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Arif ready for probe

Union Minister for External Affairs, Iqbal Singh, has issued the following clarification in response to the report in The Statesman (March 11-12) titled "Fear of scandal in V. P. Singh's regime".

"The report by your correspondents Raju Senthil and Sanjay Mishra is full of innuendo and is an attempt to mislead the public. I strongly feel that when a reported paper like The Statesman makes this kind of allegation against somebody holding high public office, then the charges must be probed. I am writing this letter to inform you that I am ready to subject myself to probe by any person whom you consider competent to probe and give his verdict in a case like this.

"I would like to add that if the probe finds even a iota of truth in the story or any mala fide on my part, then there is no reason for me to continue in the Government. In that event, the letter of resignation may be treated as resignation from the Government and may be forwarded to the Prime Minister for his acceptance.

"In case it is found that there is no basis to the allegations made, then I leave it to your discretion to take whatever action you deem fit."

(See also Page 3: Why is The Government Silent?)



The President on his way to the Central Hall of Parliament in New Delhi on Monday to address the joint sitting which traditionally marks the opening of the Budget session. With Mr Venkataraman are the Prime Minister, Mr V. P. Singh, and the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Mr P. Upendra. — The Statesman.

Fire in ONGC well: 17 hurt

AGARTALA, March 12. — Seventeen ONGC employees sustained burn injuries today when the Tichna exploration well in West Tripura caught fire following outflow of oily fluid with water for the past five days, reports UNI.

The injured were removed to hospital and fire tenders were fighting a grim battle to control the blaze.

The fire broke out at about 4 p.m. as the oil exploration experts were trying to seal the leak in the well number three in Domamura sub-division following a blow out on March 8.

Ershad's remark worries India

NEW DELHI, Monday. — India has expressed its anxiety over the reported statement of President Ershad that Bangladesh was worried about the "oppression of Muslims" in Kashmir.

The Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka, Mr K. Srinivasan, met the Foreign Secretary, Mr Abu Ahsan, and the Foreign Minister, Mr Anisul Islam, yesterday to express the view that it was a matter of concern to India as it was a departure from the position Bangladesh had taken earlier on this issue.

Bangladesh promised to get back to India soon after verifying the facts.

Plan to murder Jagmohan foiled

JAMMU, March 12. — The security forces have foiled a plan to assassinate the Governor, Mr Jagmohan, with the arrest of several militants from different parts of the Valley, reports UNI.

The conspiracy was reportedly hatched by rebel organizations based in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, according to intelligence sources.

The sources said some letters seized from the arrested militants revealed their plot. These organizations considered Mr Jagmohan as a major "hurdle" in their goal of attaining "independent Kashmir".

'Go home'

HAJMASKET (Hungary), March 12. — Soviet soldiers boarded a train out of Hungary on Monday to send off from a brass band and a banner telling them: "Go home as quick as you came," reports Reuter.

The 139 men and 27 armoured personnel carriers began the three-day journey back to the Soviet Union 48 hours after Moscow and Budapest signed an accord to remove the 50,000 Soviet troops from Hungary by June 30, 1991. Moscow has proposed August 31, 1991, for the pullout.

TODAY'S WEATHER

Mainly clear day. Strong surface winds likely during day time. Not much change in day and night temperature.

The maximum temperature in New Delhi (5.5 deg) on Monday was 21.2 degree C (70.1 degree F), 3 degree C below normal and the minimum 12.8 degree C (55.0 degree F), 1 degree C below normal.

The maximum relative humidity was 85% and the minimum 35%.

Sun sets today at 6:27 p.m.; tomorrow at 6:24 a.m. Moon rises today at 8:46 a.m. and sets at 7:12 a.m. Last quarter of the Moon on March 13.

Lighting up time 6:51 p.m.

Cuts in expenses advised

There should be no increase in expenditure in the Government sector during the Eighth Plan (1990-95), the Ninth Finance Commission has suggested as part of specific measures to reduce the growth of revenue expenditure in the immediate future, reports UNI.

In its second and final report, the Commission pointed out that there had been a fairly fast growth of employment in the Government sector, particularly at the State level.

Between 1979-80 and 1988-89, employment in this sector, taking all States together, grew at the rate of 3.6% resulting in "burgeoning increase in the salary bills".

It said the revenue plan expenditure of the Eighth Plan should consist only of expenditure on materials, except in addition to additional schools and hospitals to be started under the plan. Expenditure incurred on additional staff for such plan schemes must be adjusted within the non-plan budget.

The report said Government would have to shed some activities as the Budgets were over-burdened and resources scarce.

This, it said, called for the application of zero-based budgeting and each Ministry and department at the Centre and in the States should be asked to order its activities, according to its own scheme of priorities.

Five per cent of each department's work, measured in terms of share of revenue expenditure, which is of the lowest priority according to its own evaluation should be given up, it said.

The surplus staff created by this procedure should be kept available for relocation in other areas where activities might have to be expanded, it said.

