

## Vijayan thanks Siddaramaiah for providing security

**BENGALURU, FEB 28** /- / Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan today thanked his Karnataka counterpart and the state government for providing necessary security and logistics support to make his recent visit to Mangaluru peaceful, amidst bandh called by



**Sangh Parivar outfits, A Dakshina Kannada district bandh was called by Sangh Parivar outfits on February 25 following Vijayan's visit alleging that he was the "mastermind" behind the crimes against its workers in Kerala, especially in Kannur district. Noting that RSS and allied organisations had kicked up a controversy over his visit by issuing a public statements, Vijayan in a letter to Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said such shocking stand taken by these organisations reveal their "underlying fascism" and is totally against the spirit of democracy which we all cherish and nurture in our country.**

He said "though individually me and my political party had defied such threats and taken on such challenges head-on, in the present circumstances where I am occupying a constitutionally defined office, it is necessary to impose some limitations in responding to this challenge in the same manner."

Amid a tight security arranged by the Karnataka police, which had banned all other programmes except the two attended by Vijayan on February 25 had said it was now imperative to protect communal harmony, while RSS was trying to disrupt peace in every corner of the country.

Private shops and commercial establishments were mostly shut that day in Mangaluru and other parts responding to the bandh called by VHP, Bajrang Dal and some fringe right wing outfits and backed by BJP to protest attacks on BJP/RSS cadres in Kerala. Vijayan in his letter has appreciated Siddaramaiah and his government for rising to the occasion and "determinedly intervening to ensure that the function could be organised peacefully." "I would like to formally thank you for the stance taken by your administration in providing the necessary security and logistics support to make my visit and the public events successful and memorable," he said.(PTI)

## Followers of those who celebrated Gandhi's death teaching nationalism: Irfan Habib

**ALIGARH, FEB 28** /- / Noted historian Irfan Habib today said the followers of those forces which distributed sweets when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated are now trying to teach people the meaning of nationalism.

He led a peace march on the Aligarh Muslim University campus to express solidarity with the students of Ramjas College that was the scene of clashes between the members Left-backed AISA and the RSS-backed ABVP on February 22. Addressing the rally at the Arts Faculty lawns, Habib said the last week's incident at Ramjas College marks a "new low in the narrative of threat to free speech, democracy and the right to protest in today's India".

The February 22 violence at

## Haryana Assembly to take up Jat stir issue today

**CHANDIGARH, FEB 28** /- / The Haryana Assembly will take up for discussion the ongoing Jat reservation stir tomorrow after opposition Congress and INLD moved an adjournment motion in this regard. Speaker Kanwar Pal stated that all things barring the part which is sub-judice will be discussed in the House. During Zero Hour, Leader of Opposition and senior INLD leader Abhay Singh Chautala sought to know the government's reply on the ongoing stir by the Jats which has been going on for a month now. Referring to last year's stir in which 30 persons were killed, Chautala said that the government had promised to accept the demands of those agitating which included giving Rs 10 lakh and government jobs to the next of kin of those who died in the agitation in February 2016, withdrawal of cases slapped last year and release of those jailed after the stir turned violent. Chautala alleged that the state BJP government had gone back on its promises made to the Jats and they had been forced to sit on protest in June and now February this year. "Again, this

year, they have been forced to sit on protest and the dharnas have been going on for a month now. It is not only the Jats who are sitting on the dharnas, but they are being supported from all sections of the society," he said. The Speaker told him that since the Jat reservation issue was sub-judice, he will look into what part of the adjournment motion that has been moved can be admitted and discussed in the House. At this, former chief minister and senior Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda got up and said that only the reservation part was sub-judice and there was no bar to discuss the rest of the things pertaining to the stir. "Thousands of people are sitting on the dharnas across the state for a month now. Reservation is not their only demand, there are so many other things that are involved and should be discussed here in the House," Hooda said. Hooda also targeted the government, alleging that development has come to a standstill. "Ministers and officers of the Khattar government cannot go and move in villages because of public anger...again they

(are Jats) have been forced to agitate. The government must resolve this issue," Hooda said. Afterwards, the Speaker adjourned the House for half an hour and held a meeting with the opposition leaders from the Congress and INLD. After the House re-assembled, the Speaker informed that it has been decided that the issue will be taken up tomorrow. Besides seeking quota in education and government jobs under Other Backward Classes category, the demands of the Jats include release of those jailed during last year's agitation, withdrawal of cases slapped during the protest and government jobs for the kin of those killed or injured while taking part in the stir. Later, interacting with reporters outside the Assembly, Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar when asked to comment on the adjournment motion moved by the INLD and Congress, said "The Speaker has clarified by saying that part (Jat issue) which is sub-judice, there will be no discussion, rest will be discussed at length".

