

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## Arrested BJP leader slams police for violating human rights

**BELAGAVI (KARNATAKA), DEC 20:** Karnataka BJP MLC CT Ravi, who has been arrested for allegedly using a derogatory word against Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar, on Friday accused the police of violating human rights, as he alleged that they took him on rounds the entire night to various places in the district.

The former BJP national general secretary, who had bandages on his head, even claimed that police were behaving on the directions of someone from the "top", as he hit out at the state government and the administration, calling it "dictatorial".

Based on the complaint lodged by Minister Hebbalkar, a case was registered against the BJP leader under sections 75 (sexual harassment) and 79 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, on Thursday.

Ravi allegedly used a derogatory word against Hebbalkar in the Legislative Council on Thursday, when the House was adjourned for a while.

"I have sustained injuries while in Khanapur (station). I have no clarity how. Without any humanity, without any consideration that I'm a legislator, the entire night I have been taken on rounds. They (police) have violated human rights. They are indulging in atrocities," Ravi



told reporters.

Stating that in his 35 years of political life he has never seen such things, he said, "There is a dictatorial mindset. From Khanapur to where all they have taken me you see. Where is Savadatti, where is Ramadurga. They had taken me to Dharwad road and they are now taking me somewhere."

Alleging that police were getting directions time to time from the "top", Ravi said, "who is giving the directions, I don't know. They (police) are behaving accordingly. They too are helpless."

He said he had come to Belagavi to attend the session and his "caretaker" was Council Chairman. "There

seems to be malintention of giving me mental torture. This is a conspiracy against me."

Pointing out the conduct of Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, Minister Hebbalkar, Ravi said he was publicly threatened.

"There were three attempts to attack me at Suvarna Vidhana Soudha. We have given this in writing to the Chairman and have taken endorsement. Later, we have also given everything in writing at Khanapur police station. Despite that there was no FIR... There is dictatorship here," he added. A video of Ravi sitting on the street and questioning the police has surfaced.

"...Are you planning to

murder me? Why did you bring me here? Your intention is to murder me. Why are you taking me on rounds like this? From Khanapur to where all you took me? Why are you doing this? Three hours after I sustained injury you gave me first aid," Ravi can be seen questioning police officials who were trying to convince him.

There are also visuals of police physically lifting Ravi and making him sit in the police vehicle.

Earlier, police sources had said, Ravi will be brought to Bengaluru and is scheduled to be produced before the people's representative court there on Friday. However, officials are yet to confirm on the next move.

## Ambedkar row: Opposition MPs hold protest against Amit Shah at Vijay Chowk

**NEW DELHI, DEC 20:** Opposition MPs staged a protest at Vijay Chowk here on Friday demanding Home Minister Amit Shah's apology and resignation for allegedly "insulting" BR Ambedkar.

They also carried out a protest march from Vijay Chowk to Parliament.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also slammed the BJP over the FIR filed against the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, saying it "shows their desperation level".

"The entire country is watching, they have slapped several cases on Rahul Gandhi. They bring in new FIRs and lie... This shows their desperation level," she told reporters.

Priyanka Gandhi joined several other INDIA bloc MPs at Vijay Chowk to protest against Shah's remarks as they demanded Shah's apology and resignation over the issue.

She was seen carrying a placard which read 'Babasa-



heb ka apman nahi sahega Hindustan'.

The MPs raised slogans such as 'Jai Bhim' 'Amit Shah Maafi Mango' and 'istifa do'.

The protest comes a day after separate marches by opposition and ruling party MPs over the alleged insult

to Ambedkar led to jostling in Parliament premises, leaving BJP MPs Pratap Chandra Sarangi and Mukesh Rajput injured.

The BJP has accused Rahul Gandhi of pushing the senior member, a charge rejected by the Congress

leader.

The opposition on Wednesday had seized on Shah's remarks on Ambedkar to corner the government and demanded his resignation for what they called was an insult to the architect of the Constitution.

## SP's Sambhal MP fined Rs 1.91 cr, electricity cut-off at residence for power theft

**SAMBHAL (UP), DEC 20:** Electricity Department has imposed a fine of Rs 1.91 crore on Lok Sabha MP from Sambhal Zia Ur Rehman and also disconnected the electricity supply to his residence for alleged power theft at his residence, an official said on Friday.

The development follows a police case registered on Thursday against the Samajwadi Party MP under Section 135 of the Electricity Act, 2003, for theft of electricity.

His father Mamlukur Rehman Barq was also booked for allegedly threatening officials during the inspection at their residence in Deepa Sarai area, they said.

