

Constitution In Hand, Bhim Army Chief Azad Returns To Jama Masjid In Delhi



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From the very place he was taken into custody, Bhim Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad, with the Constitution in one hand, returned to the Jama Masjid on Friday afternoon, just a few hours before his court deadline to leave Delhi expires.

Amid the swell of protesters, Azad, aka Raavan, sitting on the steps of the Masjid, read out Preamble to the Constitution.

Azad, 33, was released from Tihar Jail on bail on Thursday night and received a rousing welcome by his supporters.

At Jama Masjid in old Delhi, where anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protest was taking place, Azad also lauded women participating in the anti-CAA protests at Shaheen Bagh, Jamia Millia University and other parts of the country. "This (anti CAA) movement is for the future of this country, for our identity and to uphold the Constitution. It is our responsibility to strengthen it," he said.

Azad said it is the fundamental duty of citizens to protect the Constitution and also urged people to carry out peaceful protests against the CAA.

Punjab Assembly Moves Resolution Against Citizenship Amendment Act



A resolution against the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act was moved in Punjab Assembly on Friday. The state government will also seek an amendment to the form of the National Population Register (NPR) to allay fears in certain quarters regarding the NPR and National Register of Citizens (NRC).

State Minister Brahm Mohindra moved the resolution on the second day of the two-day special Assembly session.

"The CAA enacted by Parliament has caused countrywide anguish and social unrest with widespread protests all over the country. The state of Punjab also witnessed protests against this legislation, which were peaceful and involved all segments of our society," Mohindra said while reading out the resolution.

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), which voted in favour of the Citizenship Amendment Bill in Parliament, supported the state government's resolution in the Assembly. SAD leader Bikram Majithi said, "If people have to stand in line and confirm where they were born, then we are against any legislation like this."

The introduction of the resolution coincides with a meeting called in New Delhi by the Union Home Ministry to discuss modalities for the

Census 2020 and NPR. It will be attended by Chief Secretaries and Census Directors of all states. Opposition parties say the NPR is a "prelude" to the NRC.

Besides this, the House also passed the Punjab Right to Business Bill, 2020, to ensure ease of doing business for those under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

Earlier, the Kerala assembly had passed a resolution against the CAA. The Pinarayi Vijayan government in Kerala also moved the Supreme Court seeking declaration of the new law unconstitutional.

Assembly clears business bill Besides this, the Assembly today passed the Punjab Right to Business Bill, 2020, to ensure ease of doing business by medium and small enterprises.

Lok Insaaf Party MLAs staged a protest in the well of the House, alleging that they were not allowed to speak on the Punjab Water Resources Bill 2020 which was tabled today. The MLAs later staged a walk-out from the Assembly.

Punjab Chief Minister Amrinder Singh told the House that he will convene an all-party meet on the conservation of underground water on January 23



President Kovind Rejects Mercy Plea Of 2012 Gangrape Convict

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NEW DELHI:- The mercy petition of Mukesh Singh, one of the four convicts in the 2012 Delhi gangrape case, was rejected by President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday, sources told PTI.

This comes hours after the Union Home Ministry had forwarded the plea, recommending its rejection to the President, the news agency had reported.

"We are happy that the chances of them getting hanged have increased. We are assured that as soon as they file mercy pleas they will be rejected," the father of the 23-year-old paramedic stu-

dent, who was gangraped and brutally assaulted in December 2012, said.

On Wednesday, the Delhi government had informed the Delhi High Court that the four death row convicts will not be hanged, as their mercy petition was pending before the President. The four were to be hanged on January 22 at 7 am.

Pointing out that the right to seek mercy is a Constitutional right, Grover said, "The applicant is entitled to a fair consideration of his mercy plea without the shadow of the noose hanging over him... There is no purpose in keeping the warrant alive as it is in defiance of law," advocate Vrinda Grover, appearing

for Mukesh, had said.

Meanwhile, Asha Devi, mother of the victim, blamed political parties for exploiting her daughter's death for "political gains" and "delaying" the hanging of the four convicts. Speaking to news agency ANI, she urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to fulfill his 2014 campaign promise of women safety and ensure that the culprits are hanged to death on January 22, as earlier decided by a Delhi court.

"The same people who took to the streets to protest against the incident in 2012 are now using my daughter's death for political gains," she said. "I feel stuck in the middle of this blame game," Asha Devi added.

'Deliberate Delay': Nirbhaya's Mother Accuses BJP, AAP Of Playing Politics

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NEW DELHI: Nirbhaya's mother Asha Devi on Friday accused BJP and AAP of playing politics and alleged that the hanging of convicts of 2012 gang-rape case which was scheduled to take place on January 22, is being deliberately postponed.

"It has been 7 years and we didn't get justice. The government can't see our pain. Both parties are playing politics on the girl's death. I think the hanging is deliberately being postponed," Asha Devi told ANI when asked about the war of words between BJP and AAP in the case.

