

The Vice President and the Chairman, Rajya Sabha, M. Venkaiah Naidu administering the Oath of Office and Secrecy to the re-elected Member of Rajya Sabha and the Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Arun Jaitley, in New Delhi on Sunday—PIB

Form panel to disburse medical claim under CGHS: SC to Centre

NEW DELHI, APR 16 /-- In a bid to protect retired public servants from "unnecessary harassment" in claiming reimbursement under the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS), the Supreme Court has asked the Centre to "expeditiously" set up a high-powered committee to disburse claims in a month. A bench of justices R K Agrawal and Ashok Bhushan also directed the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to form the panel within seven days. It would comprise special directorate general, directorate general, two additional directors and one specialist in the field and shall ensure timely and hassle-free disposal of the claims to the pensioners, it directed.

"With regard to the slow and tardy pace of disposal of Medical Reimbursement Claims (MRC) by the CGHS in case of pensioner beneficiaries and the unnecessary harassment meted out to pensioners who are senior citizens, affecting them mentally, physically and financially, we are

of the opinion that all such claims shall be attended by a secretary-level high powered committee in the ministry concerned which shall meet every month for quick disposal of such cases," the bench said. The directions came on a plea of a retired government servant who was denied medical claim under the CGHS in 2014 for his treatment at Fortis Escorts Hospital in Delhi and Jaslok hospital in Mumbai due to the non-employment of the hospitals under the scheme.

The bench, which directed the ministry to give the petitioner Rs 4.99.555 spent by him on his treatment, also observed that the CGHS officials responsible for clearing medical claims took a "very inhuman approach" by denying him the full cost of his treatment.

"Can it be said that taking treatment in speciality hospital by itself would deprive a person to claim reimbursement solely on the ground that the said hospital is not included in the government order. The right to medical claim cannot be denied merely because the name of the hospital is not included in the

government order. The real test must be the factum of treatment..." it said.

It observed that authorities must be responsive and ensure medical care to senior citizens after retirement. "The relevant authorities are required to be more responsive and cannot in a mechanical manner deprive an employee of his legitimate reimbursement. The CGHS was propounded with a purpose of providing health facility scheme to the central government employees so that they are not left without medical care after retirement," it said.

"The apex court, while directing the ministry to form the panel expeditiously said there shall be a time-frame for finalisation and disbursement of the claim amounts of pensioners. "In this view, we are of the opinion that after submitting the relevant papers for claim by a pensioner, the same shall be reimbursed within a period of one month," it said. The court was hearing the petition filed by Shiva Kant Jha, seeking reimbursement on account of his treatment done in

November, 2013 for Rs 9,86,343 for his cardiac ailment involving the implant of CRT-D device and two sets of bill amounting to Rs 3,99,097 for his treatment at Mumbai for cerebral stroke and paralytic attack. He had claimed that he was denied the amount of Rs 4.99 lakh out of the entire amount on the ground that he did not seek approval of authorities for the device implant.

The court, taking note of the facts, said "the law does not require that prior permission has to be taken in such situation where the survival of the person is the prime consideration." The bench said that the CGHS is responsible for taking care of healthcare needs and well-being of the central government employees and pensioners. "In the facts and circumstances of the case, we are of opinion that the treatment of the petitioner in non-employment hospital was genuine because there was no option left with him at the relevant time. We, therefore, direct the state to pay the balance amount of Rs 4.99.555 to the petitioner. We also make it clear that the said decision is confined to this case only," it said. (PTI)

Illegal construction near historic Lalji temple: SC asks ASI to decide

NEW DELHI, APR 15 /-- The issue of ongoing illegal constructions within prohibited 200 metre area of the 279-year-old historic Lalji temple, dedicated to Lord Krishna, at Bardhaman in West Bengal has reached the Supreme Court, which asked the Archaeological Survey of India to decide the matter within four weeks. Built in 1739 AD by the Bardhaman royal family, the Lalji temple is ornamented with beautiful terracotta art and is a magnificent brick-built temple with 25 spires ('Panchavimshati Ratna') and is the oldest temple in Kalna in Bardhaman. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), through a notification issued in 1992, had declared areas up to 100 metres from the temple as protected. Later, the limit was raised to 200 metres by the ASI, which said that neither mining nor construction activities could be carried out within the prohibited area.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Dipak Misra and Justices A M Khanwilkar and D Y Chandrachud said though the issue needed to be looked into urgently, the ASI would be the appropriate authority to deal with it. Seventy-five-year-old Shankar Lal Agrawala, through his lawyers Anil Kumar Mishra and Amurag Singh, approached the apex court seeking an action to authorities, including the ASI, to stop the ongoing

illegal construction within the prohibited area of the historic temple. He has also sought demolition of the constructions that have already come up. The lawyers said that Agrawala, a resident of Bardhaman, was forced to approach the top court due to the ongoing strike of lawyers in the Calcutta High Court.

