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Rajnath Lays Foundation Stone Of New Army HQ Building; Says India Among Powerful Nations

NEW DELHI: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday laid the foundation stone of the Army headquarters' new building in Delhi Cantonment and asserted that the world now recognises India among powerful nations.

Christened 'Thal Sena Bhawan', the multi-storied complex is designed "like a rising sun" and it will be spread over nearly 39 acres, officials said.

"We have laid the first stone of the new Sena Bhawan. It will represent the unsung heroes of the armed forces who have sacrificed their lives for the country," Singh told a gathering at the ceremony.

The defence minister said the world now recognises that India is not a "weak India, but it stands among the powerful nations globally" and the credit for that goes to "our brave soldiers and the jawans who have made sacrifices".

The Army headquarters is currently housed in the iconic South Block at Raisina Hill in Lutyens' Delhi.

The new department of military affairs headed by the chief of defence staff (CDS) will be housed in this new building,

Singh said.

The defence minister also performed "bhoomipujan" (ground-breaking) ceremony at the venue, in the vicinity of the Manekshaw Centre.

The ground-breaking ceremony began with inter-faith prayers as four religious teachers, representing the four main religions of India, read lines from their sacred texts, wishing prosperity and well being for the building that will come up and people who will work in it.

Singh said the desire of soldiers who laid down their lives was not that people would know and recognise them, but "their only desire was that India should be a capable and a powerful country".

This foundation stone will serve as a source of inspiration for others, he said.

"Due to our brave soldiers, our country is known as a capable and a powerful one, and India has the capacity and strength to face big challenges," the defence minister said.

Army Chief Gen M M Naravane, defence personnel and a large number of jawans were also present on the occasion.



"It will take at least about three-four years for the new building to come up," the army chief said on the sidelines of the event.

The office of the army chief is also located in the imposing South Block which is part of the historic Raisina Hill complex built during the colonial era as part of the "new imperial capital" of the British Raj.

The cost of the project will be in excess of Rs 700 cr, a senior official said.

The Defence Ministry in a statement later said the building, expected to be constructed in five years, will house offices, residential complex for security personnel with basic amenities.

"More than 1,700 officers -- both military and civilian -- and

1,300 sub staff will be accommodated in the new building," it said.

The new complex has been conceptualised as a multi-storey green building, adopting Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment (GRIHA) norms. Approximately 7.5 lakh sqm of area will be constructed to house the office complex and parking, the ministry said.

Presently, the Army Headquarters functioning is spread over several pockets like South Block, Sena Bhawan, hutments area, R K Puram and Shankar Vihar, it said.

Singh in his address also said that the need for a centralised office space for army had been felt for many years. "There were eight locations where offices are being run. Now it can function under one roof," he said.

He observed that there is movement of about 3,000-4,000 vehicles every day from various army establishments in the city and this would be not required once the 'Thal Sena Bhawan' comes up.

The North Block and South Block, Viceroy's House (now Rashtrapati Bhavan) and Parliament House, surrounded by a lush green landscape and imposing fountains, were built during the construction of New Delhi that started in 1912.

"The new building complex will also have 250 security personnel for whom lodging facility will be there on the campus. The building will comply to 'prestigious norms' and have a GRIHA-5 rating. It will have three entry-cum-exit points -- NH-44,

Parade Road and Link Road," the senior official said.

There will be parking for 4,000 cars, he said.

Singh said, having a centralised office will lead to reduction in number of cars, and "many persons could even walk to the new Bhawan", which will help address the issue of pollution too.

At present, the South Block houses the prime minister's office and ministries of defence and external affairs, while the North Block has offices of the home and finance ministries. The two blocks fall under a very high-security zone.

Both the blocks, which symbolise the government authority since their inception in Lutyens' Delhi, are likely to be converted into a museum as part of the government's Central Vista Redevelopment project, officials in the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry had said in January.

The housing ministry is the nodal agency for the ambitious redevelopment project of the Modi government.

The officials had said that people would have access to the North and the South blocks once they are turned into museums.

J&K Inks Rs 2,100 Crore MoUs During Mumbai Roadshow

Mumbai Roadshow

food processing, manufacturing, infrastructure, media and entertainment, film and tourism, to attract investments, he added.

Kewal Kumar Sharma, Advisor to Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir said,

"We are in the final stages of designing an ambitious Industrial Promotion Policy 2020 in J&K, which will have elements like SGST reimbursement in full, attractive land policy, exemption from stamp duty, support for green industrialisation along with other benefits."

