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CBi vs Mamata: the war escalates

SC to hear agency's plea today, 'satyagraha' to continue: CM **Rajinath warns against constitutional breakdown in Bengal**

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, FEB 4—The fierce feud between West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee and CBI that broke on Sunday over the issue of questioning Kolkata Police commissioner Rajeev Kumar by the central agency today escalated with CBI moving the Supreme Court for permission for this purpose and the Kolkata Police filing a case in the High Court requesting the court to restrain the central agency to interrogate Kumar.

Opposition leaders who have expressed solidarity with Mamata have started turning up at the dharna site. While DMK leader Kaminoji and RJD leader Tejaswi Yadav have already turned up today, political groupings from other regional leaders are expected to come in a day or two.

In Parliament where all hell broke as the TMC broached the issue Union home minister Rajinath Singh even went to the extent of declaring that the state was witnessing a breakdown in constitutional machinery. The ministry of home affairs sought a report from the Kolkata Police and the state government on the entire episode. In the morning the Supreme Court agreed to give an urgent hearing to CBI's plea alleging destruction of electronic evidence related to the Saradha chit fund scam case by the Kolkata Police commissioner and said it will come down heavily on him if he "even remotely" tries to destroy the evidence. The apex court said it will hear on Tuesday probe agency's applications which alleged that an extraordinary situation has arisen in which the top police officials of the West Bengal Police are sitting on a dharna along with a political party in Kolkata.

The applications accusing Kolkata Police chief Rajeev Kumar of destroying evidence related to the case and indulging in contempt of court were mentioned by Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta before a bench comprising Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Sanjeev Khanna. The bench declined the SG's plea to hear the two applications on Monday in the post-lunch session. It said during the interregnum, it will be for the SC or any other party to file before the court any material or evidence to show that any West Bengal authority or police official is planning or trying to destroy evidence related to the case. Taking strong note of Mehta's submission, the bench said "if the police commissioner is even remotely trying to destroy evidence, we will come down so heavily on him that he will regret".

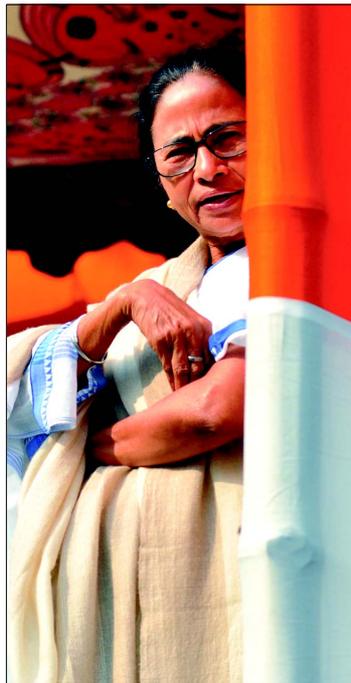
The top court said all material or evidence and additional documents has to be placed before it by means of affidavit. Mamata has been sitting on a dharna since 8.30pm Sunday. On Monday she

described her sit-in over the CBI's attempt to question Kolkata Police chief as a "non-political" protest. At the outset, the SG said an "extraordinary situation" which has happened yesterday in which CBI officials were arrested in Kolkata and Jt Director, CBI and his family were kept hostage. Meanwhile in Kolkata, the Calcutta High Court refused immediate hearing on the West Bengal government's plea against the CBI's attempt to question Rajeev Kumar at his residence in connection with chit fund scam cases. Following objection by the Union government, Justice Shivakant Prasad refused to give the matter an immediate hearing and listed it for Tuesday. State Advocate General Kishore Dutta submitted despite a stay by the high court on steps regarding notice to state police officials, the CBI sought to enter Kumar's residence on Sunday and question him. He submitted that the court is scheduled to hear the matter on February 13 and as such, the CBI's attempt to enter Kumar's official residence was in violation of its order.

Additional Solicitor General Kaushik Chanda submitted that the stay was on a CBI notice to only Arnab Ghosh, the then deputy commissioner (detective department) of Bidhannagar Police, which initially investigated the chit fund case, and two other police officials - Dilip Hazra and Sankar Bhattacharya. He further told the court that the CBI has already moved the Supreme Court, on the order of which the central agency is investigating the chit fund cases, and as such the hearing on the state's prayer be adjourned. He submitted that the Supreme Court has fixed hearing on CBI's plea on Tuesday. The AG then prayed that the CBI be directed not to take steps with regard to its notice to Kumar till the matter is heard by it Tuesday, and Justice Prasad refused to give any such direction.

Meanwhile Governor K N Tripathi has submitted a report to Union Home Minister Rajinath Singh on the situation.

