

# Tragedy, sleaze, political clashes hit Kerala in 2017

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DEC 30** /-/- Tragedy, sleaze, political clashes and allegations of love jihad shook Kerala in 2017.

Disaster struck in the form of Okchi cyclone, which hit the state's shores on November 29-30 and left over 70 fishermen dead while more than 100 are still missing. Sleazy tales scarred politicians both of the ruling CPM-led LDF and Congress-headed UDF and as if this turmoil was not enough, the state also witnessed the abduction and assault of an actress, allegedly by hired goons to settle scores. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress president Rahul Gandhi reached out to the families of affected fishermen to give a healing touch.

The year started with the abduction and sexual assault of a well-known actress, who essayed roles in South Indian films, shocking the very conscience of the people of the state. The incident, which occurred in February saw several twists and turns in its

probe and ultimately ended with the arrest of popular actor Dileep, sending tremors across the Malayalam film industry. The Pinarayi Vijayan-led government that entered into the second year in office faced embarrassment as two cabinet ministers resigned - one over sleaze talk with a woman and the other on charges of land and backwa-

Chandy, also from the NCR, who replaced Saseedharan as transport minister, was forced to tender his resignation after being hit by an encroachment allegation by his luxury tourist resort in Alapuzha in November.

However, the LDF government came in for praise from different quarters for its revolutionary decision to appoint a Dalit priest in a temple, scripting history. Similarly, a decision to provide job reservation to economically weak in the forward community in the offices of Devaswom boards that manages temples in the state also won accolades. On the political point, the state continued to witness a cycle of clashes between the ruling CPM and RSS. BJP workers especially in the politically-volatile Kannur district. BJP national president Amit Shah participated in the 'Jana Raksha' rally organised by state party unit, and charged that Kerala under the rule of the Left had become a 'fertile land'

for the growth of 'jihadi terror'.

The UDF and the LDF also conducted political yatras in the state during the year against the alleged communal agenda of the BJP. Congress workers in the state received a political boost with the visit of Rahul Gandhi in the valedictory function of Padiyurukkam a political yatra here on December 15. However, the party was left red faced when one of its MLAs A Vincent had to cool his heels in prison for the alleged rape of a housewife. The case of Hadiya, a 24-year old Hindu woman, who converted to Islam and later married a Muslim youth Shaifin Jahan came into national focus after apex court ordered a NAFIA probe following allegation that the marriage was part of 'love jihad'.

The infamous solar scam continued to haunt the leaders of Opposition UDF with a judicial commission report indicting senior Congress leaders, including former chief minister Oommen Chandy in the scam. A letter of Saritha S Nair, prime accused in the case, that con-



tained serious sexual allegations against UDF leaders, which became a part of the report of judicial commission, also put the Congress leaders in a spot. In the sensational murder case of a Dalit law student, justice was done to the victim, when the lone accused, a migrant worker from Assam, was awarded death sentence by a trial court. The

Malayalam film industry lost veteran director I V Sasi, a hit maker, who passed away after battling cancer. The year also saw Malayalam film actress Surabhi Lakshmi clinching the National Best actor award. In the infrastructure field, Kerala took a giant leap with the commissioning of the Kochi Metro by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June

and in four months, the second phase was opened by chief minister Vijayan.

In another political development, JD-U leader and party state president, M P Veerendra Kumar, resigned from the Rajya Sabha saying he did not agree with party chief and Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar's decision to join the NDA fold.