When asked about the ground situation in the union territory, he said it is much better than what it was a few months back.

"We're talking about investments in the long term. You're not talking about today, given today's situation (is) much better than what it was, let's say, a few months back. So things are improving. I don't see this becoming a problem for any investment," he added.

The Centre had in August revoked Article 370 to take away J&K's special status.

Sharma said J&K provides opportunities for Bollywood with religious and heritage sites, dense forests and waterfalls, among others.

"Jammu and Kashmir provides huge opportunities to set up film studios, film cities, film institutions, multiplexes with film exposed workforce as per new film tourism policy," he added.

J&K Commissioner Secretary Manoj Kumar Dwivedi said the union territory has a lot of inherent potential with appropriate climate for agriculture, vibrant tourism ecosystem and a huge land bank.

RTI Reveals Dr Farooq Applying

18.11.2019 to 13.12.2019 and 31.01.2020 to 11.02.2020. However, the RTI applicant was refused copy of Abdullah's leave application by the competent authority.

"His application for leave of absence is under consideration of the Committee on the Absence of Members from the Sittings of the House. Since the matter is under the consideration of the Committee on the Absence of Members from the Sittings of the House, the copy of his leave application cannot be provided to the applicant at this stage." The RTI reply states.

In another query of the RTI seeking details of Abdullah's absence from the house, the Lok Sabha replied "Details of signing/not signing the Attendance Register by Dr. Farooq Abdullah, MP during all the sessions of 17th Lok Sabha are available on the website of the Lok Sabha i.e., www.loksabha.nic.in

The applicant may, however, note that it is possible that Dr. Farooq Abdullah, MP might have attended the sitting of the House on a particular day but did not sign or forgot to sign the Attendance Register for that day."

In response to another question about how long a member may remain absent from the house, the Lok Sabha secretariat said, As per Article 101(4) of the Constitution of India, "If for a period of sixty days a member of either House of Parliament is without permission of the House absent from all meetings thereof, the House may declare his seat vacant. Provided that in computing the said period of sixty days no account shall be taken of any period during which the House is prorogued or is adjourned for more than four consecutive days.

The India Today report further says that when asked whether the Government has informed the Lok Sabha about the reasons for the absence of Farooq Abdullah from the House and if the answer is affirmative, a copy of the information be provided, the response from Lok Sabha Secretariat was "This query does not pertain to this branch".

Army Credits Drop In Local Militant

Lt Gen Dhillon said while explaining that the results of the operation were "worth noting".

"In all operations, we extend every opportunity to local militants to 'return'. Half way through, the encounters are halted and the parents or society elders are involved to urge the trapped local militant to 'return'. This is Operation 'Maa' and we have been successful many times," Lt Gen Dhillon told PTI in a written reply.

However, details were not made available by the army as this could jeopardise the safety of former militants who are inching towards living normal lives in the national mainstream.

He said effective operations, especially against the leaderships of militant outfits, are the result of the determined pursuit of joint counter militancy operations "in a people friendly manner".

According to a report compiled recently by security agencies, on an average only five youths joined militant groups every month since the special status of the erstwhile state was revoked over six months ago and it was bifurcated into two union territories -- Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh -- whereas the figure before August 5, 2019 was 14 per month.

Lt Gen Dhillon also believes that successful operations by security forces, which led to "elimination" of 64 per cent new recruits during their first year of joining militant groups, has also acted as a deterrent.

"As a result, the recruitment of local boys in 2019 has been nearly half in comparison to 2018 and joining militant tanzems (organisations) has become a non-lucrative option for the youth," he said.

The report also said large gatherings at funerals of militants killed by the forces has become a thing of the past. Now, only a handful of close relatives are seen during the burials of militants killed in encounters with security forces, it said.

Before August 5, 2019, funeral gatherings of killed militants used to be high and sometimes had more than 10,000 people, the report pointed out, adding that such gatherings had become fertile grounds for recruitment of youths into militancy.

However, there has been a sharp decline in such tendencies and has impacted recruitment of local boys in various militant groups which has come down drastically, the report, which has been collated by various security agencies, said.

"There were instances (after August 5, 2019) when militants were buried and funeral was attended by just by a dozen of close relatives," it said.

