

Sena to contest LSpolls in Goa in alliance with GSM, says senior leader

PANAJI, FEB 26 /-/- The Shiv Sena has geared up to strengthen the party for the general elections next year and will contest the two Lok Sabha seats in Goa in alliance with the Goa Sarkash Manch (GSM), a senior leader said today.

The Sena had earlier also aligned with the GSM, led by former RSS leader Subhash Velinkar, for the Goa Assembly polls last year but failed to win a single seat. Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray has given his nod for the party's alliance with the GSM for polls to the two Lok Sabha seats in the state. Sena spokesman Sanjay Raut said, "The Shiv Sena has decided to contest both the Lok Sabha seats in Goa in alliance with the GSM. The approval for the same has been given by the Sena chief," Raut said here at a press conference. Thackeray will visit Goa next month to strengthen the party base, the Rajya Sabha member said. Raut claimed that the Sena has emerged as one of the key political opponents in the coastal state. "People from all sections are joining hands with the Sena," he said. The North Goa and the South Goa Lok Sabha seats are presently held by the BJP. Meanwhile, Raut wished a speedy recovery to Goa chief minister Manohar Parrikar, who is admitted in a hospital.

No blanket entry of ex-partymen in Cong: Gen secy in charge of MP

INDORE, FEB 26 /-/- Congress general secretary Deepak Babaria said today leaders who left the party for their "vested interests" would not be taken back in the organisation in Madhya Pradesh, where polls are due by the year-end. Ahead of the Assembly polls, the Congress has started a 'ghar wapsi' (home coming) campaign to bring back leaders who left the party for different reasons. Babaria, in-charge of the party affairs in Madhya Pradesh, however, made it clear that not all those who left the party will be allowed to come back. "We are in talks with different leaders who are willing to come back into the party fold. But, most of the party workers are of clear view that those who left the Congress due to their 'vested interests' should not be taken back into the party. I also support this view," the Congress leader told newsmen here. The AICC general secretary said, "Those who deceived the party would not be taken back. The decision about other leaders would be taken on merit."

After 2008, when the BJP came to power in Madhya Pradesh, some prominent Congress leaders left the party. These included Choudhary Rakesh Singh Chaturvedi, Bhagirath Prasad and Rao Uday Pratap Singh. Replying to a question on election strategy, Babaria said the party would focus on the Assembly seats where it has not been very strong in the past. Potential candidates at such seats would be sounded out about poll preparations much before the elections, he added.

Kerala govt rejects demand for CBI probe into YC worker's killing; Assembly disrupted

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB 26 /-/- The recent killing of a Youth Congress (YC) activist, allegedly by the ruling CPM workers, rocked the Kerala Assembly today, with the Opposition UDF members disrupting the proceedings after chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan rejected their demand for a CBI probe into it. The Congress-led Opposition members, who had come to the House wearing black badges to protest the killing of Shuhaib by a gang at Mattannur in Kannur district on February 12, started raising slogans, demanding a CBI probe into the incident, as the proceedings began. Holding placards, with photos of the mutilated body of the YC activist, they tried to reach the Well of the House and placed a banner in front of Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan's podium, forcing an early adjournment of the House. Earlier, the Question Hour was also suspended following the Opposition's protest. During the Zero Hour, the Opposition took up the issue as an

adjournment motion and said the family of the slain YC worker had no trust in the ongoing investigation by the state police. Replying to the notice of the motion, moved by Sunny Joseph (Congress) on the issue, the chief minister rejected the demand for a CBI probe and said the state police was conducting an efficient, impartial and scientific inquiry. Five persons were already arrested and if any more were involved, they would also be brought to book, the chief minister said, adding that the conspiracy angle would also be probed by invoking section 120(b), IPC (criminal conspiracy). "The investigation by the state police is going on in the right direction. So, there is no need for a CBI probe," he said. Stating that Shuhaib's killing was "highly condemnable", the chief minister said it could not be justified in any manner. He added that the state government was of the view that individual and

ideological differences should not lead to violence. Vijayan also made it clear that the CPM-led LDF government would initiate stringent action against the perpetrators of political violence, whoever they might be. The chief minister also rejected the Opposition's allegation that political violence had increased in the state after the LDF government came to power in May 2016. Taking a dig at the Congress for claiming that they never indulged in violence, Vijayan listed out various incidents of political violence and killings in Kannur, in which Congress workers were allegedly involved. Turning the table at senior Congress leader K Sudhakaran, who is staging a hunger strike in Kannur demanding a CBI probe into Shuhaib's killing, Vijayan said he (Sudhakaran) himself was an "instigator of violence" when he was the president of the Congress' Kannur district unit. However,