"Till now, I never talked about politics, but now I want to say that those people who held protests on streets in 2012, today the same people are only playing with my daughter's death for political gains," she said.

On Thursday, BJP alleged that the AAP government is responsible for the delay in the hanging of Nirbhaya convicts.

Later, Deputy Chief Minister and senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia hit back at BJP and said 'Give us Delhi Police and law-and-order responsibility for two days and we will hang Nirbhaya convicts'.

Commenting on Sisodia's remark, Asha said: "It would be good if Sisodia had said 'give me Delhi Police, I will protect girls'."

The mother also urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to en-



sure that the hanging of convicts take place on January 22.

Standing Counsel for Tihar Jail authorities Advocate Rahul Mehra has said that the execution of convicts in the 2012 gang-rape case will not take place on January 22.

"It can only take place 14 days after the mercy plea is rejected as we are bound by the rule which says that a notice of 14 days must be provided to the convicts after the rejection of mercy plea," he added.

Earlier, Mukesh Singh, one of the four convicts in the gang-rape and murder of a paramedic student in 2012, had informed the Delhi High Court that his mercy petition is pending before the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi and the President of India and he should be given a minimum 14 days notice between the rejection of his mercy petition and scheduled date of execution.

The Delhi High Court has refused to set aside the trial court order which issued a death warrant. The court had asked the convict's counsel to approach the trial court and apprise about the pending mercy plea.

The Supreme Court had already dismissed curative petitions of the two death row convicts, including Mukesh Singh in the case.

Vinay Sharma and Mukesh Singh had moved the curative petitions in the top court after a Delhi court issued death warrants in their names for their hanging on January 22.

Besides them, two other convicts named Pawan and Akshay are also slated to be executed on the same day at 7 am in Delhi's Tihar Jail premises.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Home Affairs has sent the mercy petition of 2012 Delhi gang-rape case convict Mukesh Singh to Rashtrapati Bhavan on Thursday night, sources said.

Foreign Tourist Arrivals Up Despite Travel Advisories, Attempts To Create Bad Image: Tourism Min

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NEW DELHI: Foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) to India increased despite travel advisories issued by several countries and attempts by some groups to create "a bad perception" of the situation in the country, said Tourism Minister Prahlad Patel on Friday.

In 2019, till December, there has been a 43-percent increase in tourists availing e-visa, Forex has grown by almost 19 percent and the increase in FTAs is around 8 percent as compared to the same period in 2018.

"I think the data makes clear to those trying to create a bad perception of the country in a planned manner that they have

failed in comparison to the attempts made by the prime minister to showcase this country. The data shows India is stable, peaceful and definitely worth seeing," said Patel when asked about the effects the protests against CAA, NRC, NPR have on the tourism industry.

According to data from the ministry, FTAs grew by 4.3 percent in September 2019, a month after the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, as compared to the same period in 2018.

Similarly, Forex grew by 11 percent during the same period.

In December, when protests against CAA and NRC began, FTAs grew by 3 percent and Forex by 16 percent, the data said.

Isro's GSAT-30 Satellite Successfully Launched Aboard Ariane Rocket



BENGALURU: India's "high power" communication satellite GSAT-30, aimed at providing high-quality television, telecommunications and broadcasting services, was successfully launched aboard Ariane 5 rocket from French Guiana in the early hours of Friday, the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) said here.

Blasting off from the Ariane Launch Complex in Kourou, a French territory located in north-eastern coast of South America at 2:35 am IST, European space consortium Arianespace's Ariane 5 vehicle injected GSAT-30 into the orbit in a flawless flight lasting about 38 minutes.

"#GSAT30 successfully separated from the upper stage of #Ariane5 #VA251" Isro said in a tweet.

Confirming the successful launch, Arianespace CEO Stéphane Isral tweeted, "A strong start to 2020 as #Ariane5 successfully deploys its two satellite passengers EUTELSAT KONNECT and GSAT-30 into geostationary transfer orbit! I appreciate the trust from the two customers on this mission: @Eutelsat_SA and @ISRO #VA251 #MissiontoSuccess."

Isro's U R Rao Satellite Centre Director P Kunhikrishnan, who was present in Kourou, congratulated the ISRO community and Arianespace team on the successful launch.

Calling it an "excellent start" to 2020 for Isro with the launch, he said, "The mission team at the master control facility have already acquired the satellite and they will immediately complete the post launch operations..."

The 3,357-kg satellite, which was deployed from the lower passenger position of Ariane-5 launch vehicle (VA 251) into geostationary transfer orbit (GTO), is configured on Isro's enhanced I-3K Bus structure to provide communication services from Geostationary orbit in C and Ku bands.

The satellite derives its heri-

tage from Isro's earlier INSAT/GSAT satellite series, and is equipped with 12 C and 12 Ku band transponders.