4 OGWs Arrested From Shopian,

rounds of various rifles were seized from their possession, they said. Meanwhile, an associate of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) outfit was arrested from Budgam district, police said. Acting on a tip-off, a checkpoint was established at Khan Sahib in the central Kashmir district. A vehicle was intercepted and Saqib Ahmad Lone, a resident of Wager village in the area, was arrested and incriminating material was recovered from his possession, according to a police spokesperson.

As per police records, Lone is involved in assisting the active militants of proscribed militant outfit JeM operating in the areas of Khan Sahib, the spokesperson said.

Lone is also involved in providing logistic support and shelter to JeM militants operating in the area, the spokesman added.

A case has been registered under relevant sections and an investigation is on. Incriminating materials recovered from his possession have been taken into record to probe his complicity in militancy-related

incidents, the official added.

J-K, Ladakh Record Deficit Rainfall

recorded a deficit of 80 to 90 per cent, while Leh in Ladakh witnessed a deficit of 97 per cent and the nearby Kargil 53 per cent deficit," he added.

Lotus said a fresh spell of rain and snow (in higher reaches) of Jammu and Kashmir and Kargil in Ladakh is likely during February 28-29 is expected to slightly improve this deficit. After dry weather, most parts of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh experienced rainfall with some places in high altitude areas including Gulmarg witnessing snow over the past two days.

"The weather is likely to remain dry till February 27. There will be a gradual rise in day temperature from today (Friday) onwards," Lotus said.

The winter capital of Jammu recorded the highest 12.8 mm of rainfall during the past 24 hours, followed by Kathua at 7.2 mm, Katra 5.6 mm and Banihal 2.8 mm, a spokesman of the MeT department said.

He said the famous ski resort of Gulmarg in north Kashmir recorded 14 cm snowfall over the past two days, while the rainfall in most parts of the Valley ranged between zero to 4.8 mm.

A bright sun shone in the twin capital cities of Jammu and Srinagar this morning after remaining hidden behind clouds for the last two days.

Jammu city recorded a low of 11.5 degrees Celsius against the previous night's 17.2 degrees Celsius, while the minimum temperature in Srinagar dropped to 2.4 degrees Celsius against the previous night's 3.6 degrees Celsius, the spokesman said.

Gulmarg was the coldest recorded place in the valley with a low of minus 8.0 degrees Celsius followed by Pahalgam hill resort at minus 3.8 degrees Celsius, the spokesman said.

Drass in Ladakh continues to be the coldest recorded place in the region with a night temperature of minus 19.4 degrees Celsius, the spokesman said, adding Leh was reeling at bone chilling minus 7.1 degrees Celsius.

Man's Death Fuels Coronavirus Speculations

his family too had no history of travelling outside Ladakh in the recent past.

Oxygen saturation in the patient's blood was continuously low and he has been referred to Delhi on Friday for advanced treatment, the statement said.

The third patient, a 36-year-old man from Nubra, came to an OPD of a hospital on February 14 with diarrhoea and vomiting following which he was admitted on February 17 with pneumonia and acute respiratory distress syndrome.

The patient has recently returned home after travelling to Bihar and south India. In Bihar, he had similar problem, approximately two months back, and discharged after treatment.

On his arrival at Leh, the person again developed the same symptoms. The patient is stable now with his vitals parameters are within normal limits.

The patient has been kept in isolation ward and samples have been sent to laboratory, the statement said.

The death toll in China's novel coronavirus outbreak has gone up to 2,236 with 118 more deaths reported, mostly from the hard-hit Hubei province, while the overall confirmed infection cases have climbed to 75,465, Chinese health officials said on Friday.

In India, three people were tested positive for the virus in Kerala and they have been discharged after treatment.

Bengaluru Student Booked For Flashing

Dalit Mukti, Muslim Mukti" slogans were written in both Kannada and English in the placard held by her.

The Hindu Jagaran Vedike organised the protest against Amulya Leona who had raised "Pakistan Zindabad" slogan thrice at an even against the Citizenship Amendment Act.

She had made the controversial slogans in the presence of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief Asaduddin Owaisi after the organisers of the event under the banner of "Save Constitution" invited her to address the gathering, prompting him to denounce her act.

After being removed from the stage, Amulya was later arrested on charges of sedition and produced before a magistrate court which remanded her to 14 days judicial custody.

An unpaid Owaisi had said he would not have participated in the protest had he known that the woman had been invited for the event and asserted his party had no links with her.

Dsp Davinder Case: Nia Raids

Earlier this month, NIA raided several locations for two days, on February 2 and 3, in south and north Kashmir, including the residence of Davinder Singh.

