

## Punjab BJP seeks CBI probe against cabinet minister

CHANDIGARH, MAY 30 /- The BJP in Punjab today met Governor V P Singh Badnore and demanded an independent probe into the bagging of mining contracts recently allegedly by the four former employees of cabinet minister Rana Gurjit Singh. Rejecting the probe into the matter by a judicial commission, announced yesterday by chief minister Amarinder Singh, the delegation sought an inquiry by the CBI or other central agencies for the granting of mining contracts to the employees of Rana's firm. The delegation urged the governor to order an independent probe into the alleged sand mining scam involving Rana along with his 'employees' Amit Bahadur, Kulvinder Paul Singh, Gurinder Singh and Balraj Singh. Former state president Madan Mohan Mittal, state vice-presidents Harjit Singh Grewal and Iqbal Singh Lalpura and general secretary Manjit Singh Rai and state secretaries Vineet Joshi and Vijay Pari were part of the delegation. Following attacks by the Opposition, Singh ordered a probe by a judicial commission into the matter. The BJP leaders also expressed apprehension that owing to his position in the state government and his political status in the Congress, Irrigation and Power minister Rana would influence the probe. Addressing the media after their meeting with the governor, Joshi said that it is a case of shadow proxy bidding by cabinet minister Rana Gurjit Singh to capture mining business through his men by taking an advantage or misusing or abusing his government position.

"It is a case of corruption, breach of trust and clash of interest. Moreover, it is a violation of the oath taken in the name of Constitution of India by Rana while assuming office of the cabinet minister," he said. He said that it is a case of "benami transactions" where persons with insignificant incomes are depositing crore of rupees into government exchequer. The source of benami transactions will lead to money laundering and hawala transactions, he alleged. He said that the huge unaccounted money exchanged into many hands is a potential threat to national security. "Any Commission which is not headed by a sitting high court judge cannot be called as judicial commission. So, if it is a simple commission constituted under the Commission of Inquiry Act and by naming it as a judicial commission, the chief minister is trying to mislead the people of Punjab," he said. Opposition parties AAP, SAD and BJP have been demanding immediate sacking of Rana for allegedly acquiring sand and gravel mines through "benami transactions in the name of his former cook and staff". Notably, a two-day auction of sand mines in Punjab had culminated with bids worth Rs 1,026 crore secured for 89 mines.

## AAP holds protest, demands sacking of minister Rana Gurjit Singh

CHANDIGARH, MAY 30 /- The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) held protest outside the Punjab Assembly complex here today, seeking immediate sacking of state cabinet minister Rana Gurjit Singh over the alleged allotment of mining contracts to his former employees. As many as 19 MLAs belonging to AAP and its ally the Lok Insaaf Party along with their supporters, who had planned to march towards Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's residence from the Punjab Vidhan Sabha, were stopped by the Chandigarh police outside the assembly complex.

As AAP party leaders, led by state unit chief Bhagwant Mann and leader of opposition H S Phoolka, forcefully tried to move towards the CM's residence, the Chandigarh police took all their into preventive custody. However,

some MLAs managed to alight from the police bus in which they had been made to sit and ran towards the CM's residence, despite the heavy police deployment.

The cops managed to stop the MLAs, after they had covered some distance, but some of the legislators including Sukhpal Singh Khaira sat on the road, blocking the way to Punjab Vidhan Sabha as well as the Punjab and Haryana High Court. "What is wrong in meeting the CM? We are MLAs and we have been kept in illegal detention," fumed Aman Arora, MLA from Sunam. The opposition MLAs were then taken to sector 17 police station. Earlier, talking to media, AAP MP Bhagwant Mann, who is the state unit chief, attacked the Punjab government alleging that cabinet minister Rana Gurjit Singh had pumped in money through his former staff into mining contracts.

# Raje concedes cow vigilantism, hate crimes vitiate state

JAIPUR, MAY 30 /- Chief minister Vasundhara Raje has admitted that recent crimes, including those by cow vigilantes, against minorities in the state show Rajasthan in a bad light, but stressed that firm action will be taken against those behind the violence. "The law of the land prevails in Rajasthan, and the government will ensure the culprits are brought to book," she said.

In April, 194 rakshaks or cow vigilantes lynched a 55-year-old cattle trader, Pehlu Khan, in Alwar and injured four of his companions. Khan later succumbed to injuries. A month later, the desert state hit the headlines again when a video - showing Sikh men allegedly being thrashed by villagers in Alwar - surfaced.



