

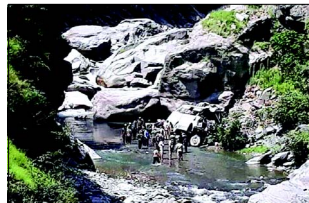
Bus falls into gorge; 16 Amarnath pilgrims killed

PM mourns death; Rajnath held talks with Mehbooba on accident

RAMBAN / JAMMU, JULY 16 /- Sixteen Amarnath pilgrims were killed and around 27 injured, 19 of them critically, when a bus skidded off the Jammu Srinagar national highway and rolled into a deep nullah in the Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir today, officials said. The deceased belonged to UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, Assam, Haryana, and Madhya Pradesh, they said. Two women were among the sixteen who died, they

added. A bus carrying pilgrims skidded off the road, turned turtle, and rolled down into the nullah at the Nachlana belt of Ramban late this afternoon, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Ramban, Mohan Lal said. The J&K State Road Transport Corporation (JKSRTC) bus was part of a convoy carrying 3,600 pilgrims from Jammu to the twin base-camps of Baltal and Pahalgam enroute the cave shrine of Amarnath in South Kashmir Himalayas,

police officials said. According to the officials, 16 persons, including two women, were killed and around 27 were injured in the accident. Nineteen injured pilgrims are being airlifted to Jammu for specialised treatment while eight have been admitted to the district hospital in Banihal, they said. Police, Army and CRPF, with help from locals, launched rescue operations and brought out the bodies and the injured persons from the nullah, they said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed pain at the loss of lives of in the accident. "Extremely pained by

the loss of lives of Amarnath Yatis due to a bus accident in J&K. My thoughts are with the families of the deceased," Modi tweeted. "I pray that those injured in the bus accident in J&K recover soon," the prime minister added. Meanwhile, Union Home minister Rajnath Singh today spoke to Jammu and Kashmir Governor N N Vohra and Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti and took stock of the situation following the death of 16 Amarnath pilgrims in a bus

accident, officials said. During the telephonic conversation, the chief minister apprised the home minister on the accident of the bus carrying Amarnath pilgrims in Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir and the ongoing rescue operation. Mufti told Singh that the injured were being airlifted for treatment to Jammu. The government has set up a helpline for inquiry about the Amarnath pilgrims traveling in the bus that met with the accident in Ramban. The helpline numbers are -

091-2560401, and 0191-2542000. The home minister also had a telephonic conversation with the governor who has reached the accident site. Vohra too apprised him of the situation, officials said. "My heart goes out to the families of Amarnath Yatis who lost their loved ones in the bus accident. My prayers are with the injured," the home minister tweeted. The victims of the accident belonged to different states, officials said. (PTI)



GJM supporters protest to press the demand for a separate state of 'Gorkhaland' in Mirik on Sunday.

39 abducted Indians in Iraq may be in jail: Swaraj

NEW DELHI, JULY 16 /- Thirty-nine Indians abducted in Iraq by the ISIS three years ago may be lodged in a jail in Badush in northwest Mosul, external affairs minister Sushima Swaraj today said, and added that her Iraqi counterpart may bring fresh information about them when he visits India. Swaraj today briefed family members of the abducted men, who are mostly from Punjab, about information gathered by the Minister of State for External Affairs, V K Singh, who was sent to the Gulf nation after its Prime Minister announced the liberation of Mosul from the dreaded terror group ISIS. Swaraj said an authoritative official quoting intelligence sources told Singh the Indians were deployed at a hospital construction site and then shifted to a farm. They were then taken to a jail in Badush in West Mosul, where fighting between the ISIS and Iraqi forces is carrying on. Ministers of state Singh and M J Akbar and senior ministry officials were also present at the meeting with the family members. She said Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Al Jaafari is scheduled to visit India on July 24 and may bring updated information about the missing men. "East Mosul has been completely freed from ISIS and now buildings are being

sanitised and authorities are not allowing civilians to go there as there may be bombs and other explosives," she said. In West Mosul, fighting is still carrying on, she said. "An official who quoted intelligence sources told Gen Singh that they were deployed for a hospital construction and then in a farm. From there, they were sent to a jail in Badush. There has been no information since then," Swaraj told reporters. There would be fresh information once the fighting in Badush was over, she added. Swaraj said she had spoken to foreign ministers of all the countries in the region which could help India in locating the men. The external affairs minister had written a letter to her Iraqi counterpart and it was handed over to him in Baghdad by Singh. Singh returned from Iraq yesterday. She said if required, Singh would again travel to Iraq. We called family members of all those who were abducted in Iraq. I had already met them 10 or 12 times, but this time the situation was different as the Iraqi prime minister had decided that Mosul had been freed from the ISIS. That very day I asked V K Singh to go to Iraq and collect details about the Indians, Swaraj said. The Indians were abducted by the ISIS in Mosul in June 2014. (PTI)