GSAT-30 is to serve as replacement to the "aging" INSAT-4A spacecraft services with enhanced coverage, ISRO has said, adding the satellite provides Indian mainland and islands coverage in Ku-band and extended coverage in C-band covering Gulf countries, a large number of Asian countries and Australia.

With a mission life of 15 years, GSAT-30 is an operational communication satellite for DTH, television uplink and VSAT services.

The Bengaluru-headquartered Isro has said the communication payload of GSAT-30 is specifically designed and optimised to maximise the number of transponders on the spacecraft bus.

According to the space agency, the spacecraft would be extensively used for supporting VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal) network, television uplinking and teleport services, digital geostationary news gathering (DSNG), DTH television services, cellular backhaul connectivity and many such applications.

One Ku-band beacon downlink signal is transmitted for ground-tracking purpose, it added.

For its initial flight of 2020, Arianespace on its website said, it would orbit EUTELSAT KONNECT, a telecommunication satellite for the operator Eutelsat, along with GSAT-30, using an Ariane 5 launch vehicle from the Guiana Space Centre.

EUTELSAT KONNECT which was produced by Thales Alenia Space for Eutelsat was riding in the upper position of Ariane 5's payload arrangement, and was released first in the flight sequence at 27 minutes following liftoff.

Since the launch of India's APPLE experimental satellite on Ariane Flight L03 in 1981, Arianespace has orbited 24 satellites, including GSAT-30, for the Indian space agency.

Panel to seek public opinion on data law

The joint parliamentary panel that the Personal Data Protection Bill was referred to last month is going to seek public opinion on the proposed law that seeks to regulate how individuals and organisations handle digital data of Indian citizens. It has also sought a definition of privacy from the Centre.

Ruling Bharatiya Janata Party lawmaker Meenakshi Lekhi, who heads the panel that met for the first time on Thursday, said advertisements seeking comments on the bill will be issued next week. "We are authoring an advertisement, with a dedicated email, so that people can write to us and let us know if there are any infirmities the bill suffers from."

Another panel member, who did not wish to be named, said the window for public comments will be three weeks, after which they will meet again sometime in February.

During the meeting on Thursday, some Opposition members asked the government if privacy had been defined. "To this, the government did not have an answer. They will come back with a reply next meeting," said the member.

An Opposition lawmaker said that since there was no structured discussion on the legislation, the Information Technology ministry gave a power point presentation on the bill during the in-camera proceedings.

'It's Amusing': Shiv Sena Trains Guns On BJP Over Indira Gandhi Comment

A day after Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut retracted his controversial comment on former prime minister Indira Gandhi, his party trained its gun on the BJP on Friday. The Sena leader had kicked up a storm on Wednesday after he claimed that Indira Gandhi used to meet Karim Lala, a Pathan leader with links to underworld, in south Mumbai. The Congress party, Sena's new ally in Maharashtra, took objection to the statement. The BJP also waded into the controversy to corner the Congress over the statement and sought clarification

on underworld links. Raut, a Rajya Sabha member, withdrew his statement and said his comments were twisted. An editorial in the Sena mouthpiece Saamana, which is edited by Raut, picked up the thread and said those who once wanted to remove the former prime minister from India's history are now expressing discontent on a statement made on her. "We welcome that Indira ji Gandhi has become dear to them (BJP). It is amusing to see those who wanted to wipe out Indira ji's identity are now worried about her," the editorial in Saamana said on Friday.

Pune-Jaipur Indigo Flight Diverted In 'Full Emergency'

An IndiGo airlines flight from Pune to Jaipur was diverted and made an emergency landing in Mumbai early on Thursday after one of its engines malfunctioned, the latest in a string of incidents involving the Airbus A320Neo aircraft widely used in the industry.

According to flight tracking data, the plane, with 183 people on board, turned around roughly an hour into its flight and landed shortly after 4.30am at Mumbai, where airport officials said a full emergency had been declared and firefighting vehicles put on standby as per protocol. The flight landed safely.

The A320Neo aircraft was equipped with a Pratt&Whitney



(P&W) engine, which has shown high failure rates and has prompted aviation authorities around the world - including India - to order airlines to replace it or curtail operations in the interest of passenger safety.

When the problem came into focus in 2018, an estimated 40% of India's domestic air traffic was believed to be on A320Neos.

On Thursday, an official from

India's aviation watchdog Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said the incident occurred when Engine 2 stalled while cruising at 30,000 feet. A visual inspection later showed signs of damage to a specific part of the engine - the low pressure turbine blades - that is consistent with a known problem with some P&W engines. The other engine had been modified to correct the mechanical flaw.

There are 127 P&W powered A320Neos in India, with IndiGo deploying the bulk of them at 98 aircraft. The rest are on GoAir's fleet. Air India and Vistara, too, operate A320Neo jets, but these are equipped with a different engine.