The report said the phasing out of the revenue deficit would reduce the rate of growth of public debt and, hence, the rate of growth of interest payments.

One of the measures suggested by it in this context is that budgetary support to public enterprises be reduced. Even in the case of key infrastructure sectors like the railways where budget support would have to be extended, part of the financing could be met through borrowing from the market with some interest subsidy from the budget.

It said public enterprises performing efficiently could be allowed to issue debentures as is done in respect of private enterprises. It would be desirable if corporations in large cities are allowed to borrow funds against debentures, with appropriate interest subsidy, to undertake slum clearance and other developmental activities.

Another way to reducing the load on the public sector was to share with the private sector the task of expanding capacity in some areas such as power.

The commission noted that, at the State level most public enterprises, including electricity boards and road transport corporations, are suffering losses.

"There is little justification for continuing to own and operate enterprises outside the core sector which are continually making losses and which, according to reasonable expectations, cannot be revived and turned around".

2 Muslim priests 'executed'

SRINAGAR, March 12. — Three persons — two Muazzins (Muslim prayer leaders) and a militant — were killed in fresh bout of violence across Kashmir Valley today. The bullet-riddled bodies of the two priests, Maulana Abdul Aziz and Maulana Ayub Ali Alqasi, both from West Bengal were found on a road six kilometres from the south Kashmir town of Shopian. Underground secessionist Hizbe Mujahideen Party has reportedly claimed responsibility for the killings.

The party said the Mujaheeds had "executed" them for they were engaged of working as "agents" of India's Intelligence Bureau. Five Muazzins, all of them from West Bengal, had been captured but three were let off after they were found "not guilty".

Another report said two more Muazzins were found dead at a deserted place in the border district of Kupwara north of Srinagar. They, too, had received fatal bullet injuries.

Meanwhile, tension escalated in Srinagar after an insurgent died in a hospital in Srinagar late last night. The official spokesman in Jammu said that the man, Fayaz Ahmed, was a "top" militant who had been seriously wounded in an encounter with security forces after he fired upon them in Habbakadal area in Srinagar yesterday.

The authorities withdrew the eight-hour long curfew relaxation period in Srinagar today after people started flocking to the hospital to inquire about Fayaz Ahmed and an estimated 5,000 of them collected in Habbakadal locality.

The security forces foiled an attempt by the Dukhtarane Millat (Daughters of Islam) Party to organise a protest on Page 7 col 1.

AIRBUS CRASH

Engine 'failure the cause'

ENGINE failure caused the crash of the Indian Airlines Airbus A-320 aircraft at Bangalore on February 14, informed sources said in New Delhi on Monday, reports UNI.

An analysis of the digital flight data recorder readout and the cockpit voice recorder, both of which had been recovered intact from the debris of the aircraft, indicated that the Pratt Whitney engine V-2500 did not respond to commands from the computer and the pilots continued to lose height and crashed seven seconds later.

They said that in spite of the computer commands and the pilots' manual efforts to climb up, the aircraft continued to lose height and crashed seven seconds later.

The Indian Civil Aviation authorities feel that the assurance given by the Airbus Industrie, manufacturers of A-320, that the V-2500 engine could gain height immediately when required, had not proved correct and thus engine failure was the obvious reason behind the crash.

The Ministry sources indicated that the Indian Airlines would not fly the new generation Airbus A-320 aircraft, the entire fleet of which has been grounded.

The fleet would continue to remain grounded until the airworthiness of the plane was proved beyond doubt.

The Ministry sources further indicated that it had conveyed the findings of the DFDR and the CVR to the French Civil Aviation authorities with a clear understanding that Airbus Industrie would not use it to protect their business interests.

The Ministry has taken a serious view of the Airbus Industrie's allegation in which it had held the IA pilots responsible for the Bangalore crash. The Government has asked the Secretary of the Ministry to convey to the Industrie its "displeasure" over the "planting of stories" in newspapers abroad blaming the pilots.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT

External interference not to be tolerated

Country's preparedness highlighted

From Our Special Representative

NEW DELHI, Monday. — The President today told a joint session of the two Houses of Parliament that India will not brook any interference from outside in its internal affairs. He reiterated that Jammu and Kashmir was an integral part of India.

The Government had noted with concern that "external forces" had tried to "encourage terrorism, internationalize the (Kashmir) issue and organize intrusions across the border."

The situation in Jammu and Kashmir had deteriorated during the past few years and was "serious". He added that the State Administration was taking all possible measures to check "terrorism and secessionism" and restore normalcy. He assured members that the Government would take all "positive steps" to remove all "legitimate grievances" and accelerate the development activities in the State.

Mr R. Venkataraman, whose Address to Parliament was marked by interruptions four times, also said that relations with Pakistan had come under strain as a result of its continuous efforts to encourage and aid terrorism and secessionist activity in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab. India was opposed to such interference in its internal affairs and had expressed upon Pakistan the need to abide by the "letter and spirit" of the Simla Agreement which had helped to maintain peace and provide enduring framework for relations between the two countries. "We hope saner counsel will prevail in Pakistan as would preserve peace and enable us to normalize relations with that country," he said.

