



Prime Minister Narendra Modi gestures as he walks to speak with the media after arriving at Parliament on the first day of the winter session in New Delhi —Reuters

NDA to take on Opposition in Parliament over its attack on PM

Cong protests against Modi's remarks, disrupts RS proceedings

NEW DELHI, DEC 15 /- / Unfazed over the Opposition parties' protests causing adjournment of the Rajya Sabha today, the NDA made it clear that it would take on them over their attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who asked the ruling alliance to strongly push the government's agenda in Parliament.

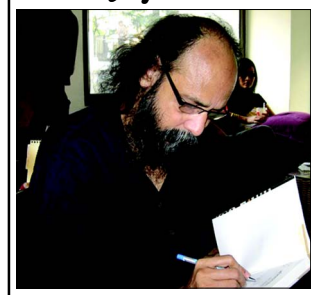
Briefing newsmen after the meeting, Union parliamentary affairs minister Ananth Kumar demanded that the Congress apologise for a meeting between its leaders, including former PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh, and Pakistani officials without informing the government. The Rajya Sabha proceedings were adjourned till Monday following the opposition's relentless protests. NDA sources said the Prime Minister referred to India's progress on several fronts, including its jump in the ease of doing business ratings and reform measures such as the GST to underline his government's "able" handling of the economy. A leader, who attended the meeting, said the prime minister spoke about the government's legislative agenda for the Winter Session and asked them to work together for pushing it through Parliament. Earlier today, the winter session of Rajya Sabha began on a stormy note with the Opposition demanding an apology from Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his "conspiracy with Pakistan" remarks against his predecessor Manmohan Singh, creating uproar and repeatedly disrupting proceedings. An angry Opposition led by the Congress accused Modi of levelling "serious charges" against Singh, former Vice President Hamid Ansari and diplomats. Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu disallowed a notice by Congress and other opposition members under rule 267 for suspension of the business of the House to discuss the matter, which led to further noisy scenes. The Up-

per House saw three adjournments before the Chair finally called it a day, a little after 3 PM following continued uproar and shouting. The Opposition members also protested the disqualification of former JD-U chief Sharad Yadav and Ali Anwar of the same party from the House by the Chairman, which was vociferously countered by ruling party MPs. They raised the issue soon after the Chairman informed the House about his decision to disqualify the two former JD-U members after giving them due opportunity of hearing. As the members protested, the Vice-President said there cannot be any discussion on the decision of the Chair. "There is no discussion on the ruling of the chairman. Please sit down." However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi today hoped the session which begins today. "The Winter Session of Parliament is starting and I am confident that it will be a productive session. I hope there is good debate, constructive debate and we come up with innovative solutions to our nation's problems," he told newsmen here. The Prime Minister said at Thursday's all-party meeting, leaders of the political parties were clear that there is a need to take the country forward and this session should be used positively to achieve that. "I hope this Parliament session contributes to the nation's growth. There will be proper utilisation of the time of Parliament which will be beneficial to the country," he said. Modi said there will be several significant government businesses which will have far reaching impact for the country.

States revenue shortfall post-GST at Rs 36Kcr: Mitra

KOLKATA, DEC 15 /- / There has been a shortfall of Rs 36,000 crore in projected revenues in the first four months post Goods and Services Tax (GST) implementation, West Bengal finance minister Amit Mitra said today. While the projected collection at 14 per cent growth was Rs 1,72,000 crore, the actual figure realised had been Rs 1,36,900 crore, resulting in a deficit of Rs 36,000 crore for the first four months till November, Mitra, who is also a GST Council member, told reporters on the sidelines of an event here. GST was rolled out from July 1, this year, with the compensation amount, in case of revenue loss of the states after GST was Rs 55,000 crore. This amount seemed inadequate in the collection figures as it did not gain traction. According to him, the main reason for the deficit was the inability of a vast section of Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to register themselves on the GSTN portal. "Due to this, many of them had gone back to the manual mode," he said. In this regard, the GST Council member said he had urged the Centre to raise the compensation amount. Meanwhile, the state industry minister informed that Shalimar Works of the state government had formed a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) with a Bangladesh ship building firm to manufacture ships here. The Centre has accorded all the clearances for the SPV, he said. (PTI)

Poet Joy Goswami to get 31st Moortidevi Award



NEW DELHI, DEC 15 /- / Eminent Bengali poet Joy Goswami will be given the 31st Moortidevi Award for the year 2017, a selection board meeting announced here today. The committee, headed by poet and scholar Satya Vrat Shastri, unanimously decided to confer the award upon Goswami for his poetry collection titled 'Du Dondo Phowara Matro'. It is the first time the award will be given to a Bengali poet. 'Du Dondo Phowara Matro' is an autobiographical account of the poet's life featuring his close ones including a pet cat. The work also echoes secret trysts, chaste loves and more of the fantastical quotidian which makes up the poet's consciousness. Born on 10 November 1954, Goswami is considered one of the most powerful poets in the post-Bibanananda Das era

of Bengali poetry lending his voice against violence, war and genocide through his poetry. Having published over fifty titles, including a novel in verse and several collections of critical essays, the poet has received many awards including Kendriya and Bangla Sahitya Akademi Awards, Ananda Puraskar, and the first Tata Literature Live Poet Laureate Award. 'Pagali tomara sange', 'Ghumiyechho, Jhapata?', and 'Christmas O Sheetar Sonnetguchho' are some of his important works in Bengali language. The annual award is presented for a contemplative and perceptive work which expresses, underlines and illuminates human values written in any Indian languages or English. The award consists of a Saraswati Statue, a Citation Plaque and cash award of Rupees 4 lac.