A Jawan stands guard on a deserted road at Nawra Kadal during curfew in Srinagar.

across India. But this government will not tolerate such crimes as it shows the state in a bad light," Raje told PTI in an interaction. She said the administration acted "swiftly" and the perpetrators were arrested in the Pehlu Khan case. The chief minister, who is due to complete her term next year, said, "We do not discriminate among people on any lines. In less than a week, the accused in the honour killing of a Kerala engineer were arrested and a thorough inquiry was also ordered into the Alwar incident." In a suspected case of honour killing, 26-year-old Amit Nair, a civil engineer, was shot dead last week allegedly by his in-laws here for marrying a Rajasthani woman. "Though our government did its part, the Kerala government is yet to speak out on the killings of BJP and RSS workers,"

she said.

"These factors will be crucial in ensuring our victory in the polls," Raje said, adding that the BJP government had "inherited dozens crippled by debts running into crores of rupees from the erstwhile Congress government." Bailing them out to put the crucial sector back on track was a "massive and uphill task," she said. Siting an example of the coordination between the Centre and the

state, Raje said, "Rajasthan's road network by 2018 will be of 30,000 km. The state has already constructed 21,000 km of roads since the BJP formed the government in the state." Apart from its plans to highlight investments in industry and agriculture, the Raje government will heavily bank its poll campaigns on schemes such as the Mukhya Mantri Jal Swavlamban Abhiyan (MJSJA), the Nyay Apke Dwar (legal camps), the Bhamashah Yojana and irrigation schemes. "These are our flagship programmes. The MJSJA is decreasing the dependency on canals and rivers, thus reducing the financial burden on the state," she said. On the AAP looking to make its debut in the Rajasthan polls, Raje said she welcomed the party. "I welcome them. This is a democracy," the chief minister said.(PTI)

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## Govt prepared to handle dengue, chikungunya situation: Delhi health minister

NEW DELHI, MAY 30 /- With nearly 100 cases of chikungunya reported in the national capital even before the onset of monsoon, Delhi Health Minister Satyendra Jain today said the government was prepared to handle any possible outbreak of vector-borne diseases in the city. At least 36 people had died due to chikungunya and dengue last year. The Arvind Kejriwal government had received flak after one of the worst outbreaks of chikungunya in the city with a total of 12,221 cases reported till December 24, 2016 out of which 9,749 were confirmed.

"There have been meetings at ICD level on steps to be taken to prevent breeding of mosquitoes. All civic bodies have been instructed as well. Besides, we have directed various steps to increase their bed strength by 10 to 20 per cent," Jain told reporters today after a surprise visit to a hospital here. During his inspection at the Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) Hospital at Dilshad Garden area in east Delhi, Jain also interacted with patients and their family members. His visit today comes days after Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's surprise inspection at Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital, during which he had expressed displeasure over the state of affairs there. "There are about 10,000 beds in Delhi government hospitals. We had put extra beds last year as well and this time as well, we will add more beds if needed," Jain said, adding,

the focus would be more on preventive measures. At least 96 cases of chikungunya have been reported in Delhi this year, with 10 of them this month, according to a municipal report released yesterday. Kejriwal had recently directed authorities to make a comprehensive plan to deal

at zero. At least 21 deaths due to dengue were reported last year at various hospitals, including nine at AIIMS. Though the official tally of the SDMC stood at 10, seven suspected deaths in 2016 due to malaria were also reported by the civic bodies. The season for vector-borne diseases begins from mid-July and generally lasts till November-end.

On May 13, Kejriwal had chaired a high-level meeting of officers from the three municipal corporations and the Delhi government to discuss plans to eliminate vector-borne diseases in the national capital. He had also written to Union Health Minister J P Nadda, requesting him to reserve 10 per cent of the beds in the central government-run hospitals for dengue and chikungunya patients. Lt Governor Anil Bajjal had on April 29 directed Delhi government-run LNJP Hospital to keep beds ready for dengue and chikungunya patients in the event of an outbreak of vector-borne diseases in the city. The municipal authorities had in early March called an all-hands workshop on the prevention and control of vector-borne diseases to finalise a comprehensive action plan for combating the menace in the coming season. The Lt Governor on March 23 held a review meeting with the three municipal commissioners on preparations for combating vector-borne diseases in the city.(PTI)

He demanded that Chief Minister Amarinder Singh should immediately sack the minister. The AAP also dismissed the probe ordered by the state government in the alleged mining bids and termed it an "eye-wash." Sangrur MP Mann alleged that the present government was functioning like the previous Akali regime.