The 14-page Address by the President touched upon a number of subjects and claimed that the National Front Government had responded to the "sacred trust" reposed by the people in it. The recent Assembly elections had reaffirmed the verdict of the people in favour of change, as they had done in the Lok Sabha elections earlier.

Mr Venkataraman also spoke of a "fresh hope in the atmosphere". He said the National Front Government was working for a strong India "based on dignity of the individual" where benefits of development would flow to all, particularly the weaker sections and the "poor of the poor". The challenges were tremendous. "But we shall overcome," he said.

PTI adds: Members of the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Lok Dal (B) raised issues concerning the implementation of the Mandal Commission report, incidents of booth capturing in the recent Assembly polls and the plight of women.

The Government had decided to set up a national security council with a view to evolving long term policies appropriate to the regional and international environment.

The President assured the people on the high state of defence preparedness and the morale of the armed forces.

"We are fully prepared to meet any external threat" Mr Venkataraman asserted.

The President in his address spoke of the measures the Government had taken to contain inflation and ensure remunerative prices to farmers.

He said special efforts were being made to augment the supplies of essential commodities through

Fernandes to focus on J&K political arena

The Railway Minister, Mr George Fernandes, was on Monday formally named the Minister in charge of Kashmir Affairs and a committee of major political parties constituted to evaluate the current situation in the Valley and initiate steps to restore normalcy, report PTI and UNI.

An announcement to this effect was made by the Prime Minister, at a meeting of the parliamentary party of the National Front.

The Union Law Minister, Mr Dinesh Goswami, who briefed the Press, said representatives of Congress(I), Janata Dal, CPI, CPI(M), BJP and National Conference would comprise the committee.

Mr Fernandes would essentially be active in the political sphere, establishing contacts with various groups in the Valley.

Talking to correspondents soon after his appointment, Mr Fernandes said his role would in no way clash with that of the Union Home Minister or the Jammu and Kashmir Governor. "The Governor has a Constitutional role which he is performing".

The six-member advisory committee constituted to assist Mr Fernandes consist of Mr K. N. Sahani (BJP), Mr P. L. Handoo (NC), Mr Saifuddin Chowdhary (CPI-M), Mr M. Farooqi (CPI), Mr Ghulam Rasool Kar (Cong-I) and Mr Surendra Mohan (National Front).

French poet dead

PARIS, March 12. — Writer and Poet Philippe Soupault, 92, one of the founders of the surrealist movement, died last night at his home here, says AP.

Born in the exclusive Paris suburb Chaville to a bourgeois family, Soupault was educated at the Sorbonne.

Lithuania declares independence

VILNIUS (USSR), March 12. — Lithuania declared political independence from Soviet Union last night, hoping to force Moscow into talks on granting full freedom to the Baltic Republic that Josef Stalin annexed 50 years ago, report AP, UNI and PTI.

Legislators joined hands, raised their hands over their heads, and chanted "Lietuva, Lietuva," or "Lithuania" after they voted to proclaim their homeland independent once more after a half-century of Soviet rule. The vote was 124-0 with six deputies abstaining.

Wild cheers erupted among a crowd outside the building. The Soviet earlier had torn down the Lithuanian flag from the outside door of the legislative building. Some stamped on it.

"That's the end of the Soviet regime," said a jubilant Deputy looking on.

"Expressing the will of the people, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania declares and solemnly declares the restoration

Darbara Singh cremated

The body of the veteran Congressman and former Punjab Chief Minister, Mr Darbara Singh, who died in New Delhi on Sunday night, was consigned to flames with State honours at the Nigarbodh Ghat crematorium on Monday, report PTI and UNI.

A galaxy of party leaders, including the AICC president, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the party general secretary, Mr V. N. Gadgil, former Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr Balram Jakhar, former Union Minister, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, Mrs Margaret Alva and Mrs Shikha Dikshit, were present during the cremation.

The Delhi Police jawans gave a gun salute as the pyre was lit by Mr Singh's eldest son, Mr Joginder Singh. The policemen dipped their guns when the body was put on the pyre. Two other sons of Mr Darbara Singh, Mr Surjit Singh and Mr Devendra Singh, and his daughter, Ms Surinder Kaur, were present.

Earlier, the body of Mr Darbara Singh was kept at the All-India Congress Committee (I) headquarters for several hours to enable party workers and people to pay their homage.

A host of ruling party and Opposition leaders, including the Prime Minister, on Monday visited the residence of Mr Darbara Singh.

Others who paid their respect to the departed leader included: the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Devi Lal, the Home Minister, Mr Muhammad Sayeed, the Information and Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr P. Upendra and Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr Rajiv Ray.

Besides, several members of Parliament and hundreds of leaders and well-wishers from Punjab also

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Soviet Union

Lithuania

Other countries shown include Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, Greece, Turkey, and Israel.

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