Tripathi had last night summoned the state chief secretary and state director general of police and asked them to take immediate action to resolve the situation. In another development, the Bhabanipur police station under Kolkata Police sent a legal notice to CBI joint director Pankaj Srivastava on a cheating case. The official however left for Delhi for consultation with his seniors. The dharna mancha at Esplanade has turned into a secretariat with Mamata presiding over a cabinet meeting and signing files there. She also gave away prizes to police personnel in a joint investiture ceremony organized by the Kolkata police and the state police at a pandal erected beside the mancha. (PTI)



Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee at the dharna site

Rajinath warns against constitutional breakdown in Bengal
Parliament adjourned amid noisy protests by TMC

NEW DELHI, FEB 4—Union home minister Rajinath Singh today said there may be a Constitutional breakdown in West Bengal in the wake of the Kolkata Police-CBI face-off and asserted that the Centre has power to take action.

Amidst dim in the Lok Sabha, Singh also termed as "unprecedented" the move to stop the probe agency from performing its duty. An all-out war broke out between the Centre and the Mamata Banerjee-led government on Sunday over the CBI's attempt to question the Kolkata Police commissioner in connection with chit fund scams. Making a statement in Lok Sabha on the prevailing situation in Kolkata, the home minister described the action against the CBI probe agency, which went to question the Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar, as "unprecedented" and a threat to the federal political system of the country. "There may be constitutional breakdown in West Bengal...under the Constitution, the central government has been vested with the power to maintain normalcy in any part of the country," he said.

Earlier, opposition parties in Lok Sabha attacked the government over the alleged misuse of central agencies against political rivals, saying it was against democratic norms. Members from Trinamool Congress, Biju Janata Dal, NCP and Samajwadi Party spoke against the CBI move to question the Kolkata police chief. A CPM member said both the Trinamool Congress and the Centre were at fault. As soon as the House took up Zero Hour, Speaker Sumitra Mahajan allowed members to raise the issue. Meanwhile, both Houses of the Parliament was adjourned for the day following protests and sloganeering by TMC members over the alleged misuse of the CBI in state. Soon after the House met at 2 pm, members of TMC trooped into the well and started raising slogans like "Chowkidar chor hai" and "CBI tota hai" ("CBI is parrot"). Parliamentary affairs minister Narendra Singh Tomar made a plea to agitating members to go back to their seats, stating it was time for motion of thanks on the President's address. Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan said the CBI matter is already in the Supreme Court and let the apex court decide.

Rishi Kumar Shukla takes charge as CBI director

NEW DELHI, FEB 4—Newly-appointed CBI director Rishi Kumar Shukla took charge of the agency today, when it finds itself locked in a dirty tussle with the Kolkata Police that spiralled into a political slugfest between the Centre and the West Bengal government. Normally, a new incumbent gets a week's time to take charge, but Shukla, who was appointed on Saturday, took the reins of the agency within two days in the backdrop of the agency's tussle with the Kolkata Police which broke out on Sunday officials said. The appointment of the 58-year-old Shukla, a 1983-batch IPS from the Madhya Pradesh cadre, as full-fledged director is likely to bring some sort of order within the CBI which has moved the Supreme Court alleging



Rishi Kumar Shukla

destruction of evidence by Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar in non-zi scam cases, they said. Kumar headed the special investigation team probing these cases, the officials said. The agency did not get an immediate relief from the Supreme Court in the matter.

The Supreme Court, however, agreed to give an urgent hearing Tuesday to applications moved by the CBI alleging destruction of electronic evidence related

to the Saradha chit fund scam case by the Kolkata Police Commissioner. The applications accusing the top cop of destroying evidence related to the case and indulging in contempt of court was mentioned by Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta before a bench comprising Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi and Justice Sanjeev Khanna. Taking note of his submissions the bench said, "If at all the evidence is destroyed, it is in electronic form and can be retrieved". Former Madhya Pradesh Director General of Police (DGP) Shukla, who took charge of the agency as its 28th director from interim CBI chief M Nageswara Rao at the 11th-floor office in the imposing steel and glass CBI headquarters on Lodhi Road, did not offer any immediate comments on the issue. (PTI)

Mamata accuses Centre of snatching farmers' sleep

KOLKATA, FEB 4—West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee today accused the Narendra Modi-led Union government of having snatched farmers' sleep and while referring to the sops announced in the interim Budget on Friday claimed that the peasants were being cheated before the general elections.