Replying to a question, Khattar said "We have always been open for any talks. Now, the Jats have put forward 18-point charter of demands. We are ready to talk and do whatever is possible within the ambit of the Constitution." Talking to reporters outside the Assembly complex, Abhay Chautala said they moved adjournment motion to seek a reply from the government. "We had said earlier that we will raise the matter in the House and seek a concrete reply from the government on the issue," Chautala said. Chautala said that Speaker had to adjourn the House on this issue today "and it has been decided that the issue will be discussed tomorrow". Attacking the Congress, the INLD leader said, "It is strange that Congress too is moving an adjournment motion on this issue. They should, in fact, apologise to all those who are agitating because all of what is happening today is because of their (Congress) mistakes who brought half-baked reservation during their time. Had they done their homework properly, situation which we are currently witnessing would not have been the case."

## CAG pulls up Haryana on 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme

**CHANDIGARH, FEB 28** /- / The Comptroller and Auditor General has pulled up the Haryana government for "diversion of funds" and non-achievement of 100 per cent enrolment of dropout girls under the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' scheme. Besides, the sex ratio target of Haryana's Panipat district from where the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' (BBBP) scheme was launched in 2015, could not be achieved as on March 2016, as per the latest performance audit of non-public sector undertakings for the year ending March 2016. BBBP a centrally sponsored scheme, was rolled out on January 22, 2015 at Panipat and the objectives of the scheme were to prevent gender-biased sex selection elimination, and ensure survival, protection, education and participation of girl child.

CAG test checked the records of the office of Director, Women and Child Development (WCD) department and three districts covering a period from January, 2015 till March, 2016. Mahendragarh and Panipat were selected on the basis of lowest and highest child sex ratio and Sonapat on the basis of maximum expenditure incurred, the report said. As per the scheme, Rs 5 lakh were to be provided to each district through their respective departments to strengthen the district pre-conception & pre-natal diagnostic technique cell, monitoring, research studies, information, education and communication activities.

The audit observed that funds of Rs 3.51 lakh were not utilised for the programme in Panipat for the aforementioned objectives out of which Rs 3.01 lakh were spent on preparation of 'theme gate' for the entrance at Panipat on the occasion of launching the scheme. "Thus the expenditure incurred on the theme gate was irregular and tantamount to diversion of funds. Further, it was observed that an expenditure of Rs 21.24 lakh was incurred (January 2015) by WCD department from funds of the scheme for the purchase of 1,800 laptop bags and 2,900 mugs. There was no provision in the scheme for purchase of these items," said the report.

However, the department in its reply said the purchase of laptop bags and mugs was made for wide publicity of the scheme and all the material was printed with the logo 'BBBP' and it was distributed to participants from all over India. "The reply was not convincing because purchase and distribution of laptop bags and mugs was against the provision of the scheme as the expenditure was to be incurred on innovation and awareness activities," auditor observed. As per audit report, the guidelines provided for improving the sex ratio at birth in gender critical districts by 10 points in a year.

The report said the ratio in Panipat district was 892 against the target of 902 as of December, 2015 which further decreased to 881 in March, 2016.

## HC asks striking drivers of Ola and Uber to end stir

**NEW DELHI, FEB 28** /- / The Delhi High Court today asked the drivers of app-based cab firms Ola and Uber and their unions, who are on strike in Delhi-NCR to protest against "low fares" and "lack" of basic amenities from the companies, to end their agitation. "You cannot go on fighting, as you do with the government. You will have to resolve and end this agitation as it will not get you anything," Justice Rajiv Sahai Endlaw said.

The court said that the cab drivers and their unions have a purely contractual relationship with the companies and if they do not desire to continue, they can always choose the more lucrative option, but cannot demand anything from the firms except by peaceful commercial negotiation. It said the drivers should create an atmosphere for a peaceful commercial dialogue with app-based cab aggregators.

The court's observations came after the counsel for the two unions - Sarvodaya Driver Association of Delhi (SDAD) and Rajdhani Tourist Drivers' Union, submitted that they have met the representatives of the two companies, but could not reach any settlement. "We are ready to settle the issue, but they are not," the counsel said, adding that "we only get around Rs 60 per day from our cab firms so the rate per km should be increased". "The unions' contention was opposed by counsel for Uber, who said, "We are not forcing you to pay taxi for us". The court, however, said that the parties should talk. It appointed a mediator to help resolve the issue amicably.

The court has now fixed the matter for hearing on March 22.

It, meanwhile, also extended its interim order asking Delhi Police to ensure safety of the drivers having a contract with the companies and wanting to ply. It had also said that their vehicles should not be stopped or come after the counsel for the two unions - Sarvodaya Driver Association of Delhi (SDAD) and Rajdhani Tourist Drivers' Union, submitted that they have met the representatives of the two companies, but could not reach any settlement. "We are ready to settle the issue, but they are not," the counsel said, adding that "we only get around Rs 60 per day from our cab firms so the rate per km should be increased". "The unions' contention was opposed by counsel for Uber, who said, "We are not forcing you to pay taxi for us". The court, however, said that the parties should talk. It appointed a mediator to help resolve the issue amicably.