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Numbers beacon Kovind in Prez poll today; Kumar unlikely to be a pushover

AIMIM likely to vote for ex-Loksabha speaker, Gandhi

NEW DELHI, JULY 16 /- Election for the next President of India will be held tomorrow where NDA candidate Ram Nath Kovind is pitted against opposition nominee Meira Kumar. The counting of votes will take place on July 20 in New Delhi where all the ballot boxes will be brought from various state capitals. The electorate, comprising elected Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members and members of state assemblies, is tilted in favour of the NDA, but the opposition is still working to seek support of some regional parties in favour of their candidate. Both Kovind, a former Bihar Governor and Kumar, the former Lok Sabha Speaker, have held a series of meetings across states to garner support for their candidature. The tenure of incumbent Pranab Mukherjee comes to an end on July 24. So far 12 stalwarts, including Mukherjee, have held the post. The electoral college which elects the President through the system of proportional representation, comprises MPs and

members of state legislative assemblies. A total of 4896 voters -- 4120 MLAs and 776 elected MPs -- are eligible to cast their ballot. MLCs of states with legislative council are not part of the electoral college. While the Lok Sabha Speaker, an elected member, can vote, the two nominated members in the Lower House from the Anglo-Indian community cannot. Twelve nominated members in Rajya Sabha are also ineligible. Since the election is through a secret ballot, the parties cannot issue a whip to their members to vote for a particular candidate. A total of 13 vacancies in Lok Sabha and state assemblies will be filled up after the presidential elections. The NDA, led by the BJP, has 5,37,683 votes includes the Shiv Sena, and the shortage is around 12,000 votes. But the promised support from the BJD, the TRS and the YSR Congress and likely backing from the AIADMK factions could offset the shortfall of the presidential votes by a substantial margin. In

the 2012 elections, Pranab Mukherjee garnered 7,13,763 votes, while Pratibha Patil secured 6,28,116 votes in the previous polls in 2007. Both Mukherjee and Patil were Congress nominees. This time, the Lok Sabha secretary general is the returning officer. Last time, it was the secretary general of Rajya Sabha. A total of 32 polling stations -- one in Parliament House and one each in the state legislative assemblies, have been set up. 33 observers have been appointed by the EC to oversee the conduct of election. While two observers will be present in the Parliament House, one each will be employed in the respective state assemblies. In a fresh development, the Election Commission has barred MPs and MLAs who vote to elect the next President tomorrow from carrying their personal pens inside the voting chamber and will have to mark their ballot with specially designed marker pens. Meanwhile, ten legislators of the All India Majlis-e-Itehadul

Muslims (AIMM) are likely to vote for the opposition presidential candidate, Meira Kumar, in the election tomorrow, party sources today said here. AIMM decided to support Kumar at a meeting chaired by Asaduddin Owaisi last week, the sources said. "Ten lawmakers of AIMM are likely to vote for Meira Kumar," they said, adding that Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Telangana Congress leaders had spoken to AIMM chief Owaisi, seeking his party's support. Also, the AIMM is most likely to vote for the opposition's candidate Gopalkrishna Gandhi in the election for the vice-president's post, they said. AIMM has 10 legislators, including Hyderabad MP and party chief Asaduddin Owaisi. The party has seven legislators in Telangana, including Chandrayangutta MLA Akbaruddin Owaisi and two MLAs in Maharashtra. NDA nominee Ram Nath Kovind is pitted against opposition candidate Meira Kumar in tomorrow's election for the country's top political office. (PTI)

Kolkata police in B'desh over arrest of Burdwan blast accused

DHAKA, JULY 16 /- A Special Task Force of the Kolkata Police has held a meeting with Bangladesh security officials here for information on arrested Jama'atul Mujahideen militant Sobel Mahmud wanted in India in the 2014 Burdwan blast case. The three-member team reached the capital city yesterday and met Bangladesh police officials at the police headquarters. Assistant Inspector General Md Moniruzzaman said. In the meeting, they discussed information received so far during the interrogation of Neo-JMB militant Mahfuz, who was arrested along with three other militants by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit from Chapainawabganj district in northern Bang-

ladesh on July 7. The officials from both countries also shared their experiences dealing with militant incidents in addition to information on Mahfuz. Moniruzzaman said was quoted saying by the Daily Star. Mahfuz, a top explosives specialist of neo-JMB, is on a seven-day remand in the Dhaka cafe attack case. He allegedly supplied firearms and explosives for the cafe attack in which 22 people, including 17 foreigners, were killed. Mahfuz who lost a hand while making bombs, thereby earning him his title 'Hatkati', was wanted by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in India for the blast at Khagrachar in Burdwan district of West Bengal on October 2, 2014.