Leader of Opposition Ramesh Chennithala maintained that the government and police were not sincere in arresting the "real" culprits behind the crime. Alleging that local CPM leaders in Kannur had a role in Shuhaib's killing, he said not only those directly involved in the crime, but the conspirators should also be brought to book.

The Congress leader wanted to know why the government was shying away from ordering a CBI probe into the case and charged that efforts were on to mislead the police investigation. The opposition would pursue the legal options if the government did not concede to the demand, he added. Meanwhile, the fast by senior Congress leader and former MP K Sudhakaran and Youth Congress leader Dean Kuriaakose, in Kannur and in front of the Secretariat, here respectively, entered the eighth day today.



Police fire tear gas shells to disperse Youth Congress workers, who were staging a march demanding the arrest of real accused and CBI inquiry in murder of youth congress activist in Kannur in Thiruvananthapuram on Monday.

MP budget session begins; Cong demands farm loan waiver

BHOPAL, FEB 26 /-/- The Madhya Pradesh Assembly's budget session began today with Governor Anandiben Patel's address, even as the Opposition Congress demanded waiver of farmers' loans and criticised the high VAT on petrol. Patel mentioned in her address that the state government has reduced the value added tax (VAT) on diesel from 27 per cent to 22 per cent and that on petrol from 31 per cent to 28 per cent. However, the Congress members, including Mukesh Nayak, Sunderlal Tiwari, Dr Govind Singh Bala Bachchan and Jitu Patwari, protested over the. "Despite the reduction, the

VAT on petrol and diesel is the highest in Madhya Pradesh across the country," said Bachchan, who is the deputy Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly. The government has also imposed a cess of Re one per litre on petroleum products, he pointed out. He said the Congress wants these products to be brought under the ambit of the Goods and Services Tax (GST). When Patel highlighted the government's achievements in the agriculture sector, specially getting the 'Krishi Karmam Award' for maximum agriculture production in the country,

the Omembers raised the farmers' concerns and demanded that their crop loans be waived off. They also displayed a placard in the House demanding loan waiver for farmers. When the Governor said that the government has not opened any new liquor shop in the state, the Congress members again raised their concerns over the issue but their words were inaudible amid the noise. Earlier, Assembly Speaker Dr Sitasharan Sharma mentioned in the House that Governor Patel would only read out some select parts of her speech and not the full text. In her address, Patel highlighted the state

government's various welfare schemes, including for crop insurance, the 'Bhavanant' scheme for farmers, encouragement given to cashless transactions in various sectors and the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Ajay Singh, alleged that the government's achievements were "a bundle of lies" and criticised the governor's "lacklustre" speech. On the Governor not reading out her complete address, Singh said, "It is not a good tradition." "Even the ruling party members are not happy with it, leave alone the Opposition," he claimed.

Maharashtra budget to signal BJP's move on simultaneous polls: Cong

MUMBAI, FEB 26 /-/- The upcoming budget of Maharashtra will indicate whether the ruling BJP wants to hold the state assembly polls along with the Lok Sabha elections, a senior Congress leader has said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP have been pressing for holding simultaneous polls to Lok Sabha and state Assemblies to help save time and the country's resources. Several Opposition parties are against the idea, saying holding the polls simultaneously is not realistic in the present situation. Leader of Opposition in the Maharashtra Assembly, Radhakrishna Vikhe Patil, today said the Congress would closely monitor the state budget, to be

presented next week, to ascertain the BJP's intentions about simultaneous polls. "This (Maharashtra) budget will indicate the intentions of the BJP on whether the general and the assembly polls will be held jointly or separately. We are closely watching what's going to be in the budget," he told news agency PTI. Another Congress leader said if the state budget offers a lot of sops and concessions, it would naturally mean that the BJP is keen on contesting the elections to the Maharashtra assembly along with the Lok Sabha polls. A leader of the Opposition NCP said technically, the Lok Sabha and the assembly polls can be advanced or postponed by six

