

Air India Has To Recover Over Rs 822 Crore For Providing VVIP Charter Flights: RTI



Cash-strapped Air India, which is being disinvested by the government, has to recover over Rs 822 crore for providing VVIP charter flights, according to latest data provided by the national carrier to an RTI response.

In its RTI response provided on Wednesday to Commodore Lokesh Batra (ret'd), who sought to know the latest data on outstanding bills of Air India, the carrier said as on November 30, 2019, Rs 822 crore were pending towards VVIP charter flights.

It also said an additional Rs 9.67 crore towards evacuation operations and Rs 12.65 crore towards ferrying foreign dignitaries were also pending.

Under VVIP charter flights, Air India provides its aircraft to ferry— the President, the Vice-President and the Prime Minister—for which the bills are paid by the ministries.

If outstanding bills of VVIP charter flights were not enough, the carrier had also accrued bills of Rs 526.14 crore towards government offices which also include tickets taken on credit by the officials as on March 31, 2019, according to the reply.

Out of Rs 526.14 crore, Rs 236.16 crore were pending for over three years, Air India said in its response.

The airlines also said provisioned Rs 281.82 crore as an accounting charge in its account books for "probable non-recovery".

Air India had stopped the practice of issuing tickets on

credit to government agencies for the travel of their officials in December last year because of accruing pending bills.

In the RTI response, the airlines has provided a list of agencies against which bills were pending. These include the CBI, the Enforcement Directorate, Income Tax, Intelligence Bureau, CRPF, Department of Posts, Reserve Bank of India among others.

Batra had sought "updated (till the date of response), completed and detailed information (including dates and invoices)" on total pending dues towards VVIP charter flights and amounts owed by different public authorities towards Air India among other details.

The information under the RTI Act is defined as any record in any form held by or under the control of public authority which has to be furnished to an applicant within 30 days subject to exemptions under the law.

According to a response provided by the Civil Aviation ministry on December 5, 2019, a net loss of Rs 8,556.35 crore (provisional) was reported by Air India. The total debt of the airlines is pegged at around Rs 60,000 crore.

On Wednesday, the ministry said reasons for losses reported by Air India were—high interest burden, increase in competition especially from low cost carriers, adverse impact of exchange rate variation due to weakening of the Indian Rupee, and high operating costs.

Indian, Russian Companies Ink 14 Defence Mous



LUCKNOW:- As many as 14 MoUs were signed between Russian original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) and Indian companies on Thursday at Defexpo currently on in Lucknow.

The MoUs were signed during the fifth round of India-Russia military industrial conference which was co-chaired by Ajay Kumar, Defence Secretary, and Oleg Ryazantsev, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade of Russian Federation.

During the conference, 14 MoUs were exchanged between the Russian OEMs and the Indian companies. The first "Request for Proposal" for manufacturing of parts in India under the provision of inter-governmental agreement was also handed over by the Indian Navy to the identified Indian industry.

Representatives from both the countries acknowledged that the MoUs would pave the