PM raises anti-vigilantes pitch

Lobs retribution ball in states' court; asks all parties to come hard on 'hooliganism' in name of Gau-rakshaks

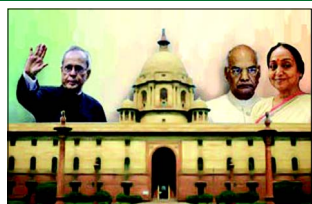
NEW DELHI, JULY 16 /- Prime Minister Narendra Modi today asked all political parties to collectively fight "hooliganism" in the name of cow protection and said the state governments should take stringent action against anti-social elements indulging in violence on the issue. Addressing an all-party meeting ahead of the Monsoon session of Parliament beginning tomorrow, Modi said maintenance of law and order was the responsibility of the state governments and they should take stringent action wherever such incidents take place. "Cow is treated as a mother and it is an emotive. But we have to understand that there are laws governing cow protection and breaking it is not an alternative," Modi said in a series of tweets after the meeting.

"All political parties should collectively castigate hooliganism in the name of cow protection," he said, adding that such incidents were also affecting the image of the country. "The state governments should take stringent action against anti-social elements," the Prime Minister said, adding they should also check whether some people are setting personal scores in the name of cow protection as "a tool to spread anarchy. Some people who want to damage the social fabric of the country are also taking advantage of it." Seeking the support of the opposition parties in tackling "communal violence" in the name of cow protection, Modi also warned against giving a political or communal colour to the issue. Modi said "state governments must ensure the maintenance of law and order and strict action must be taken against those who break the law," an official statement quoted Modi having said in the meeting. The statements assume significance in context of the recent cases of violence in different parts of the country in the name of cow protection. Opposition parties have attacked the BJP over the cases of cow vigilantism in which Muslims and Dalits have often been targeted.

Prez poll: SP divided in two camps, cross-voting likely

LUCKNOW, JULY 16 /- The Samajwadi Party appears divided on the eve of the presidential election with camps led by its patron Mulayam Singh Yadav and party chief Akhilesh Yadav all set to vote for rival candidates, triggering possibility of cross-voting. Though the division in the party may not have any bearing on the election result, it will certainly complicate the family feud further, said an SP insider, requesting anonymity. The sharp differences in the SP on the issue of presidential nominee was clear right from the day Ram Nath Kovind was chosen as the NDA nominee. Soon after the announcement of Kovind's name, Mulayam had attended a dinner hosted by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in honour of Prime Minister Narendra

Modi here on June 20. It was seen in political circles as a clear indication of Mulayam's support to the NDA candidate. Significantly, the dinner was skipped by Akhilesh and Mayawati, who are supporting the opposition candidate. The SP patron's vote for Kovind became a foregone conclusion the very day he openly desecrated him as a "strong candidate", said the SP insider. "Ram Nath Kovind is a good candidate. I have a very old relations with him. BJP has selected a strong candidate. The most important thing is that the BJP has a majority" Mulayam had said on record. On expected lines, Shiwpal, the warring uncle of Akhilesh, said that whatever his elder brother Mulayam decides was the last word for him, indicating that he too would back



Kovind. Opposition's candidate Meira Kumar met Akhilesh at the SP headquarters here on Friday before meeting BSP supreme Mayawati to seek votes. Interestingly Shiwpal and another senior party leader and MLA Azam Khan were conspicuous by their absence. Akhilesh has instructed his MLAs to vote for opposition candidate Meira Kumar, who has "represented a secular ideology." SP spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary said that Akhilesh Yadav has given instruction to his MLAs to vote for Kumar. Chaudhary said Akhilesh has asked SP MLAs to vote for Kumar. Another senior SP leader, who is also Leader of the SP Legislature Party, Ram Govind Chaudhary said, "Everyone should support Kumar." Ram Govind is also the Leader of the Opposition in the 403-member UP Lower House. In a written appeal circulated to all SP MLAs, Netaji, Kahengey wahi hoga (Whatever netaji says will happen)," he said. Shiwpal-loyalist Deepak Mishra, though not a voter, pledged "open support to Kovind" and thanked the

prime minister for his selection. The SP has five members in the Lok Sabha, including Mulayam, and 19 members in the Rajya Sabha, including Amarnath Singh, who is now an unattached member after his expulsion from the party, besides 47 MLAs in UP. Since members of the Legislative Council are not part of the electoral college, Akhilesh an MLC cannot vote, though his wife Dimple, a Lok Sabha member, is eligible to participate in the exercise. Mulayam was removed from the party's national president post and made a patron by Akhilesh in January at the peak of dissidence in the erstwhile ruling party which led to one of the most humiliating drubbings the party suffered in the political history of Uttar Pradesh. (PTI)



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