"An electricity inspection drive underway in Sambhal even today. A fine of Rs 1.91 crore has been imposed on the MP by the Electricity de-

partment and the power supply to his residence has been disconnected," Sambhal Superintendent Engineer Vinod Kumar told PTI.

According to the FIR lodged by the Electricity Department, an inspection team found evidence of electricity theft by bypassing the meter and confirmed illegal power use.

The inspection was conducted on Thursday morning amid heavy security at the MP's residence.

Zia Ur Rehman is among those booked in connection with the November 24 violence in which four locals died in a clash with security personnel during a court-ordered survey of the Mughal-era Shahi Jama Masjid in the city's Kot Garvi area.

Superintendent of Police (SP) (Sambhal) Krishna Ku-

mar Bishnoi had earlier told reporters that at 7.30 am on Thursday electricity department's Santoshi Tripathi was tasked with checking power equipment in Deepa Sarai area. During the inspection at the MP's residence, Mamlukur Rehman Barq abused engineers V K Gangal and Ajay Kumar Sharma and obstructed government work, he said.

The SP said Barq told the engineer that "the dispensation will change and we will ruin you". The incident has been video recorded by the electricity department.

"A case has been registered at the Nakhasa police station against Barq and two others -- Wasim and Salman -- under relevant provisions of the law," Bishnoi added.

Vinod Kumar said the MP's house had two connec-

tions of two kilowatts each. One in the Zia Ur Rehman's name and another in his late grandfather's name.

Two days ago, smart meters were installed at the MP's residence and in the last six months, the metres showed zero unit consumption, a power department official said.

He added that when the premises were checked on Thursday a 16.48 kilowatt load was found at his place. When both his electricity meters were sent to the lab, it was found in the MRI test that both the meters were tampered with.

During the check today, engineers Ajay Sharma and V K Gangal claimed that they were threatened by the MP's father. A complaint has been lodged with the police in this regard, he said.

## BJP MPs Sarangi, Rajput, Konyak should be given all awards for acting: Jaya Bachchan

**NEW DELHI, DEC 20:** Samajwadi Party (SP) MP Jaya Bachchan on Friday alleged that the BJP MPs, undergoing treatment in a hospital in the city, are doing "drama" and said they should be given all the awards for their "acting performance".

Speaking to reporters during a protest march carried out by opposition parties here, the Rajya Sabha member also claimed that she has never seen in her career as an actor a "better performer" than BJP MPs Pratap Chandra Sarangi, Mukesh Rajput and S Phangnon Konyak.

The BJP hit back and said this is the "true culture" of the SP and the opposition INDIA bloc with Bachchan standing with the "aggressor", not with the victim, survivor and the tribal woman MP who has made "grave" allegations against Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi.

The acrimonious face-off between the opposition and the ruling NDA over alleged insult to B R Ambedkar took an unprecedented ugly turn in Parliament premises on Thursday with claims of pushing and shoving involving MPs, leaving two BJP members Sarangi and Ra-



ajput hospitalised.

Konyak, a woman BJP MP from Nagaland, alleged Congress leader Rahul Gandhi came in her "close proximity" and shouted at her during the protest which made her feel "extremely uncomfortable".

Asked for comment, Bachchan said, "Sarangi ji is doing drama... I have never seen a better performance in my career (as an actor) than that of Rajput ji, Sarangi ji and the woman (Member of Parliament) from Nagaland... They should be given all the awards in acting." "Rajput ji was in the ICU (intensive care unit) of the hospital. First a small band-aid was applied.

Then a bigger bandage was applied. After that he was speaking to his leader in the

ICU. I have never seen such a great performance in my life," she told reporters.

Reacting sharply to the SP MP's remarks, BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said, "This is the true culture of the Samajwadi Party and the INDI alliance. They disrespect tribals and women. This is their identity."

He said Rajya Sabha member Konyak has claimed that Rahul Gandhi violated "her space" by coming "extremely close" to her and by shouting and "doing gestures" at her.

"Instead of standing with the tribal woman MP who has made grave allegations against Rahul Gandhi, you have a situation where the version of the woman MP is being questioned. Her character is being called into

question, dignity is being played around with," Poonawalla said.

"And that too by Jaya Bachchan who for herself in Rajya Sabha made a huge hue and cry but for another woman MP she is speaking so disparagingly," he added.

The BJP spokesperson also slammed the SP and said Bachchan's remarks against Konyak shows they do not have any respect for the tribal community and women.

"This is the party which says boys will be boys. And today too, they stand with the aggressor, not with the victim, the survivor and with the woman MP who has made such grave allegations," he added.