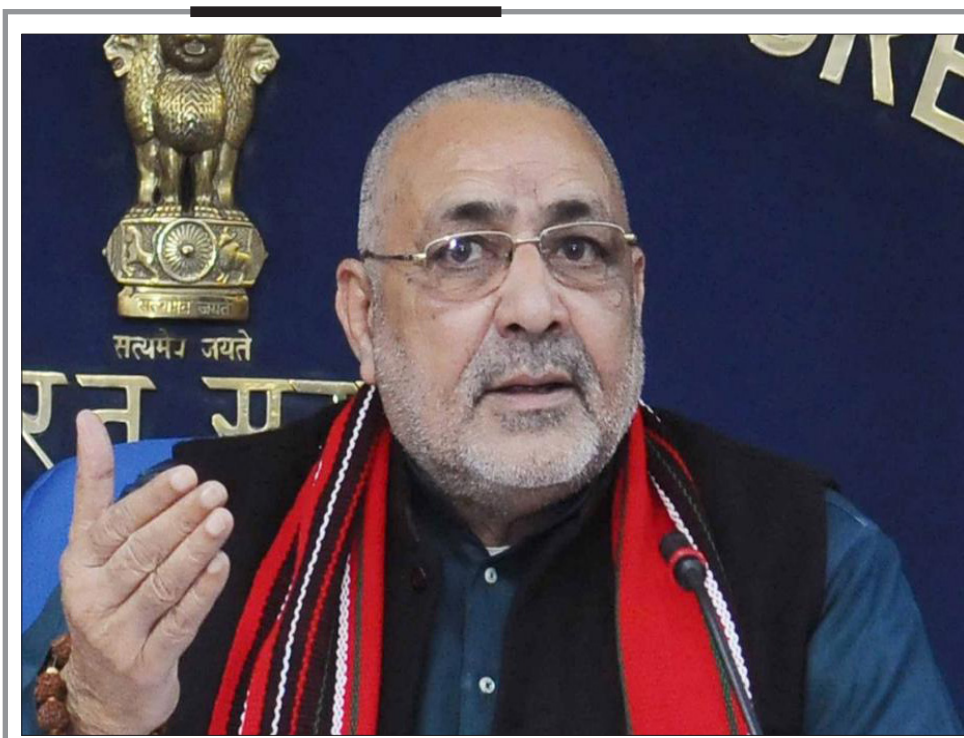
way for more contracts for joint manufacturing of spare parts.

Kumar said the Inter-Governmental Agreement on joint manufacturing of spare parts in India has been signed at Vladivostok, Russia on September 4, 2019.

The IGA provides framework for partnership of Russian OEMs with Indian industry for manufacturing of spare parts of Russian origin equipment in use by the Indian defence forces.

Kumar said the Indian side has taken steps to expedite the collaboration between the Indian and Russian companies as the country looks forward to expeditious commencement of manufacturing in India.

Ryazantsev said the Russian side would actively participate in the collaborations under the ambit of the Inter-Governmental Agreement and would take all necessary steps to facilitate manufacturing of parts in India.



Shaheen Bagh Now Suicide Bombers' Breeding Ground: Minister Giriraj Singh

NEW DELHI: Shaheen Bagh has become a breeding ground for suicide bombers plotting against the country from the capital city, Union Minister Giriraj Singh said today, contributing one more to a series of hate-filled comments that have vitiated the Delhi election campaign.

"This Shaheen Bagh is not a movement anymore. Suicide bombers are being raised here. A conspiracy is being planned against the country in the country's capital," Giriraj Singh tweeted in Hindi on Shaheen Bagh, the heart of protests against the citizenship law CAA. He also posted a video he claims is from Shaheen Bagh, but it is not established.

He even defended his tweet. "At Shaheen Bagh a baby dies and his mother says my son is a martyr. What is this, if not suicide bomb? If we have to say India, then people should be cautious of these suicide bombs, this khilafat movement."

Giriraj Singh, the Union Minister for Animal Husbandry and Fisheries, is notorious for his incendiary speeches, for which he has mostly gone unpunished.

A multitude of BJP leaders, including Home Minister Amit Shah, have targeted the Sha-

heen Bagh protest in a deeply polarizing campaign for the Saturday Delhi election.

Since December 18, hundreds of men, women and children have sat on protest on the road at Shaheen Bagh in south Delhi, against the religion-based Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA, which enables non-Muslims from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan to become Indian citizens if they escaped religious persecution and entered India before 2015.

The government has been accused by critics of subverting the constitutional principle of secularism and discriminating against Muslims by bringing in the CAA.

Protests have swept through the country against the law.

The BJP has accused Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of providing active support to the Shaheen Bagh protesters.

The ruling party's campaign pitch has circled around Shaheen Bagh and the narrative that the protesters are "anti-national" and have blocked a key road, inconveniencing thousands of commuters.