Mamata, also the Trinamool Congress supreme, said if the government at the Centre changes following the Lok Sabha elections, farmers' interests will be given priority. The chief minister is on a dharna since Sunday night over the CBI's attempt to question the Kolkata Police Commissioner in connection with chit fund scams. From the dharna site in front of Metro Cinema in the heart of the city, she addressed a state conference of farmers over phone, which the participants at the Netaji Indoor Stadium, about a kilometre from the sit-in site, heard over loudspeakers. In her address, the chief minister referred to her Singur fast and said: "I sat on fast at the same place for 26 days in 2006 demanding that farmland be returned to farmers and the movement set new precedent as the right of land to

farmers got acceptance all over the country". The Metro channel, where she is sitting on a dharna seeking "restoration of the spirit of the Constitution", was the same venue where she held a 26-day hunger strike in 2006 demanding return of farmland to the peasants in Singur, where the Tata Motors' Nano car plant was to come up. The Tatas finally abandoned the project in West Bengal and went to Gujarat on the invitation of then chief minister Narendra Modi and Banerjee was catapulted to power in 2011, defeating the 34-year-old Left Front government. Claiming that nearly 12,000 farmers have committed suicide in the country in the past couple of years, the TMC supreme on Monday said, "The BJP and the Modi government have snatched farmers' sleep".

"Farmers are being cheated before the elections," she alleged. Mamata said owing to demonetisation, farmers are in deep distress with many having committed suicide or have lost their livelihood. "Our government is the only one in the country which does not acquire farmland and have returned acquired land in Singur," the chief minister added. (PTI)

Bharti Ghosh joins BJP slams Mamata govt

NEW DELHI, FEB 4—Former IPS officer Bharti Ghosh, once considered close to the Mamata Banerjee government but now facing criminal charges, joined the BJP today and alleged that "thugocracy" has replaced democracy in the state. Ghosh joined the party here in the presence of senior BJP leaders Ravi Shankar Prasad, Kailash Vijayaragya and Mukul Roy. "There is no democracy in West Bengal. 'Criminalism' and 'thugocracy' have replaced it," Ghosh told newsmen. Vijayaragya said her joining the BJP will strengthen the party. (PTI)

Oppn parties meet E over EVM issue, demand matching of 50 per cent of EVM results with VVPATs

NEW DELHI, FEB 4—Election Commission made it clear that there was no possibility of going back to the old system, they changed their strategy and are now demanding matching of 50 per cent of EVMs with VVPATs. The leaders of various Opposition parties earlier met in Parliament and discussed their strategy on the issue. The delegation included Ghulam Nabi Azad, Mallikarjun Kharge, Ahmed Patel and Anand Sharma of the Congress, Chandrababu Naidu (TDP), Majid Memon (NCP), Derek O'Brien (Trinamool Congress), Ramgopal Yadav (SP), Satish Chandra Misra (BSP), Omar Abdullah (NC), Mohd Salim and T K Rangarajan (CPM), Manoj Jha (RJD), Sanjay Singh (AAP), D Raja (CPD), Danish Ali (JDS), N K Premechandran (RSP), Badrudin Ajmal (AIUFD) and K G Kenye (NPP). (PTI)

Rahul praises Gadkari for having guts, asks him to comment on Rafale, jobs

NEW DELHI, FEB 4—In a left-handed compliment, Congress president Rahul Gandhi today said Union minister Nitin Gadkari is the only one in the BJP who has the guts, and asked him to comment on the Rafale deal, job crisis, "farmers distress and destruction of institutions". Rahul's remarks came following Gadkari's remarks that "one who cannot take care of home, cannot manage the country". The union minister hit back at him, saying he does not need a certificate from Rahul on



his courage and alleged that the Congress chief is taking the help of reports "twisted" by the media to attack his government. The Congress president cited a report quoting Gadkari as saying that party workers should first fulfill their domestic responsibilities as "those who cannot do that cannot manage the country". "Gadkari Ji, compliments. You are the only one in the BJP with some guts. Please also comment on: The Rafale scam and Anil Ambani, farmers' distress and destruction of

institutions", Rahul tweeted and tagged with it the report on Gadkari's comments. "Oops, Gadkari Ji. Huge apology. I forgot the most important one...JOBS! JOBS! JOBS!" he said later in a tweet. The Union minister had made the remarks on Saturday while addressing former workers of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the BJP's student wing, in Nagpur. The Union minister took to Twitter to reply to the Congress president. "Rahul Gandhi Ji, I do not need a certificate from you on my courage, but it is a matter of surprise that even after being the president of a national party you have to take the help of news twisted by the media to attack our government," Gadkari tweeted. The Congress president's comments praising the

Union minister came in the wake of various other Congress leaders lauding the Union minister for his recent statements they view as a swipe at the BJP leadership. Congress spokesperson Manish Tewari had last week lauded Gadkari for his remarks that "leaders who fail to fulfil promises get 'beaten up' by people", but at the same time took a swipe at him saying his target was Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his eyes were on the Prime Minister's chair. (PTI)