Karnataka Agriculture Minister Krishna Biregouda (Cnd L) inaugurating 'Krushi Yantradhare Center (Agriculture Equipment) at Kadakalata village in Nippani Taluk of Belagavi district near about 75 kms away from Belagavi city on Tuesday.

## UDF walks out of Assembly alleging 'goonda raj' in state

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB 28** /- / Congress-led UDF opposition members in Kerala today staged a walk-out in the state assembly, protesting the LDF government's refusal to discuss the alleged collapse of law and order situation in the state, even as Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan rejected the charges. Replying to the notice for an adjournment motion, moved by the Opposition over the issue, Vijayan said the opposition charges were baseless and they were raising false charges. Giving details of various steps taken by the government to regulate goons and mafia gangs, he said action has been initiated against 171 persons under the Kerala Anti-social Prevention Act (KAPAA) in the last nine months, after the CPI(M)-led LDF govern-

ment came into power. "We have taken stringent measures against goons and mafia gangs. After this government came into power, an anti-goonda squad led by a police superintendent was formed to regulate such criminals," Vijayan said. Praising the police force, he said police personnel had showcased commendable job and they were able to nab criminals, accused in various cases, in a speedy manner. Police took strong action especially in cases like extortion, manhandling, political murders and attacks against women and children. Defending opposition's charges that about 1,75,000 crime cases had been registered after this government came into power, Chief Minister said the number of cases has in-

creased as the police stations have become more people-friendly. Vijayan also rejected the allegation that the government was planning to give remission to 1850 prisoners as part of the diamond jubilee celebrations of the state formation. "The allegation is completely baseless. The decision to give remission to selected prisoners was taken as per the existing guidelines. No hardcore criminals will be given any remission," he said. Culprits involved in cases connected with national security, drug trafficking, found guilty under Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act and those accused in crimes against women and children would not be given any exemption. Rejecting the Chief Minister's claim that there was no law and order

issues in the state worth to be discussed on the floor, Opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala said Kerala is under the grip of 'goonda raj' and the crime rate has shot up in the last nine months. "Law and order has collapsed in the state. Public life has become miserable due to the thriving of criminals. Police is inactive. But Chief Minister is justifying the police's inaction," he said. After the reply of Chief Minister, Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan refused leave for the motion, following which UDF members trooped out of the House. Lone BJP member O Rajagopal and Kerala Congress (M)-led by former finance minister K M Mani also walked out in protest against the government's matter.(PTI)

## Indo-Oman joint military exercise to begin from March 6

**JAMMU, FEB 28** /- / In an effort to build bilateral military-to-military relations and skills, a 14-day joint defence exercise 'Nagah-II' between the armies of India and Oman will begin in Himachal Pradesh from March 6. 'Indo-Oman Joint Army Exercise 'AL NAGAH-II 2017' will be conducted between the Indian and Oman Army from 6 to 19 March in the Dhauladhar Ranges at Bakloh in Himachal Pradesh. PRO, Defence, Jammu, Lt Col Manish Mehta said. This is the second joint military exercise between the two countries which have a history of extensive cooperation in the defence arena, the first one was held in Oman in January 2015, he said.

The PRO said the participating troops for this exercise have been drawn from one infantry battalion each from the Indian Army and the Royal Army of Oman. Approximately 60 troops from both countries will participate in the exercise. He added, "The aim of the exercise is to build and promote bilateral Army-to-Army relations and enhance interoperability while exchanging skills and experiences between the Indian Army and the Royal Army of Oman", he said.

He further said that an added aim of the exercise is to qualitatively enhance knowledge of each other's military procedures thus increasing the scope for interoperability and better responsiveness to a common threat. The Indian troops have undergone extensive training on rock craft, slithering, Counter Terrorism or Low Intensity Conflict Operations, in addition to tactical drills of close cordon and house entry. Further, the drills to fulfil the mandate of the joint exercise, he said.

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Delhi University's North Campus is not an isolated incident but part of a "systematic move to crush India's tradition of peaceful protests which began nearly two centuries ago during the British rule," he said. "It is ironical that the forces, the adherents of which distributed sweets when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated, are trying to teach us the meaning of nationalism," the history professor said. Lauding Delhi University student Gurmehar Kaur, who started a social media campaign against the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, he said she is as a role model for the country's youth.

Bating for the rights of people of Jammu and Kashmir, he said, "Whenever any person raises the issue of the democratic rights of peo-

ple of Kashmir, the government tries to browbeat them by accusing them of being anti-national... Those who use violence to crush the weakest sections of society are the real anti-nationals."

"When the land and territory of Kashmir belongs to India, people of Kashmir are also Indians. They have every right to enjoy all fruits of democracy available to people of rest of India," the professor emeritus at AMU said. Attacking BJP, he said that like "Adolf Hitler the leaders of the party swear in the name of the poor but follow policies which help the rich".

The speeches given by some of the senior most BJP leaders during the poll campaign in Uttar Pradesh have exposed the divisive



politics of this party, Habib said, citing the "graveyard and cremation ground" remark of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.(PTI)