

## CRPF to replace 12,000 older troops with young personnel in Chhattisgarh

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 24** /- The CRPF has decided to replace about 12,000 of its aged troops with young and freshly inducted recruits to bring agility and renewed strength in its anti-Naxal operations in the LWE-hit areas of Chhattisgarh.

The paramilitary, designated as the lead force against Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in the country, has recently recruited and trained about 20,000 fresh troops and has now planned to deploy the 'young blood' in these strenuous operations that require personnel to be out in jungles for days together, in harsh climatic conditions. The first-time measure, a senior official told news agency PTI, is part of the forces' strategy to bring renewed vigour in its operations by posting young and motivated personnel and having the least amount of casualties and injuries on its side. "About 12,000 freshly trained young recruits, in the age group of 18-21 years, will be deployed in Chhattisgarh soon by replacing their older colleagues who are in the age-group of 45-50 years," the official said.

The aim of the exercise is to keep the combat profile of the force young, he said, adding that the move has been approved by CRPF Director General

(DG) R R Bhatnagar. An analysis of casualties in the force, both fatal and non-fatal, in the past encounters reflect that a number of aged troops were victims.

"There can be no doubt that a young age profile for a fighting force will result in better successes. The older age profile of troopers will be taken out from this LWE affected region and deployed in other locations where the battle is not that tough and demanding," the official said. Another official deployed in the anti-Naxal operations grid of the force said while this first lot of young troops will go to Chhattisgarh, especially the south Eastern region that comprises districts of Sukma and Dantewada, the next batches could be sent to other states affected by LWE violence like Jharkhand and Odisha.

"Some of the young personnel would also be sent to the Kashmir valley which is another important theatre of operations for the CRPF," the second official said. The about 12,000 new personnel will be employed in such a fashion, across various units of the CRPF in Chhattisgarh, that the overall profile of the battalion remains experienced and conversant with the area they are operating in and at the same time fighting fit, the officials said.

## Siddaramaiah not automatic choice, Cong high-command to pick CM in Karnataka

**KALABURAGI, APRIL 24** /- The Congress stands a very good chance of winning the Karnataka Assembly polls, and the high-command will take a call on the next chief minister, senior party leader Mallikarjun Kharge said today, indicating incumbent Siddaramaiah may not be the automatic choice. Kharge said the Congress high-command will choose the chief minister in consultation with the newly elected MLAs. If the party is voted to power for a second term running, The Congress has consistently maintained it is contesting the polls under the leadership of chief minister Siddaramaiah but refrained from declaring him its

candidate for the top job. Kharge's remarks indicated that the leadership question in the Congress was far from settled. When asked if the party's Central leadership has decided on who would be the next chief minister, the senior Congress leader said: "Unnecessary controversy" should not be created in the run-up to the elections.

"CM (Siddaramaiah) is already there. He is leading (the Congress campaign) and he is the captain. As long as he leads, he is the captain. And the party, whenever it wants, can change anybody because the high-command is the ultimate authority in consultation with local (newly elected) MLAs, they (the high-command) will take decision

(on who will be the chief minister)," Kharge told news agency PTI. Kharge, leader of the Congress party in the Lok Sabha, said since the BJP and the JDS were facing problems, they had declared their chief ministerial nominees, he said, without elaborating. The BJP has declared its state unit chief B S Yeddyurappa and JDS H D Kumaraswamy as their chief ministerial faces. Both have been the state's chief minister. Talking about the Congress's electoral prospects, Kharge said: "We have got very good chances to win the elections and I hope that we will get majority".

The senior leader also claimed that neither the Congress nor the chief minister is facing "anti-

incumbency". He defended the chief minister for filing nominations from two constituencies - Chamundeshwari and Badami. Noting that Kumaraswamy is also contesting from two seats, he added: "Have Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda not done so?" "People of the area (Badami and north Karnataka) want Siddaramaiah to contest from Badami. He has got a lot of clout in that area also. People (Opposition parties) are creating a sort of atmosphere that there is no hope for Siddaramaiah in Chamundeshwari and that's why he is contesting from Badami). It's not like that," Kharge added.

## New ministers in Punjab cabinet take over; best pick, says CM

**CHANDIGARH, APRIL 24** /- The new ministers in the Punjab cabinet took over their departments today as chief minister Amarinder Singh expressed optimism that they would perform well, with the "best" having been selected for the job.

Reacting to claims that the Dalit and Other Backward Class community had not been given adequate representation in the cabinet expansion last week, he said not all the 77 ruling party MLAs can be made ministers. But as already announced, those left out will be suitably accommodated, he told newsmen. Three Congress MLAs had resigned from their posts in the state unit of the party before the swearing in of the nine new ministers on Saturday, complaining that they too deserved a berth in the Amarinder Singh cabinet.

