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Police patrol a street as members of the Dalit community hold a protest in Mumbai —REUTERS

Maharashtra bandh forces closure of shops, schools, colleges in Nashik

■ Flight operations badly hit in Mumbai ■ Issue rocks Parliament, RSS rejects Cong charge

NASHIK, JAN 3 /--/ The Maharashtra Bandh called by Dalit leaders to protest the violence during the bicentennial commemoration of the Bhima-Koregaon battle evoked a considerable response in the Nashik city today. Commercial establishments in the city and Satpur, Ambad, Nashik Road localities remained closed. Buses of the Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation and auto rickshaws too remained off the road. The administration had already declared a school and college holiday. More than 2,000 police personnel have been deployed in the city, said a police official. Bandh was also being observed in Manmad and Lasalgaon. A Manmad-Lasalgaon ST bus was stoned this morning at the Lasalgaon Railway Gate and some agitators tried, unsuccessfully, to set the bus on fire, according to the rural police control room officials. Police commissioner Ravindra Kumar Singhal and District Superintendent of Police Sanjay Darade have requested people not to believe rumours

or forward false or inflammatory WhatsApp messages. Flight operations at the Mumbai airport were badly hit due to the Maharashtra Bandh called by Dalit leaders today, with 12 flights getting cancelled and 235 delayed. The shutdown, called to protest the state government's "failure" to stop the violence against celebration of 200th anniversary of the Bhima-Koregaon battle in Pune district, disrupted normal life across Maharashtra, including Mumbai.

As many as 182 flight departures and 53 arrivals at the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport (CSIA) were delayed till around 1600 hours, according to a website tracking real-time flight status at airports across the world. The bandh called by various Dalit and other organisations to protest the violence against commemoration of Bhima-Koregaon battle was withdrawn in the evening, as Bharipa Bahujan Mahasangh leader Prakash Ambedkar said. The caste violence in Maharashtra rocked Parliament today

even as the RSS rubbished the Congress charge it was fuelling the clashes over which the opposition party also flayed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his "silence" on the matter. As a political war of words erupted over the simmering caste tensions in BJP-ruled Maharashtra both inside and outside Parliament, the saffron party also hit back and accused the Congress of trying to play politics over the matter. Rejecting the Congress charge, the RSS sought to put the blame of caste violence in Maharashtra on a "breaking India brigade" which, it said, had raised anti-national slogans at the JNU in Delhi in 2016 and was now trying to divide the Hindu society. "The 'breaking India brigade' chanted slogans at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2016 that India will be shattered into pieces. It wants to divide the country on religious and caste lines. It wants to divide the Hindu society. The Sangh castigates it," RSS spokesman Manmohan Vaidya told reporters in Ujjain.

NEW DELHI, JAN 3 /--/ A united Opposition today had a face-off with the Union government over the triple talaq bill in the Rajya Sabha and stalled a debate on it insisting that it should be sent to a select panel, as the ruling BJP strongly sought its expeditious passage to stop the unlawful practice. Amid noisy scenes, Union law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad introduced the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill 2017 for discussion and passage, but pandemonium broke out in the Upper House with the Opposition creating uproar and the BJP countering it vociferously. The House, which had met at 3 pm after witnessing three adjournments over the Maharashtra caste violence, also witnessed procedural wranglings from both sides.

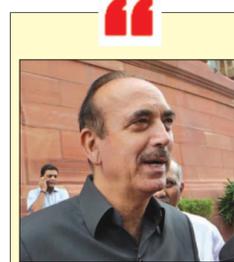
The bill, which seeks to make instant triple talaq illegal with up to three years in jail for the husband, was passed in the Lok Sabha on December 28. While the government emphasised the need to pass the bill on an urgent basis citing a Supreme Court judgement pronouncing triple talaq as unconstitutional, the Opposition countered it saying the views of various stakeholders must be taken by the select panel. While supporting the bill, the Opposition parties especially those from the Congress, Trinamool Congress and Samajwadi Party, insisted that it be referred to a select panel for further scrutiny. As heated exchanges continued despite warnings and appeals, deputy chairman P J Kurien adjourned the House for the day, without giving any ruling on the validity of the opposition's motion on the select panel. Terming it "a historic bill", Prasad said the Supreme Court on August 22 "called triple talaq as unconstitutional... The judges appealed to Parliament to come out with a law. Until then, it stopped the practice for six months. Even after Lok Sabha passing it, triple talaq is being given." Appealing for