A 20-member NIA team had come on February 1 to Kashmir to collect more evidence against Singh whose arrest shook the security agencies in J&K and Centre. Singh is currently being questioned in Jammu by the NIA officials after getting his transit remand.

The DySP was arrested by J&K police on the 280-km-long National Highway while transporting three people, including two HM commanders Naveed Babu and Rafi Ahmed, to Jammu on January 11.

Multiple raids were conducted by J&K police at his residences in the valley after his arrest. But, after initial investigations by the J&K police, the case was handed over to the NIA.

Singh was an office in Anti-hijacking wing of J&K police at Srinagar International Airport, and was part of the security staff that received a group of foreign ambassadors, including US ambassador, who visited Kashmir last month.

Snow Clearance Operation Starts

snow clearance operation, they said.

Meanwhile, a report from Drass, the second coldest place in the world after Siberia, on the highway said snow clearance operation from other side of the Zojila has yet to commence. It said there are ten to 12 feet of frozen snow on the road between Zojila and Meenmarg.

The Government of India (GoI) has sanctioned two tunnels at Gagangar and Zojila to make Srinagar-Leh highway all weather road.

Meanwhile, the 270-km-long Srinagar-Jammu was open for one-way traffic and on Friday up convoy was allowed.

However, the 86-km-long historic Mughal road, linking Shopian in south Kashmir with Rajouri and Poonch in Jammu region and Anantnag-Kishtwar road remained closed for the past about three months.

Devotees Throng Temples In Kashmir

Among the devotees at the temple were Mohan Kumar from Bihar and Shri Ram from Hyderabad.

"I have come from Bihar especially to participate in the special prayers at the Shankracharya temple; a visit to the temple on Mahashivratri is considered very auspicious," Mohan Kumar said.

"I am feeling really good on visiting the temple. It was a one-hour trek from the nearest roadhead to the temple on the hillock, but I felt very good. I always wished to visit Kashmir on this holy day -- today my dream has come true," said Shri Ram.

The temples in other parts of the Valley are also holding prayers to invoke the blessings of Lord Shiva.

"We are holding special prayers for peace in Jammu and Kashmir; we wish the problems in Kashmir and elsewhere in the country come to an end and brotherhood and harmony prevails," Rakesh Kumar, a priest at the Shankracharya temple, said.

Mahashivratri marks the culmination of a three-day festival for the Kashmiri Pandit community. Special prayers are held on the first two days, with a feast on the third day, in which their relatives as well as members from the Muslim community participate.

Kupwara Sarpanchs Demand Underground

or maimed by Pakistani shelling.

"There are regular ceasefire violations in our area and either people and cattle get killed or property is damaged. Our lives, livestock and property are in perpetual risk," Hamid said.

He said that a ceasefire must be established at the LoC and there should be no violations.

"The 2003 ceasefire between India and Pakistan had given us a lot of relief," added said.

Another sarpanch, Khalid Badana, said that 60,000 residents in the area have been living on the edge due to continued shelling from Pakistan.

He urged the government to construct underground bunkers on a war footing. "Last month there was shelling from Pakistan and all of us were praying for our lives," Badana said.

He said they recently held a meeting with Divisional Commissioner (Kashmir) Baseer Khan and apprised him of the problems faced by the border residents.

He said Khan has promised them that the government would construct bunkers for the people in Karnah, but the work is yet to start. Badana said that people of Karnah want the government to provide at least three to four underground bunkers for the residents in every panchayat circle.

"The government should construct a bunker in every house or build at least four bunkers in each panchayat circle," he said.

The sarpanchs said that Karnah remains cut off from the rest of the country during winters and the government must take up the region's demand to construct a tunnel at Sadna Top to provide unhindered connectivity to Karnah.

No Trace Of Missing Gurez Student

examination at Gurez on Saturday. However, two other students identified as Arif Hussain and Ali Mohammad Lone were rescued and shifted to hospital in an injured condition.

Sources said that the rescue operation in the area by locals, police, Army and SDRF personnel was stopped at around 2200 hrs due to darkness and threat of more avalanche.

"This morning operation was again resumed at 0700 hrs to rescue Javid," they said, adding the operation continued even on Thursday despite bad weather conditions.

"Sniffer dogs were also pressed into service to recover Javid," they added.

Court To Hear Tufail Mattoo Case On April 11

was quoted by a local newsgathering agency KNO as saying.

He said that it was the first appearance today before the City Judge as the case was earlier being heard at Judge small causes.