## LOOKING BACK

ter encroachment. A K Saseedharan, (National Congress Party), was forced to quit the cabinet after a news channel aired an audio clip, purported to be his, in which he is talking in a sexually explicit manner to a woman. However, months later, a commission report virtually acquitted Saseedharan of charges saying that there was no evidence against him. The woman involved in the case also stated that she did not want to pursue the case. An NRI businessman-turned-politician Thomas

Thomson today (Friday) approved the Cabinet decision of the Health Department relating to provision of free treatment for medico-legal victims of road accidents, acid attack and burn injuries and termed it as a step in the right direction," the statement said. Bajjal has given his to the proposal of the department for outsourcing of diagnostic (non-radiological) services to provide free laboratory services at Mohalla Clinics, polyclinics and Mobile Health Clinics, it said. The Lt Governor has also agreed with the amendments to the Delhi Aarogya Kosh (DAK) scheme to provide financial assistance for specified high-end diag-

## Public meeting held near LoC to address issues of Rajouri locals

**JAMMU, DEC 30** /-/- Authorities in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir convened a public meeting near the Line of Control (LoC) in Sunderbani sector to address issues faced by locals, in the wake of repeated ceasefire violations by Pakistan.

Over 300 people from six panchayats participated in the public meeting at border village Meenka on Friday and presented their demands related to development issues and safety measures like construction of underground community bunkers, an official spokesman said today. District development commissioner (DDC), Rajouri, Shabbir Iqbal Choudhary chaired the meeting which, among others, was attended by senior civil and Army officers, the spokesman said. Choudhary directed sub-divisional magistrate Sunderbani for finalisation of location for at least 100 bunkers in consultation with elected representatives, locals and Army officials, the official added.

According to the DDC, issues such as installation of transformers, provision of additional staff in schools, road connectivity, operationalisation of Borpattan teshil, drinking water supply and opening of new sub-centres came up for discussion during the meeting. He also issued directions for time-bound construction of seed-stores, water supply lines, bringing more villages under irrigation network during current financial year, providing pension for widows and old age applicants and several other developmental measures. Assuring time-bound redressal of issues, the DDC also directed the block development officer for construction of a Park at Mahadar temple and bridge for connectivity in Meenka village. People from various panchayats appreciated the outreach programme started by district administration for addressing public grievances and providing various services at doorsteps, the spokesman said.

## Lt Gov approves Delhi govt's proposal to bear treatment costs for road, fire victims

**NEW DELHI, DEC 30** /-/- Lt Governor Anil Bajjal has approved Delhi government's proposal to bear the treatment expenses of victims of motor accidents, fire and acid attacks that take place on the city's roads at private hospitals.

Bajjal, in a statement issued on Friday, termed the Arvind Kejriwal government's scheme as a step in the "right direction". The LG also stressed that for a robust healthcare system, the "government institutions also need to be strengthened, as the healthcare system cannot be left entirely in the hands of private sector". Bajjal said complete transparency and relevant procedures or guidelines

should be followed strictly while empaneling private hospitals. He said a mechanism must be evolved for ensuring that unnecessary tests are not prescribed in collusion with private medical centres.

"Further, the quality of tests and the private institutions empanelled for these tests also should be ensured through appropriate penalties in case of malpractices/ 'poor quality'," the Raj Niwas said in a statement. The Lt Governor also advised that the administrative department must develop a system of online Aadhaar-based/biometric tracking of patient to ensure proper follow-up and to prevent any malpractices, given the finan-

cial implications, it said. "Lt Governor today (Friday) approved the Cabinet decision of the Health Department relating to provision of free treatment for medico-legal victims of road accidents, acid attack and burn injuries and termed it as a step in the right direction," the statement said. Bajjal has given his to the proposal of the department for outsourcing of diagnostic (non-radiological) services to provide free laboratory services at Mohalla Clinics, polyclinics and Mobile Health Clinics, it said. The Lt Governor has also agreed with the amendments to the Delhi Aarogya Kosh (DAK) scheme to provide financial assistance for specified high-end diag-

nostic (radiological) tests or surgeries. However, noting that the original purpose of the scheme was to help the poor and needy sections of the society, and that the planning department too has advocated an income ceiling, he advised the government to retain some "income ceiling" so that the resources of the government were used and the "poor are not crowded out by the well-to-do".

The LG also noted that the focus of these schemes appeared to be on outsourcing and there is no mention in the proposal about any action plan to strengthen the diagnostic infrastructure in the government institutions.



Uttar Pradesh Governor Ram Naik, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis honouring freedom fighters on the occasion of "Smriti Samaroh" in memory of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, in Lucknow on Saturday.