When told that some of the new ministers did not have the qualifications to head their departments, the chief minister said they all had qualified and experienced staff to help them.

A defence minister is not an Army General, he said at the interaction with media persons after the installation of the new ministers in their offices at the Punjab Secretariat. Efficiency is bound to improve with the expansion of the cabinet, he said. Already there was a marked improvement in the state's overall situation, he said. Even the financial situation had improved slightly, he said, claiming that pensions had been disbursed regularly under the social security schemes for the past four months. Earlier, the chief minister moved from floor to floor in the Punjab Secretariat, starting from the seventh, to see the new ministerial colleagues settle down in their jobs.

On the seventh floor, a 'death' of Sri Sukhmani Sahb ji marked the installation of animal husbandry, dairy development and labour minister Balbir Singh Sidhu. The Chief Minister was also greeted enthusiastically in the offices of power minister Gurpreet Singh Kang and food and civil supplies and consumer affairs minister Bharat Bhushan Ashu on the same floor. Flanked by his party functionaries, he also escorted sports minister Rana Gurmeet Singh Sodhi to his chair in his sixth floor office, before moving down to the fifth floor to visit PWD and IT minister VijayINDER Singla, Revenue Minister Sukhbinder Singh Sarkaria, and industries and commerce minister Sunder Sham Arora.

Enthusiastic workers were present at every floor to welcome the Chief minister, who completed the installation process in the offices of Education and Environment Minister G P Sori and Cooperation and Jails Minister Sukhbinder Singh Randhawa.



**Kirron Kher, Member of Parliament, Chandigarh planting a sapling after inaugurating an Open Gym through MPLADS at Shehalya Maloya, in Chandigarh on Tuesday.**

## Himachal to get Rs 300 cr under Central Road Fund, says CM

**DHARAMSHALA, APRIL 24** /- Chief minister Jai Ram Thakur today said Union minister Nitin Gadkari had approved a proposal of the Himachal Pradesh government to increase allotments under a Central fund to improve roads in the hill state.

The Central Road Fund (CRF) for the state has been increased from Rs 210 cr to Rs 300 cr, Thakur said in a press release issued here after his meeting with

Gadkari in New Delhi. "The Union minister for road transport and highways has given his approval to the proposal," he said. The chief minister has also urged the Union minister to set up a special fund under the CRF for improvement of black spots and construction of crash barriers on roads in Himachal Pradesh, according to the release.

In view of the topography of hill states

and occurrence of accidents, Thakur said he had suggested that a concrete policy be made on road maintenance and safety. The Union minister has approved the suggestion in principle, he said. The chief minister also discussed and reviewed important issues of the state, which are pending with the ministry, the release read. Senior officers of the road transport and highways ministry were

also present in the meeting. Union minister Nitin Gadkari asked the officers to complete the formalities for construction of new highways approved for the state. He also directed the authorities to ensure that in view of the tourist season, repair and construction work on national highways be undertaken in such a way that there is no inconvenience is faced by tourists coming to the state, Thakur said.

## Custodial death: Victim's family moves Kerala

**HC for CBI probe**

**KOCHI, APRIL 24** /- Alleging lapses in the police investigation into the 'custodial death' of a 26-year-old man near here, the victim's family has moved the Kerala High Court seeking a CBI probe into the incident.

Akhila, wife of S R Sreejith, who died after allegedly being tortured in police custody, on April 9, told reporters here that a petition has been filed in the High Court seeking a CBI investigation in the case. She has also sought Rs 1 crore compensation for 'custodial death' of her husband to be paid to other dependents of the joint family within a time frame fixed by the court.

In her petition, Akhila stated that she apprehends that the inquiry conducted by police against the officials from their department would not yield expected results.

It is fair and proper to handover the investigation to the CBI, she said. The role of other influential officers including the district police chief (rural) and circle inspector of the area should also be investigated, she said.

Currently, a special investigation team (SIT) headed by Crime Branch IG S Sreejith is probing the case.

## Bombay HC suggests special police unit to probe serious crimes

**MUMBAI, APRIL 24** /- Emphasising the need for prompt and timely completion of investigations, the Bombay High Court today suggested setting up of a special unit in the police to probe serious crimes like murder and offences related to women.

Timely investigation into serious offences like murder, rape and other cases pertaining to women or minors is the need of the hour, a division bench of Justices N P Patil and G S Kulkarni said. The court was hearing a case of rape and kidnapping of a 13-year-old girl. The girl's father had filed a petition seeking permission to terminate her 26-week pregnancy. The court had, earlier this month, permitted the girl to terminate her pregnancy but had sought to know from the police the status of the investigation in the case.

