he lamented. Reeling out numbers, Chidambaram said gross fixed capital formation is down 7.0 points from its peak and there's no sign of

it recovering in the near future as well. In Kolkata, CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury said today there was nothing to celebrate about the Moody's upgrading India's sovereign credit rating as the country "lags" behind in all parameters of other global indices. Yechury also criticised the Narendra Modi-led government for delaying the winter session of the parliament and said these were the "signs" that it was not willing to face the House. "The government is trying to represent the upgradation of India's ranking by Moody's rating agency as a sign of progress. But what is this rating all about? This rating tells us in which country the industrialists and investors will have more profit," he said at a party programme here.

"More profit to investors mean more oppression of working class and this cannot be a reason to celebrate. India has turned into a junior partner of US imperialism," he said. The country, the Communist leader said, "lags" behind other nations, even Bangladesh, in various global indices of growth such as education, eradication of hunger, poverty and employment. Adding to the attack on Centre, another former Union minister Kapil Sibal today said that Moody's upgrade of India's ranking is in sharp contrast with the mood of the people. Without naming the government, Sibal said it should worry about the "loss of livelihood of millions" during its tenure rather than basking in the glory of the upgrade. Taking to Twitter, the senior leader said the agency talks about "sunshine tomorrow", while people are worried about the "dark clouds" of today. "Contrast the mood at Moody's with the mood of the people. While you bask under their upgrade worry about livelihood millions have lost," he tweeted.



After GBU Malda St Xavier's school faces deadlock

BOICORRESPONDENT MALDA, NOV 19 /-/- One of the oldest English medium schools in the district - The St Xavier's School under Council for the Indian school certificate examinations (CISCE) undergoes a crisis as examination centre of ICSE & ISC examinations from the school has been shifted to Kolkata from Malda by the council following several allegations of mismanagement. The crisis deepened further as principal of the school Abhijit Jha, who tendered his resignation last week, now intends to be reinstated against the collective objection of majority of teachers and non-teaching employees. Many guardians have also opposed the attempt of Jha's return. Prasanta Roy, a senior teacher of the school has been appointed as teacher-in-charge (TIC) of the school. Jha, however, claims that he wants to withdraw his resignation in larger interest of the students and after being persuaded by a section of guardians. Additional district magistrate (education) Debatosh Mandal has convened a meeting inviting all concerned to resolve the crisis on Sunday at 12 noon. "We have invited both Jha and Roy to the meeting. Teachers' representatives, guardian-members and governing body members are invited also," Mandal said. "Our basic objective is to help the ICSE & ISC examinees so that they can write their papers in any school in Malda instead of Kolkata," the ADM (education) added. Teachers of the school have strongly resented the decision of inviting Jha to the meeting. Roy said, "Jha has resigned and his resignation letter has been accepted by the secretary of school's governing body. Hence, he has no right to attend the meeting." Jha, on the contrary, claims that he has withdrawn his resignation and is the principal of the school again. "More than 40 rebel teachers, however, are backing Roy and accused Jha of 'complete mismanagement and financial discrepancies.'" "We would go to any extent to prevent Jha from resuming his duties. In seven years he has indulged in different vices. We do not recognize him as principal anymore," said a senior teacher echoing the voice of her colleagues. As the tug of war continues between two camps, the concerned guardians have strongly called for a fresh election so that a full-fledged governing body starts functioning to restore the school's reputation.



State to spend Rs 70 cr to improve safety infrastructure in schools

KOLKATA, NOV 18 /-/- The West Bengal government will spend Rs 70 crore to improve safety infrastructure in schools, a top official of the School Education department said today. "Developing sound infrastructure in schools with good hygiene and clean environment dominates the state's agenda," the principal secretary, School Education department, Dushyant

Nariala told a gathering of more than 100 school teachers, including 45 principals, at the CH School Excellence Conclave here. Later Nariala told newsmen: "A sum of Rs 70 crore has been sanctioned to improve the safety infrastructure in government and government-aided schools all over the state." Elaborating he said: "The state government is forming safety committees in schools



to look into safety issues. safety issues which ranged from healthy food, nutrition, protection from outsiders, stop any use of tobacco and drugs in the campus and safeguard to cyber threats," he said. The government is also committed to end the practice of bullying by a section of students," he asserted. On the digital initiative of the state, the secretary said: "the government has developed 4,000 e-classrooms in 2000 secondary schools. Under the government's ICT

(Information and Communication Technology) programme, 3,915 secondary schools have been provided 39,300 computers in the past five years, he said. Nariala said in the changing technology-driven times, it is imperative to focus on building schools which can adapt to the change in teaching methods. "Technology should have a greater presence in future schools, he said.

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