its expeditious passage, the minister also said that the Congress had supported the bill in the Lower House and asked it to clear its position here. However, the Opposition remained adamant on its demand for setting up of a select committee, with Congress Deputy Leader Anand Sharma moving a resolution to this effect. Sharma gave a list of Opposition members to be part of the proposed select committee and asked the ruling party to suggest its names to the panel, which should give its report in the first week of the Budget Session. The Congress today accused the BJP of "befooling" Muslim women with the triple talaq bill that seeks to make the practice a criminal offence, alleging that it has no provision for their welfare in case their husbands are jailed. Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad said 18 Opposition parties including the Congress wanted to send the bill to a Select Committee for its proper scrutiny before it becomes a law, but the government did not allow it. He alleged that the BJP does not believe in democracy and that is why it did not allow the motion moved by the opposition to send the bill to a select committee. Azad said the BJP is projecting itself as a "messiah" for Muslim women and claiming to be champions of their welfare and rights, but has not made any provision for their welfare. "This government is trying to mislead Muslim women and the general public," he alleged at a press conference. "What are they giving to Muslim women. They are merely projecting themselves as their 'messiah', but they are in fact only trying to befool the Muslim women," he said. Besides Congress, SP and TMC, the names proposed by Sharma for the panel included leaders of AIADMK, BSP, DMK, NCP, CPI, CPM, TDP, RJD, BJD, JMM, IUML and nominated member KMS Tulsil. The Congress leader, along with Derek O'Brien (TMC), also insisted that the resolu-

Mamata finds triple talaq bill 'defective'

AHMEDPUR, JAN 3 /--/ West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee today described the bill on triple talaq as "defective", saying it would do Muslim women more harm than good. Mamata accused the BJP of trying to "do politics" with the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, which was passed in the Lok Sabha recently. "We did not oppose the triple talaq bill because we are for women. I know many Muslims who abide by the law. This bill, brought by the BJP government, is a defective one. "Instead of protecting the Muslim women, it will cause them harm. The BJP is playing petty politics with the bill," the chief minister said while addressing a meeting

here. Banerjee also claimed that her Trinamool Congress is the only party in the country having 33 per cent women MPs. Questioning the utility of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' scheme, mamata said that the Centre was spending only Rs 100 crore for the entire country, while West Bengal government is spending Rs 5,000 crore for the 'Kanyashree' scheme. 'Kanyashree' is a cash transfer scheme with the aim of improving the status and well-being of the girl child in West Bengal by incentivising schooling of teenage girls. The chief minister Mamata Banerjee today accused the BJP-led central government of "hatching a conspiracy" to drive



Ghulam Nabi Azad

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Arun Jaitley

It was a mere sham that they (Congress) gave a statement and supported the bill. They tried their best to ensure that this bill is not passed in the Rajya Sabha