Last week, Amit Shah had said at a Delhi rally that people should press the button on the

Electronic Voting Machine with "such anger that the protesters in Shaheen Bagh feel the current".

BJP MP Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, banned twice from campaigning by the Election Commission because of his hate speeches, said recently: "Lakhs of people gather there. They will enter your houses, rape your sisters and daughters, kill them."

BJP leaders like Kapil Mishra, a candidate in the Delhi election, have compared the protests to "mini-Pakistans" in the city.

Mishra tweeted last week that "Pakistan" had entered Shaheen Bagh, and likened polling day to a contest between India and its Muslim-majority neighbour.

At another meeting yesterday, the Home Minister said: "The Delhi election is not a contest between two parties. You have to choose between two ideologies — Rahul Baba (Rahul Gandhi), Kejriwal and the company which supports Shaheen Bagh or (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi who is safeguarding the country."

Arvind Kejriwal has accused the BJP of using Shaheen Bagh in its campaign and avoiding subjects like development as it has no other strategy to win and nothing to show.

Sharjeel Imam Sent To Judicial Custody Till Feb 12

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI:- A Delhi court on Thursday sent Sharjeel Imam, a JNU student facing sedition charges, to judicial custody for six days till February 12.

Imam, whose three-day police custody ended today, was nabbed from Kako in Bihar's Jehanabad district on January 28 for allegedly making seditious and inflammatory speeches against the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Following this, he was sent to police custody for five days which was further extended by three days on February 3.

The Crime Branch had registered a sedition case against him on January 26 for delivering a provocative speech on January 13 after its video went viral. Subsequently, he went into hiding and the police launched a



manhunt to nab him.

Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Uttar Pradesh also followed the suit and filed cases against him.

In a purported video, Imam was seen talking about splitting the North-East from India to block the implementation of the NRC. —IANS

SC To Hear Centre's Plea Against HC Order On Hanging Of Nirbhaya Convicts Today



NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court has agreed to hear on Friday the Centre's appeal challenging the Delhi High Court's verdict dismissing its plea against stay on the execution of the four death row convicts in the Nirbhaya gangrape and murder case.

Additional Solicitor General K M Natraj, appearing for the Centre, on Thursday mentioned the matter for urgent listing before a bench comprising Justices N V Ramana, Sanjiv Khanna and Krishna Murari.

Natraj told the court that jail authorities are unable to execute the convicts in the case despite the fact that their review petitions have been dismissed and curative petitions and mercy pleas of three of them have been rejected.

The Delhi High Court Wednesday held that all the four convicts are to be executed together and not separately while setting a week's deadline for them to avail the remaining remedies.

If the convicts choose not to make any type of petition in seven days from now, the institutions/authorities concerned will deal with the matter, as per the law, without further delay, it said.

Hours after the high court's verdict, the Centre filed an appeal against it in the apex court.

The high court said all the four convicts in the Nirbhaya case have to be executed together, not separately, and faulted the authorities concerned for not taking steps for issuance of death warrants after rejection of appeals of the convicts by the Supreme Court in 2017.

The trial court had on January 31 stayed "till further orders" execution of the four convicts in the case — Mukesh Kumar Singh (32), Pawan Gupta (25), Vinay Kumar Sharma (26) and Akshay Kumar (31), who are lodged in Tihar Jail.

A lawyer associated with the matter had said the grounds taken for challenge in the top court are almost the same as taken in the high court while filing the appeal against the trial court order.

He had said the Centre has stated in the petition in the apex court that the convicts can be hanged separately as Mukesh has exhausted all his remedies, including the mercy plea.

Shaheen Bagh Shooter's Custody Extended By Two Days



NEW DELHI: A Delhi court on Thursday extended the police custody of Shaheen Bagh shooter Kapil Gujjar by two more days, after police said that there was a conspiracy angle to the crime that was "committed with political ambitions".