They said the construction activity was going on at such a speed that if urgent remedial measures were not taken the purpose to save the monument would get defeated. "This is a temple of Lord Krishna and is also locally referred to as 'mini Vrindavan'. The temple has exquisite terracotta and brick carvings. This temple is a centrally protected monument," they said, seeking judicial intervention. The bench asked Agrawala to file a representation within a week to the ASI which, in turn, will have to take a decision within four weeks hence. "We permit the petitioner to submit a representation to respondent no.1 - Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) - within a week hence which shall consider the same in accordance with law. "Be it noted, we have passed such a direction, for, a submission has been advanced that the property in question is a protected ancient monument to be looked after by ASI," it said. (PTI)

'Vishu' celebrated with gaiety in Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APR 15 /-- Keralites today celebrated the harvest festival of 'Vishu' with traditional fervour and gaiety, looking ahead to a season of peace and prosperity. People woke up in the early hours to see the auspicious 'Vishukkani', symbolising hope, promise and fine prospects they wish to have in the year ahead.

The ritual comprises arranging on platters auspicious articles like seasonal fruits, vegetables, flowers, gold and clothes which together form the first sight when the family members wake up to on the Vishu day.

Keralites dressed in their traditional attire thronged temples across the state, including the famous Guruvayur and Sabarimala, which witnessed heavy rush of devotees for Vishu darshan. At the Sabarimala hill shrine of Lord Ayyappa, a large number of devotees from neighbouring states also thronged for the Vishu darshan, for which elaborate arrangements had been made. Keeping up the long tradition, elders gifted coins to children as part of the custom known as 'Vishukaineettam'. Kerala Governor, P Sathisavarn and Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, and opposition leader, Ramesh Chennithala were among those who greeted malayalees on the occasion of 'Vishu'. (PTI)

Hope under Sun: Marathwada villagers wage war on drought

BEED (MAHA), APR 15 /-- Hundreds of people from 15 villages in Maharashtra's Beed district are braving blazing Sun to wage a war on perennial water crisis in Marathwada, one of the most arid regions of the state. They are part of the 45-day "Shramdaan Abhiyan" (Voluntary labour campaign), launched on April 8 by an NGO under former AAP leader Mayank Gandhi, who has adopted these villages for water conservation and preservation. The villagers are digging trenches, farm ponds, watershed structures, check dams to preserve the rain water. Dozens of excavators and earth-movers, funded by various corporates, are deepening and widening the tributaries of the "Paanashi" river which passes through six of the selected villages. The 15 villages have collective population of 30,590.

Gandhi, previously associated with the "India Against Corruption" movement, said he chose the particular area in Parli taluka of the district because it has the lowest irrigation. "Only 1.72 per cent of land here is under irrigation as compared to 16.57 per cent in Maharashtra and 40 per cent in the country. I want to empower these villages with the 360-degree development including water security, agriculture, education, sanitation and community building," he told reporters at Mandapur. Gandhi said

the "Global Parli project" launched by him in 2016 has been acting as a catalyst. Local social worker Dr Harishchandra Wange and his team of doctors are raising awareness and motivating the villagers about the importance of storing water.

"The Paani Foundation is providing technical and practical training to the villagers while corporates like Borosil, UPL, Alkerm are assisting us through their CSR initiatives," Gandhi said. Ten out of these 15 villages have been selected to participate in the Satyamev Jayate Water Cup competition. The activist said he had fixed a target for all the villagers to complete the work before the arrival of the monsoon.

Every village has its own maps with watershed structures, contour trenches, compartment ponds, check dams, farm ponds etc," he said. Huda Kaudgaon village Sarpanch G R Rathod said the villagers are motivated and are hopeful that their struggle for water would end soon.

Marathwada region has been experiencing a spate of droughts since 2012. Most of the villagers face the daunting challenge of walking long distances up to two to four kms, just to fetch few litres of water. In 2016, the Railways had dispatched a special "water train" with 10 wagons for parched Tattur in Marathwada region. The region has also seen suicides by a number of distressed farmers. (PTI)

BCI asks Jammu, Kathuabar bodies to call off strike

NEW DELHI, APR 15 /-- The Bar Council of India (BCI) today asked the Jammu and Kathua bar associations to call off their strike and decided to send a five-member team headed by a former high court chief justice to investigate the alleged incident of misconduct on part of the lawyers there in connection with the Kathua rape-murder case. BCI chairman and senior advocate Manan Kumar Mishra told reporters that if any lawyer is found guilty then the council will go to the extent of cancelling the legal practise licence. "The BCI has decided to issue a direction and an appeal to the Jammu High Court Bar Association and the Kathua Bar Association to call off their strike with immediate effect. We have made a request and issued a direction to them to convene an extra-ordinary meeting tomorrow to decide on the issue," he said.