tion on sending the bill to a select panel be put to vote in the House and a division was sought. Dubbing Sharma's motion to set up a select committee as "invalid", Leader of the House Arun Jaitley objected to the procedure followed by him, saying Rule 70 (sub-rule 2a) cited by Sharma was not applicable here because the bill did not originate from the Upper House. It originated in the Lok Sabha and was transmitted to the Rajya Sabha. The other objection Jaitley raised was that the notice for setting up of a select panel was not given before, thereby breaking the parliamentary procedure. Not only the names given for the proposed panel were proportionate to the strength of the parties represented in the House but the consent of these members was also not taken, he claimed. "Now, we are taken by surprise that we all assemble here after 3 pm, a motion is suddenly submitted to us. For the first time breaking all parliamentary convention and procedures, an invalid motion is moved," Jaitley said. Lashing out at the Congress, the finance minister said the party was "indirectly" opposing the bill in Rajya Sabha and said Muslim women would continue to face injustice due to its attitude. The politics of the Opposition party has been to support the bill in one House and oppose it in the other, he said. "It has become clear that the Congress party is indirectly opposing the triple talaq bill. It was a mere sham that they gave a statement and supported the bill. They tried their best to ensure that this bill is not passed in the Rajya Sabha," Jaitley told reporters outside Parliament. The Opposition party could put forth any suggestions it had before the government for consideration. "Today was a golden opportunity for Parliament to end the injustice (that has been) happening with Muslim women for a long time. This injustice will carry on due to this attitude of the Congress party," he said.

ATA GLANCE

Hardeep files nomination for RS seat

LUCKNOW: Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri today filed his nomination as a BJP candidate for the by-election to a Rajya Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh. The seat fell vacant following the resignation of Manohar Parrikar, who quit as defence minister after he became the Goa chief minister. His term was to end on November 25, 2020. A career diplomat-turned-politician, 65-year-old Puri was sworn in as a minister in September and was allocated the housing and urban development ministry.

BSF jawan killed in Pak firing

JAMMU: A BSF jawan deployed along the India-Pakistan border in Jammu was killed today in an incident of unprovoked firing, officers of the force said. Head constable R P Hazra was killed after Pakistan forces "sniped" from across the border in the Samba sector of Jammu and Kashmir. Retaliatory fire has been initiated, a senior BSF officer said. The incident took place around 4.30 pm. The BSF guards the India-Pak International Border (IB) in the region.

Bonds fail to break corporate-political nexus, says ex-CEC

Withholding donors' names a regressive step: Congress

HYDERABAD, JAN 3 /--/ The new electoral bonds scheme does not promote transparency in poll funding and fails to break the nexus between corporates and political parties, former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) T S Krishnamurthy said. "It's not a step forward (in efforts to clean election funding). It (electoral bonds) does not solve the problem of money power, it does not solve the problem of transparency in donations," Krishnamurthy said. "It (electoral bonds) does not enhance transparency as far as the public is concerned. It may be

enhancing the transparency between the donor and the donee. Public are still kept in the dark as far as who gives money and how much money is given. That's not transparency. The public should know," he argued. "It will still maintain the nexus between corporates and political parties which is not desirable. It is not a good system at all. It will probably only increase the money power among the parties," Krishnamurthy said.

The former CEC also told news agency PTI that a better measure would have been the setting up of an Election

Commission-administered national election fund which would give donors 100 per cent tax benefits. "All donations can be directly given to the national election fund. Give them (individual and corporate donors) 100 per cent tax benefit. It will be more transparent. It removes nexus between corporates and parties," he explained. On how such a national election fund would operate, Krishnamurthy said it should be on the basis of guidelines to be drawn in consultation with all political parties. "No party should be allowed to collect donations from com-

panies and individuals except their own members. That removes the nexus between corporates and political parties," he added.

In the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, Union finance minister Arun Jaitley had outlined contours of the new electoral bonds that donors can buy from State Bank of India (SBI) with political parties receiving them being able to encash them only through a designated bank account. The Congress today hit out at the Union government over the introduction of electoral bonds, alleging that withholding the donors' names was a "regressive

It's not a step forward (in efforts to clean election funding). If (electoral bonds) does not solve the problem of money power, it does not solve the problem of transparency in donations

step" and would give unlimited access to the ruling party to misuse official machinery to "coerce" them. Chief spokesperson of the Congress Randeep Surjewala said today that hiding names of donors of electoral bonds was a "regressive step". "Hiding 'donor names' of 'Electoral Bonds' is a regressive step that paints process of Electoral Funding to Modi Government's favourite colour: BLACK! "Is it meant to stifle 'transparency' and give unlimited access to ruling party to misuse info and state machinery to coerce donors!" Surjewala tweeted.



Former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) T S Krishnamurthy