months. "The BJP is trying to use it to hold the Maharashtra elections along with the general polls to gain maximum out of it," he claimed. If voters have a soft corner for the BJP in the Lok Sabha elections, a similar sentiment can be helpful in the assembly polls as well, if both are held together, he noted. The BJP may be pointing at the expenses and waste of time in holding separate elections, but in reality, it is a political decision, the NCP leader added. The country's general elections are due in the first half of 2019, while the term of the present Maharashtra Assembly will end in the second half of next year. Maharashtra has 48 Lok Sabha and 268 Assembly seats. (PTI)

State Notes

Six killed after being run over by locomotive in UP

LUCKNOW, FEB 26 /-/- At least six persons were killed when they were run over by a locomotive at Pilkhuwa railway station in Hapur district of Uttar Pradesh, railway police said. SC Dubey, superintendent of police (GRP Moradabad), told news agency PTI: "A group of seven youngsters was trying to cross the railway tracks. After seeing a train coming in front of them, they retraced their steps. But in the process, they were run over by a railway engine which was moving on the track behind them." He added that five died on the spot, while one succumbed to his injuries at a hospital, later. Another one is undergoing treatment, he said. The deceased have been identified as Aarif (18), Sallim (20), Samir (15), Vijay (18) and Akash, while the injured as Rahul, a resident of Sarodaya Nagar Pilkhuwa, Dubey said.

'Cow smuggler' crushed to death in Alwar

JAIPUR, FEB 26 /-/- A suspected cow smuggler was crushed to death under the wheels of a truck carrying bovines when he allegedly tried to flee the vehicle, which was being chased by police in Rajasthan's Alwar district, an official said today. "Police were chasing the truck yesterday when 35-year-old Aas Mohammed, a resident of Haryana, tried to flee by jumping off the vehicle, but got crushed under the same truck," Banwari Lal, station house officer at the Reni police station, said. Out of the 23 cattle recovered, five were found dead and the rest shifted to a cow shelter nearby. Lal said, Police are searching for the other alleged smugglers, who managed to escape.

Uttarakhand BJP MLAs pass away

DEHRADUN, FEB 26 /-/- Uttarakhand BJP leader and Tharali MLA Maganlal Shah passed away at a private hospital here after prolonged illness, family members said today. He was 55. Shah was suffering from a lung infection and was in the Himalayan Hospital on February 19. He died around 10 pm on Sunday, family members said. Uttarakhand chief minister Trivenendra Singh Rawat, Speaker Premchand Agarwal and state BJP chief Ajay Bhat condoled the demise of the first-time legislator. He was elected an MP from Tharali in the 2017 Uttarakhand Assembly elections.

BSF foils infiltration bid along border in Samba

Jammu, Feb 26 /-/- BSF troops today foiled an infiltration bid along the International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district, police said. BSF troops at a border out post observed some movement along IB in Ramgarh sector around 0500 hours today, a senior police officer told news agency PTI. They fired several rounds and illumination flares, he said, adding that the suspected militants were forced back and the infiltration bid was foiled. "Troops are on alert to foil any bid," a BSF officer said. On February 23, the BSF and Pakistan Rangers held a flag meeting along the IB here during which the border guards of the two countries expressed their commitment to maintain peace and tranquility.

UP deputy CM forecasts clean sweep by BJP in by-polls

LUCKNOW, FEB 26 /-/- Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister Keshav Prasad Maurya today expressed confidence that the BJP would sweep the March 11 by-polls to the Gorakhpur and Phulpur Lok Sabha seats. The by-polls were necessitated after Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Maurya vacated the Gorakhpur and Phulpur seats respectively, following their election to the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council. "The lotus (BJP's poll symbol) will bloom in both the seats. I have no doubt about this. The very fact that people are talking mostly about the BJP's winning margin is itself an indicator that the party is going to win." You can be rest assured that we are going to improve our margin in both the seats," Maurya told news agency PTI in an interview here today.