The bar council's decision came after its general body meeting which was convened today in the backdrop of the apex court's notice to it. The Supreme Court had taken suo motu cognisance of a strike call given by the Kathua and the Jammu and Kashmir bar associations in connection with the gang rape and killing of an eight-year-old girl in Jammu region and issued notice to the bar bodies. The Bar Association of Jammu had on April 13 said that it was extending its strike till April 17 against the "growing illegal presence of Rohingyas and Bangladeshi nationals", while alleging that its agitation for a CBI probe into the Kathua rape-cum-murder case was wrongly being portrayed as "communal".

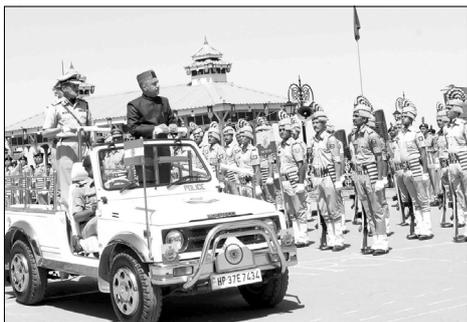
"If we find that they were really indulging in misconduct and the strike was illegal and altogether objectionable, then we will take appropriate action. We can go to the extent of cancelling the licence of the lawyers. We have the power," Mishra said.

The apex bar body has decided to send a team headed by former high court chief justice Tarun Agarwal and comprising two co-chairmen of the council, S Prabhakaran and R G Shah, advocate Razia Begum and independent lawyer Naresh Dixit. The BCI chairman also said that the team will visit the state on April 20 to investigate the matter and after consulting all the persons concerned, it will submit its report to the bar council which will in turn submit its report before the apex court.

Road-accident: 45-year-old man's kin get Rs 14.72 l compensation

NEW DELHI, APR 16 /-- The family members of a 45-year-old man, who died after being hit by a car, have been awarded a compensation of over Rs 14 lakh by a Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT) here. MACT Presiding Officer Amit Bansal directed Tata AIG General Insurance Company Ltd, insurer of the offending car that hit the motorcycle of the victim, killing him on the spot in 2014, to pay Rs 14.72 lakh to his mother and three children. The tribunal decided the petition in favour of the victim's family after relying on the testimony of an eyewitness and documents produced on record, including a copy of the FIR, postmortem report and mechanical inspection report of the vehicle. According to the petition, which claimed Rs 50 lakh for the death of victim Mahaveer, who was a driver by profession, the victim was on a bike with another man when he was hit by a car near Farruk Nagar in north-west Delhi. During the proceedings, the insurance company had contended that it was not liable to pay the amount as the driver did not have a valid driving licence and the owner's policy was not active. The contentions of the firm were rejected by the tribunal. The driver and the owner of the vehicle did not lead any evidence in their support. (PTI)

Amarinder hits out at Sukhbir for questioning his style of governance



Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur inspecting guard of honour on the occasion of state level Himachal Day function at the Ridge in Shimla on Sunday.

CHANDIGARH, APR 15 /-- Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh today hit out at Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal for questioning his style of functioning, saying he did not need any lessons from the former deputy chief minister on how to govern the state.

"Given his own total failure on the governance front, as was evident from the complete mess the erstwhile government had plunged the state into, Sukhbir had no locus standi to comment on anyone's governance style," said the Chief Minister in a statement here. At a political conference in Talwandi Sabo in Bathinda yesterday, Sukhbir had questioned Amarinder's style of functioning and alleged he had no

control over the government and that the bureaucracy has become unbridled and police top brasses were having a free run. Amarinder Singh said Sukhbir's statement was totally senseless.

Unlike the Akalis led by the Badals, the Chief Minister said, he believed in giving his civil and police administrations a free hand to function so that they can work effectively.

"The bureaucrats and police officials had been totally stifled by the Badals," he alleged, adding that if that was the "control" Sukhbir was referring to, then he was happy and proud not to be exercising that. "Had I not given a free hand to the police, the gang wars, the targeted killings and the desecrations that had destroyed the state's law and order under the Akali regime would still

have been continuing," Amarinder said.

"The bureaucracy is also now functioning more transparently than it was ever allowed to do during the decade-long SAD-BJP rule," he alleged.

Amarinder Singh also defended his government's stand in the Supreme Court in a 30-year-old road rage case against Navjot Singh Sidhu, saying it was the only legal option available to it. The state government in the apex court recently favoured the Punjab and Haryana High Court verdict convicting and awarding a three-year jail term to Sidhu in the 1988 case.

The CM also challenged Sukhbir to come out with one legal remedy which could have enabled the government to reverse its stand.

Instead of wasting time in such falsehoods and misinformation, Sukhbir should invest his energy in securing the interests of Punjab with the central government, led by his party's ally, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), he said.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal also lambasted Sukhbir for trying to "mislead" the people by making his "blatantly false statements" on the state's financial situation. In a statement issued here, Manpreet accused the previous Akali government of "misleading" the state's properties but the future of its youths. "They sold out Punjab and its interests in every possible way, leaving behind a trail of devastation, capped by the Bhrathriya cross and burden," said the Finance Minister. (PTI)