## Bedi functioning more like leader of Oppn, alleges Puducherry CM

**PUDUCHERRY, DEC 30** /-/- Puducherry chief minister V Narayanasamy today alleged that Lt Governor Kiran Bedi's "style of functioning is more like a leader of Opposition than an administrator" of the Union Territory.

Addressing newsmen here, Narayanasamy said although he had written to the Lt Governor asking her not to "overstep her constitutional and statutory limits" and not to "interfere in the routine working of the elected government," she had been doing so. "I have written letters to her on more than 15 occasions registering protest against her style of functioning. But,

she keeps functioning more like a leader of opposition than an administrator," he said. The Congress leader also minced no words stating that, "Bedi has not contributed for the economic development of Puducherry and in implementation of progressive schemes."

Condemning the "autocratic style of working" of the Lt Governor, the chief minister said: "It is really a sad development that she (Bedi) held meetings with the police officers yesterday to draw up a plan of police tourneys in view of the flow of tourists into Puducherry on the eve of New Year Day."

Narayanasamy claimed that the Lt Governor has held meetings with police officers though he had arranged one with police officers to finalise the security plan for maintenance of law and order with the chief secretary in charge, A Anbarasu being a coordinating officer.

The chief minister maintained that "time is not far for the current situation to come to an end." Since Bedi assumed office last year, the Congress government in Puducherry and she have been at loggerheads over several issues including medical admissions, civic problems and induction of three nominated MLAs.

## Union minister downplays separatists call for boycott of J&K local polls

**JAMMU, DEC 30** /-/- Union minister Jitendra Singh today downplayed the separatists' boycott call for the upcoming panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir, saying they have never gone through the test of ballot and stand exposed for their duplicity.

The minister of state in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) also said the nation had approved the "policy shift" of giving befitting response to Pakistan for ceasefire violations. Talking to newsmen before a meeting of the state BJP here, he said: "The entire country should now realise that the separatists already stand exposed. The duplicity that they have exercised to put forward their political agenda, which is separatism by convenience and not by conviction, stand exposed particularly before the youth of Kashmir." He was responding to a question on the boycott call given by the separatist camp for the panchayat polls scheduled to start in February next year.

On December 28, separatists repeated their call to boycott the panchayat polls, saying the central and state governments have been using such elections to hoodwink international community.

Separatists Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Yasin Malik said boycotting these elections will deliver a message that Kashmiris will accept nothing less than freedom and right to self-determination.

By calling for a boycott of the polls, the separatists are only betraying their own insecurity and the lack of public support they are themselves now tactically acknowledging," the Union minister said today.

## Drug bust: NCB arrests 3 students from universities in Delhi-NCR

**NEW DELHI, DEC 30** /-/- NCB officials said they arrested three students from Delhi-NCR based institutions - the DU, JNU and Amity University - have been arrested by the NCB as part of a major New Year eve crackdown against drugs rackets. The agency, at the end of a three-day long operation that started on December 28, said it has also seized 1.14 kg of charas (cannabis) and three LSD (Lysergic acid Diethylamide) blot papers, the NCB officials said they were supposed to be supplied to the party circuit of students in and around the DU's North Campus and other similar locations for New Year celebrations. The Delhi Zonal unit of the NCB identified the four, arrested under the provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS), as students of reputed academic institutions. Two are from the Hindu College and one student each from the Jawaharalal Nehru University (JNU) and the Amity University.

'Anirudh Mathur (22), Tenzin Phunog (23) and Sam Mallick (21) are all abusers of charas and used to get it from Gaurav Kumar (22). They have also informed that abuse of drugs is rampant in the Delhi University campus area. They have given information about drug peddlers and others involved in the racket which is further being verified. NCB deputy director general (North) SK Jha said, Kumar, a BA Economics (Hons) student of the Hindu College, was named as the kingpin of the racket by the NCB, which added that the charas was being allegedly sourced by these students from Himachal Pradesh.