BJP MPs Sarangi and Rajput, who were admitted to the Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital here after suffering head injuries in a face-off between the opposition and NDA members in Parliament premises on Thursday, are still in the ICU and being closely monitored, doctors said on Friday.

Both of them had been brought to the hospital from Parliament with head injuries, hospital's Medical Superintendent Ajay Shukla said.

## More student loans cancelled in Joe Biden's final round of forgiveness before leaving office

**WASHINGTON, DEC 20:** The Biden administration is canceling federal student loans for another 55,000 workers through an existing programme known as Public Service Loan Forgiveness.

The Education Department's announcement Friday targets teachers, nurses, service members, law enforcement officials and others who've reached eligibility through the programme, which promises to erase loans after 10 years of work in government or nonprofit jobs.

The USD 4.28 billion in relief is expected to be the final round of public service loan forgiveness before President Joe Biden leaves office in January. After failing to deliver his promise of widespread loan cancellation, Biden has

instead focused on expanding loan relief through programmes that were created before his presidency.

Under Biden, the Education Department loosened the rules for Public Service Loan Forgiveness, which previously had a 99 per cent rejection rate amid burdensome rules and widespread confusion over eligibility requirements.

With the latest round of relief, Biden has now canceled an unprecedented USD 180 billion in federal student loans through existing programmes, covering 4.9 million Americans. That includes USD 78 billion for roughly 1 million borrowers through PSLF.

"From day one of my administration, I promised to make sure that higher education is a ticket to the middle class,

not a barrier to opportunity," Biden said in a statement.

"Because of our actions, millions of people across the country now have the breathing room to start businesses, save for retirement, and pursue life plans they had to put on hold because of the burden of student loan debt."

Still, the Democrat has fallen short of his goal to deliver widespread relief to millions of other Americans. Biden's first attempt at mass cancellation was blocked by the Supreme Court, and his second attempt remains tangled in a legal battle brought by Republican states.

In October he proposed another rule that would cancel loans for people facing various kinds of financial hardship, though it's unlikely to take effect.

## 2,200 cases of violence against Hindus, other minorities in Bangladesh: Govt

**NEW DELHI, DEC 20:** A total of 2,200 cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities have been reported in Bangladesh this year till December 8, and India's expectation is Dhaka will take necessary measures to ensure their safety, the government said on Friday.

Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh gave the information in a written response to a query in Lok Sabha, citing data from minority and human rights organisations.

In Pakistan, the number of cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities in Pakistan this year stood at "112 till October 2024," the MoS said. The corresponding figures for 2022 were 47 in Bangladesh and 241 in Pakistan, while in 2023 the figures were 302 in Bangladesh and 103 in Pakistan, according to the data he shared.

The minister said the Indian government has urged "Pakistan to take steps to prevent religious intolerance, sectarian violence, systemic persecution and attacks on minority communities and ensure their safety, security, and well-being." He added, "India continues to highlight the plight of minorities in Pakistan at appropriate international fora." Cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities in other neighbouring countries (except Pakistan and Bangladesh) is "nil," the min-



ister said.

Singh was asked about the total number of cases of violence against Hindus and other minorities reported in neighbouring countries during the last three years, country-wise and year-wise; and the steps taken or proposed to be taken by the ministry to protect minorities, including diplomatic interventions and relief measures.

The Union minister in his response also said the "government has taken serious note of these incidents and shared its concerns with the government of Bangladesh." "India's expectation is that Bangladesh will take all necessary measures to ensure safety and welfare of Hindus and other minorities. The same was also reiterated during the visit of the Foreign

Secretary to Bangladesh on December 9, 2024," he added.

The High Commission of India in Dhaka "continues to monitor the situation" related to the minorities in Bangladesh "closely," the Minister of State for External Affairs said. "The primary responsibility for the protection of life and liberty of all citizens, including minorities, rests with the government of the country concerned," he said.

Ties between India and Bangladesh came under severe strain after deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina was forced to leave the country in the face of a massive anti-government protest in August. Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus came to power days after Hasina took shelter in India.

He heads Bangladesh's interim government as its Chief Advisor. Relations between the two nations deteriorated further in recent weeks over attacks on the Hindus and the arrest of Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das.

"Several incidents of desecration and damage to Hindu temples and deities in Bangladesh have been reported in the past few months," Singh said.

"The government of India has expressed its concerns about such incidents, including the demolition of Jagannath Temple in Bangladesh, attack on a Puja mandap in Tantibazar, Dhaka and the theft at the Jeshoreshwari Kali temple at Sathkhira during Durga Puja 2024," he added.