Taking a jibe at the Opposition, Maurya said: "As soon as the by-elections were announced, the opposition parties started discussing the victory margin. This is a clear indication that the lotus will bloom in Gorakhpur and Phulpur." The deputy chief minister, a former president of the state BJP, said as far as the vote-share was concerned, "60 per cent is ours and the rest is for the others to share". On whether he wanted one of his family members to contest from Phulpur, the BJP leader said: "Party workers, owing to their affection towards me, floated the idea that someone from my family should contest the by-polls." However, I am a kaaryakarta-waadi (workers-centric) person, and not a parivaar-waadi (believer in dynastic politics). I am a member of the BJP's big family!"

Referring to the BJP's winning show in the 2014 general election and 2017 Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, he expressed confidence that the "lotus will bloom in 2018 (by-polls) and it will lay a strong foundation for the 2019 Lok Sabha election". The by-elections are expected to witness a triangular contest between the ruling BJP, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress. The saffron party has fielded Kaushalendra Singh Patel from Phulpur and Upendra Dutt Shukla from Gorakhpur against the SP's Pravin Nishad and Nagendra Pratap Singh Patel respectively. Sureetha Nehru, the Congress candidate from Gorakhpur, said the party has fielded Manish Mishra from Phulpur. "Voters are very clear as regards which party can usher in development, provide jobs, ensure safety and a robust law-and-order situation in the state. They know that it is the BJP which is a pro-poor political party, is working to ensure that the benefits of development reach the last person, and also that it can take a tough stand against corruption," Maurya said. For the BJP Gorakhpur, which has represented the seat in the Lok Sabha five times.

Prior to Adityanath, the seat was thrice represented in Parliament by his mentor Avaidyanath. Phulpur, on the other hand, was once the bastion of the Congress and represented by India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. It had, for the first time, witnessed a saffron surge in the 2014 Lok Sabha election, when Maurya won the seat. Voting for the by-polls will be held on March 11 and the results will be declared on March 14.

Madras HC rejects PIL seeking to restrain govt teachers' agitation

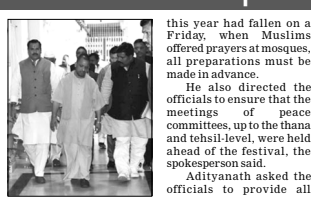
CHENNAI, FEB 26 /-/- The Madras High Court today dismissed a PIL petition seeking to restrain a section of government teachers from resorting to protest in the city, pressing for their demands, without obtaining permission from the competent authority.

The First Bench comprising Chief Justice Indira Banerjee and Justice Abdul Quddus dismissed the petition by S Sirgheta Naima Mohamed. It observed that the teachers should be role models for students and should also realise their responsibilities and act accordingly. Noting that the Court cannot interfere if the agitation was held in their office premises or in private places, the bench hoped that the Joint Action Council of Teachers Organisations and Government Employees Organisations (JACTO-GEO) will not hold any protest causing inconvenience to the public.

Referring to their February 21 protest, the petitioner submitted that no violence was affected in Chennai. Alleging that the common man was put to hardship due to the stir, the petitioner prayed for a direction to forebear JACTO-GEO from resorting to illegal strike without getting permission from the Commissioner of Police, Chennai. JACTO-GEO members went on an indefinite strike in September, last year to press for their demands, including restoration of the old pension scheme.

UPCM directs officials to ensure peaceful Holi

LUCKNOW, FEB 26 /-/- Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath has asked the officials to ensure peace and order during the Holi festivities by coordinating between different communities so that questions are not raised on the intentions of the government. Directing the officials to hold talks with different communities to ensure that the festival is celebrated in peace and harmony, Adityanath has asked them to work in a manner so that no questions are raised on the intentions of the government and work culture of the administration, an official spokesperson said. He spoke to the officials of different districts through video-conferencing and stressed that since Holi



this year had fallen on a Friday, when Muslims offered prayers at mosques, all preparations must be made in advance. He also directed the officials to ensure that the meetings of peace committees, up to the thana and tehsil-level, were held ahead of the festival, the spokesperson said. He asked the officials to provide all necessary security to the traditional functions but not offer any new function in their respective areas. State Director General of Police (DGP) OP Singh has asked the senior superintendents of police (SSFs) to personally monitor the deployment of force and keep an eye on the rumours, the spokesperson added.