The NCB claimed that the students were both addicts and suppliers of these drugs. Calling the operation as one of the

major crackdowns against drugs in Delhi colleges in the recent past, NCB director general Rina Mitra told newsmen that the agency is committed to check the abuse of narcotics among students as part of its larger mandate to eradicate the menace. "NCB officials said they smelled the rat after being tipped-off that LSD blot papers were being couriered from Jaipur to Himachal Pradesh with help from Mallick. Interrogation of the four students revealed, the NCB said that Kumar was "into drug peddling in and around the North campus area." He procures the charas from a man, Neelchand, of Himachal Pradesh and sells them to students and others in the north campus area. The anti-narcotics agency said Gaurav Kumar along with Anirudh Mathur and Tenzin Phunog went to Himachal Pradesh on December 24 and they stayed at a village named Choj at a home stay, which is Neelchand's house.

Neelchand, it said, is a kingpin of drug trafficking racket operating from the hill state and was already wanted in a case of the NCB, Delhi. "The three went to different villages such as Choj, Kalga, and Halana, all in Himachal Pradesh and sell them during the trip," the NCB said in a statement. While Phunog is studying Msc. (Physics) from the Hindu College, Mathur is a MBA (hospitality management) student at Amity and Mallick is pursuing MA (Philosophy) from the JNU. (PTI)

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## Held 'hostage' in Lucknow madarsa, 51 girls rescued; manager arrested

**LUCKNOW, DEC 30** /-/- As many as 51 girls were rescued today after a raid was conducted at a madarsa in the old city area following complaints of sexual harassment of the inmates by the institute's manager, police said.

A senior police official said madrasa manager Mohammad Taiyab Zin was arrested. Acting on a tip off by the locals, a police team carried out a raid at Madarsa Jamia Khadeejul Qubra Lilabnat in Yasinaganj area under Saadatganj police station on Friday night, police said. "The madrasa manager was arrested and 51 girls being held hostage in the institution in the old city area were rescued following the raid," they said.

Police said as they made arrangements for sending the inmates to their parents, the girls narrated their ordeal alleging inhumane treatment and molestation by the accused. Investigations to ascertain whether the madrasa was being illegally or was registered are on, they said. The police said more than 100 girls study at the madrasa and the rest were not present at the time of raid.

## BMC to ensure eateries follow safety norms during New Year celebrations

**MUMBAI, DEC 30** /-/- The city civic body has directed its officials to form teams to ensure that all the restaurants are fire safety compliant in view of the New Year celebrations, a day after a massive fire at a plush pub here claimed 14 lives.

Civic chief Ajoy Mehta, in a message to all assistant municipal commissioners and deputy commissioners of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), said all zonal deputy commissioners and ward officers are requested to form a team comprising staff of building

and factory departments, medical health officer and fire department staff. The team will inspect all the restaurants and ensure that they are fire compliant, the message said. The premises should have fire escape routes, staircases and ensure open fire extinguishers are in place, he added. Fourteen people were killed and 21 others injured after a major fire broke out at '1 Above' pub, located on the terrace of a building in Kamala Mills compound on Senapati Bapat Marg in Lower Parel in the wee hours on

Friday. Most of the victims, who included 11 women, died of asphyxiation.

The Mumbai civic body had on Friday suspended five officials, including those attached to the G-South ward for dereliction of duty. There are allegations that civic authorities turned a blind eye to construction irregularities and violation of fire safety norms in the compound. Mumbai mayor Vishwanath Mahadeshwar had said an inquiry had been ordered and strict action would be taken against errant officials. Meanwhile, the Shiv Sena,

which is at the helm of affairs in the BMC, in its mouthpiece 'Saamana' lamented today the lethargic attitude of the administrations across the world towards issues of fire safety, as it cited the examples of fire incidents at Mecca, London.

The party announced that the incidents of fire in Mumbai had gone up in the last two years. "The nexus of civic officers and employees, with the owners of premises that caught fire, resulting in the loss of lives has been debated extensively," it said.