Kapil, who belongs to east Delhi's Dalli Pura area, had on February 1 fired three bullets in the air after warning anti-CAA protesters to disperse. He also shouted communal slogans. After his arrest, Kapil's police custody was earlier extended twice.

On Thursday, he was again presented before Saket Court's Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Gurmohina Kaur at the end of his police remand.

Seeking Kapil's custody for three more days, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Manoj Pant told the court that he was giving "misleading replies", not revealing the identity of who supplied him the firearm and the whereabouts of bullets he had in possession.

"Two notices were served to his family members to appear before police for questioning but they have not come. There is a conspiracy angle. There was certainly no rush of blood and the crime was committed with political ambition," the ACP said.

The court directed police to escort Kapil to Bihar to find the person who supplied him the firearm used in the crime.

Police also informed the court that Kapil was not revealing passwords to his accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok, adding that it hinted at a larger conspiracy that needed to be unearthed.

Police also said that Kapil's laptop which he claimed was handed over to his friend also needed to be recovered.

Defence counsel Akhil Rexwal denied the allegations and said that his client was ready to reveal the passwords to his social media accounts and also his family was willing to join investigations.

Kejriwal Calls BJP Leaders "Fake Hindus"

NEW DELHI: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday called BJP leaders "fake Hindus", adding that they only knew the language of abuse.

Reacting to the BJP for mocking him for reciting "Hanuman Chalisa" on television, Kejriwal said that he will ensure that all BJP leaders recite the same.

"They all should recite Hanuman Chalisa. It will help them with calm and peaceful mind and the tone and tenor of their speech will also develop discipline and restraint. BJP leaders are fake Hindus, they only know the language of abuse," Kejriwal said.

The Delhi Chief Minister



challenged that the BJP leaders didn't know what to recite, Hanuman Chalisa or Bhagwat Gita. "They don't know anything. All they know is to abuse," he said.

Kejriwal's remarks came just two days before the February 8 Delhi Assembly elections.

Youtube, Google, Whatsapp Misused For Porn, Fake News And Incite Violence

The government on Thursday expressed serious concern over "public platforms" like YouTube, Google, WhatsApp and others being abused for revenge porn, fake news and content designed to incite violence and cautioned that while digital world cannot be caged, players have to be accountable and responsible.

Minister for Law and IT Ravi Shankar Prasad said the issue of fake news is a worry, and added that there are "serious parliamentary concerns" about internet being abused for child pornography. He also asserted that identification of originator of messages was still a problem with regard to WhatsApp.

"I am a great supporter of creativity and freedom but there are

also social obligations...But the digital world has to be responsible, accountable and most importantly sensitive. For the sake of earning money, is it right to show what we are showing - this question has to be asked," the minister said at an IMAI event.

Stating that India is emerging as a large digital powerhouse that will yield golden opportunities, he asked companies not to allow their platforms to be abused.

"You must remember, India is emerging as a big global power and there are forces that want to create hurdles... that is their outlook but you don't allow your platform to be abused for that, that is my appeal," he said.

Terming digital universe a "pious and pure world" and one

that was empowering, he however noted that issues such as fake news was a "problem".

"Revenge porn is creeping in India...girlfriend and boyfriend split up... then what happens, platform is being abused," the minister said adding that he had even brought the issue of abuse of YouTube to the notice of Sundar Pichai (CEO of Alphabet).

"I told Pichai also, when you go to YouTube there are many positive narratives like old songs, speeches, enlightening digital material available...but see some of the other parts...the way YouTube is being abused," he said.

YouTube, Google, mobile or other related platforms are "public platforms" that are being misused for porn, fake news,



or content designed to provoke violence and flare communal tensions, he noted.

On WhatsApp he said there is still a problem in identifying the originator of a rogue message.

"Have one problem, still going

on. Who is the initiator of that sin and if it comes from abroad, who was the first in India to start it," Prasad said.

He said India, unlike China, will keep its doors open to progressive and new technologies.