Corrupt practices are continuing as before, only agents have changed, Mann alleged. "It is surprising that Rana's former employee, a cook, who drew a salary of just Rs 11,000, paid a huge sum to bag a mining contract worth Rs 26.51 crore," Mann claimed.

He demanded that the minister must resign or he should be dismissed from the cabinet in view of the inquiry, or else the entire exercise would appear to be meaningless. Mann said the opposition

party MLAs will meet Punjab Governor on the issue and added that state-wide protest will be launched against the state government if the minister was not removed.

Khaira, AAP MLA from Bholath said the "delated inquiry ordered by Amarinder Singh into the mining scandal appears to be a tailor-made exercise to absolve the accused minister".

The time Rana Gurjit Singh continues to be a member of cabinet, the said inquiry can never be fair and impartial, Khaira alleged. Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh had yesterday ordered the setting up a one-man judicial commission to probe the allegations against Rana Gurjit Singh. The inquiry will be conducted by Justice (Retd) J S Narang and he would submit his report within one month, officials said.(PTI)

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## Punjab cabinet gives nod to abolishing 'kurki'

CHANDIGARH, MAY 30 /- The Punjab cabinet today gave its formal nod to Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh's promise to scrap 'kurki', a practice under which mortgaged land is auctioned to recover loans. The cabinet decision comes in the backdrop of the Chief Minister's assertions about his commitment to rescue the state's beleaguered farmers from the burden of debt by waiving off the loans and putting an end to kurki. The council of ministers, which met here under the chairmanship of Singh, approved the proposal to abolish section 67-A of the Punjab Cooperative Societies Act 1961, which provides for 'kurki' to recover loans as arrears of land revenue, an official spokesman said.

In another move to reform the agriculture sector, the cabinet also okayed the super-session of the existing nominated Market Committees. As per the cabinet decision, Section 12 of the Punjab Agricultural Produce Market Act, 1961, will be amended to appoint administrators, who shall perform the official duties and exercise powers of the Market Committees for a period of one year or till the nomination of Market Committees. The meeting also decided to rename the Department of Agriculture as Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare. It also decided to rename the Department of Irrigation to Department of Water Resources to impart greater focus on issues related to water and its optimal and sustainable use, the spokesman said. It was also decided to form a cabinet sub-committee to review the review the Agriculture Debt Reconciliation Act 2016 to make it effective, broad-based and farmer-friendly, the spokesman said.

The council of ministers felt that the Act, formulated in 2016, was not favourable to farmers and needed a review, he said. The Congress has been claiming that the agriculture sector in the state has been reeling under "mismanagement legacy", which its newly elected government has inherited. (PTI)

## U'khand CM orders strict adherence to BJP's vision document

DEHRADUN, MAY 30 /- Describing BJP's vision document as an "article of faith" to him which has to be followed verbatim, Chief Minister Uttarakhand Singh Rawat has today told government departments to follow it in a time-bound manner and departments must design a concrete roadmap for doing this, he said. "Rawat said. He also reprimanded officials who had not come fully prepared to the meeting warning them not to stammer again if it happened again. Senior officials including Chief Secretary S Ramaswamy, Additional Chief Secretary Om Prakash, Principal Secretaries Radha Raturi and Manisha Panwar attended the meeting.(PTI)

## Mortar misses target; 9 BSF personnel hurt in Rajasthan

JAISALMER, MAY 30 /- Nine personnel of Border Security Force (BSF) were today injured during mortar firing practice near this town in Rajasthan along the Indo-Pak border. The incident took place at about 8.30 am when a 51 mm mortar fell short of its target at the forces' firing range in Kishangarh. While six personnel suffered injuries due to the blast of the ammunition, three others have minor injuries. All of them are stable now, a senior BSF officer said. A Court of Inquiry (COI) has been ordered into the incident, he said. The troops were participating in a firing exercise. Officials said all the injured personnel were air lifted to a hospital in Jodhpur. This is the second such incident here this year after four personnel were injured in similar circumstances in March. (PTI)

## SP leader warns 'saffron-clad goondas' to mend their ways

BADAUN (UP), MAY 30 /- Samajwadi Party MP Dharmendra Yadav has warned the "saffron-clad goondas" that even the police would not be able to save them from the samajwadis if they did not "mend their ways". "All those who have put saffron scarves around their necks and doing goondagardi (hooliganism), mend your ways or else, even the police will not be able to save you from the SP workers," Yadav, the brother of party president.

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