Union Cabinet approves bill criminalising triple talaq

Historic decision, says Prasad ■ AIMPLB opposes clearance

NEW DELHI, DEC 15 /- / A draft law which seeks to make the practice of instant triple talaq "illegal and void" and provides for a jail term for the husband was today cleared by the union cabinet. The nod paves the way for its introduction in Parliament during the Winter session which began today. Union law minister Ravi Shankar Prasad confirmed that the "Muslim Women Protection of Rights on Marriage Bill" has been approved but refused to share details as Parliament is in session. According to the draft law prepared by an inter-ministerial group headed by Union home minister Rajnath Singh, giving instant triple talaq will be "illegal and void" and will attract a jail term of three years for the husband. The husband could also be fined and the quantum of fine would be decided by the magistrate hearing the case. The bill is being introduced as the practice still continued despite the Supreme Court striking down 'talaq-e-biddat' (instant triple talaq). The proposed law would only be applicable on instant triple talaq or 'talaq-e-biddat' and it would give power to the victim to approach a magistrate seeking "subistence allowance" for herself and minor children. The woman can also seek the custody of her minor children from the magistrate who will take a final call on the issue. Under the draft

law, triple talaq in any form – spoken, in writing or by electronic means such as email, SMS and WhatsApp – would be bad or illegal and void. "The provision of subsistence allowance and custody has been made to ensure that in case the husband asks the wife to leave the house she should have legal protection," a government functionary said. According to the draft law, which would be applicable to the entire country except Jammu and Kashmir, giving instant talaq would attract a jail term of three years and a fine. It would be a non-bailable, cognisable offence. The functionary pointed out that after the Supreme Court order, the government was of the view that the practice would end. "But it continues. There have been 177 reported cases of instant talaq before the judgement and 66 after the order this year... Uttar Pradesh tops the list. Hence, the government planned a law," Prasad explained. He said the provisions of the Domestic

Violence Act were found to be of little help in such cases even as the government and the Prime Minister's Office were receiving complaints from women. As of now, the draft law is prospective in nature. But the Parliament feels, it can be implemented retrospectively once it is passed and gets the President's nod, he said. Perpetrators women who have been given triple talaq before the proposed law comes into force can also seek custody of minor children and subsistence allowance using its provisions, another official said. In August, the Supreme Court struck down the controversial Islamic practice of instant divorce or 'talaq-e-biddat' as arbitrary and unconstitutional. The Cabinet clearance was however criticised by the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) as a direct attack on the religious freedom of the Muslim community, while women activists sought collective support of political parties in converting the Bill into law.



Binay Tamang focuses to improve tourism infrastructure and explore new virgin avenues

PRASHANT ACHARYA

SILIGURI, DEC 15 /- / GTA chief Binay Tamang focuses to improve tourism infrastructure and explore new virgin avenues during his speech in the inaugural function of Tourism Fair in Siliguri. The three days long tourism fair organized by Blue Eye India Pvt. Ltd. was on Friday inaugurated by tourism minister Gautam Deb and Binay Tamang. Tamang who did not wish to speak in a public forum amidst political turmoil in the hills told that GTA will focus on tourism to develop

the region. He said that new avenues for the promotion and expansion of tourism in Darjeeling region will be undertaken by GTA especially in rural tourism infrastructure and aspects of tourism that caters to the economic well-being of the people such as through adventure tourism, cemetery tourism, health tourism, eco-tourism, village tourism, tourism and heritage tourism will be promoted. Tamang further informed that GTA will improve the existing tourism infrastructures, and to build modern and sustainable tourism facilities and work towards resto-

vation, restoration and beautification of existing tourist spot, with a trust on strengthening the infrastructure in various heritage sites across the Darjeeling hills. "As you all know that the recent bandh crippled Darjeeling and brought its economy to a standstill but after the formation of the new Board of Administration (GTA) not only has returned in the hills and GTA and Tourism Department, Government of West Bengal is all set to host five-day tourism festival from December 27 to attract people of the "Queen of Hills", said Tamang.

AT A GLANCE

PM pays tributes to Sardar Patel

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tributes to the country's first home minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on his death anniversary today, saying every Indian is indebted to him for his monumental service to the nation. "I remember the great Sardar Patel on his Punya Tithi. Every citizen of India is indebted to Sardar Patel for his monumental service to our nation," Modi tweeted. West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee also remembered the country's first home minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on his death anniversary. "Solemnly remembering the Iron Man of India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on his death anniversary," she said in a tweet.

Ryan murder: No bail to accused

GURUGRAM: The bail plea of the class 11 student who has been accused of killing class 2nd student Pradyuman Thakur has been rejected by a Gurugram court. It was also reportedly argued in court that he should be tried as an adult and not as a juvenile in the case. The juvenile's family has been claiming that their child is being framed to hide the real culprit behind the matter. The CBI contended that the probe is still on and they are still interrogating to find the details of the murder. The class 11 student was found with his throat slit in the washroom of Ryan International School in Gurugram on September 8.

Building collapse: 4 feared trapped

MUMBAI: Four persons are feared trapped in the debris after the slab of a building collapsed in the Zaveri Bazaar area of south Mumbai today afternoon, a fire brigade official said. The official said that the slab of the five-storied building collapsed and brought down with it the common passage of the first, second, third and fourth floors of the building. The incident occurred in the common passage in San Street in the area, officials said. The building was undergoing repair when the collapse occurred, said officials.

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