Government counsel Abhinandan Vagyanji today told the court that the FIR was registered in the case last July when the girl was kidnapped. In March, the girl and the accused person were traced to Uttar Pradesh and brought to Mumbai.

"While initially, only a charge of kidnapping was levelled against the accused, rape and other relevant charges under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) were added later," Vagyanji said. The court expressed its dissatisfaction with the fact that the FIR was lodged last July and for eight months the police did nothing. "It is time the police get divided into two units. One for law and order and one special unit only for probing serious crimes like murder, rape and other women related offences. Police, nowadays, have no time to probe cases as they are most of the times put on bandobast duty or on special duty during religious festivals," Justice Patil said.



**Women bikers took all protection like scarf and sunglasses to protect from the scorching sun during a hot summer afternoon in Lucknow on Monday.**

## Asaram case: Security stepped up around victim's house ahead of verdict

**SHAHJAHANPUR, APRIL 24** /- With a special SC/ST court Jodhpur all set to pronounce its verdict on Wednesday in a 2012 rape case against self-styled godman Asaram, the district administration here has stepped up security around the house of the victim.

Asaram is accused of raping a teenage girl from Shahjahanpur, who was studying at the self-styled godman's ashram at Chhindwara in Madhya Pradesh. "The security of the victim's family is continuously being monitored. Two more constables will stand guard outside her house in addition to the five policemen already deployed there

and a strict vigil is being maintained on all the visitors who pass by CCTV cameras," superintendent of police K B Singh told news agency PTI today. Vigil was also being kept on Asaram's ashram at Rudrapur here, he said. Earlier this month, Judge Madhu Sudan Sharma of the Jodhpur court heard the final arguments from the prosecution and defence counsel and reserved the order for April 25.

As per the directions of the Rajasthan High Court, the trial court will deliver its verdict in the case in Jodhpur Central Jail premises. The victim had alleged that Asaram had called her to his ashram in Manali area near Jodhpur

and raped her on the night of August 5, 2013. Asaram, in jail since August 31, 2013, was charged under relevant sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. If convicted, he could be jailed for a maximum sentence of 10 years.

A chargesheet against Asaram and four other co-accused namely Shiva, Shilpi, Sharad and Prakash had been filed by the police on November 6, 2013 under various sections of the POCSO Act. Juvenile Justice Act and IPC. Trial of the case had begun in the district and session court on March 19, 2017,

which was shifted to the special court for SC/ST Cases on December 16, 2016.

He is also facing a rape case in Gujarat. Earlier, the apex court had refused to grant bail to Asaram on various grounds in the two sexual assault cases lodged in Rajasthan and Gujarat. Two Surat-based sisters had lodged separate complaints against Asaram and his son Narayan Sai, accusing them of rape and illegal confinement, among other charges. In all, Asaram has unsuccessfully moved 12 bail applications, of which six were rejected by trial court, three by the Rajasthan High Court and three by the Supreme Court. (PTI)

## State Notes

### Minor raped in Balrampur

**BALRAMPUR, APRIL 24** /- An eight-year-old girl was allegedly raped at knifepoint by a man in a village here, police said today. The girl was returning from her agriculture field when the accused Chhunu (28) dragged her into a field and allegedly raped her at knifepoint on Monday. Villagers working nearby rushed on hearing the cries of the child and nabbed the accused, police said, adding the girl was admitted to hospital. DIG, Devi Patan, Anil Kumar Rai who visited the victim in hospital and met her family members, said the accused has been arrested and the girl was being taken to Gondia for treatment.

### Advocates clash at UP civil court premises, few hurt

**BJJNOR, APRIL 24** /- A man was shot at and injured and a few lawyers were hurt after two groups of advocates clashed on the Civil Court premises here over the district bar association elections, police said today. Both the groups lodged complaints against each other on Monday at the Kotwali police station, station house officer (SHO), Fateh Singh said. He said a client of a lawyer was shot at and injured during the firing in the clash. The person was admitted to a hospital along with the other advocates who were hurt in the violence, the officer said. Circle officer Gajendra Singh said the case is being investigated. The reason behind the clash could be the animosity between the groups over the elections of the district bar association, police said.

### Security personnel killed in Pulwama encounter

**SRINAGAR, APRIL 24** /- A security force personnel was today killed while another was injured in an encounter with militants in a forest area of Pulwama district in Jammu and Kashmir, officials said. Security forces launched an anti-militancy operation in Latam forest of Tral area in Pulwama district following information about presence of militants there, a police official said. He said a gunbattle broke out between militants and security forces when the ultras opened fire. Two security force personnel - an Army soldier and a policeman - were injured in the encounter while the operation is still in progress, the official said. He said the injured soldier later succumbed to injuries.