

Mamata's no-trust bid fails in India

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A no-confidence motion moved by Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress lawmakers against India's Congress-led UPA government was yesterday disallowed by the speaker as the winter session of Indian parliament began on a stormy note.

The motion moved by Trinamool Congress over the government's decision to allow foreign investment in retail sector was disallowed in Lok Sabha by Speaker Meria Kumar. Trinamool's move was supported only by Biju Janata Dal, a regional party ruling eastern state of Odisha, and lacked requisite numbers.

Key ruling UPA supporters Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) triggered uproar in both Houses of Parliament leading to the adjournment of proceedings for the day.

In the Lok Sabha, SP members trooped into the well protesting the government's decision to impose a limit on supply of subsidized cooking gas for households while BSP members were in the well demanding dismissal of the SP government in Uttar Pradesh on the ground of law and order.

Some BJP members were heard saying that SP and BSP were helping the government through their protests.



PHOTO: AFP
Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, centre, arrives at the Parliament House to attend the winter session of parliament in New Delhi yesterday. India's shaky government and the opposition yesterday locked horns as parliament re-opened for a crucial session that will see a recent string of pro-market reforms being hotly contested.

NEWS IN brief

BBC gets new director general

BBC ONLINE

The chief executive of the Royal Opera House and the BBC's former director of news, Tony Hall, has been appointed the corporation's new director general yesterday.



BBC Trust chairman Lord Patten said Lord Hall was "the right person to lead the BBC out of its current crisis".

The appointment follows the resignation of George Entwistle earlier this month after just 54

Journalist deaths hit 15-yr high

AFP, Vienna

More journalists have been killed this year while on assignment than at any time in the last 15 years, according to the International Press Institute, a Vienna-based media watchdog.

A total 119 journalists have died so far, IPI's Death Watch survey found, exceeding the number of deaths in any year since it started keeping track in 1997. The previous highest figure had been 110 deaths in 2009. In, 102 journalists were killed.

Rice hits out at Libya allegations

AFP, United Nations

Susan Rice, US ambassador to the United Nations, said Wednesday she has been the victim of "unfounded" Republican attacks over her account of a militant assault on the US embassy in Libya that killed US citizen including ambassador Chris Stevens.

Rice is a frontrunner to be the next US secretary of state but Senator John McCain and other Republicans have said they would block her confirmation by the US Senate because of the controversy.

BCL attacks JCD

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same time, the BCL members came marching in a procession from the opposite direction, said Zoynal Abedin, Kushtia additional superintendent of police.

The BCL activists attacked the JCD members when both the groups came face to face near Kushtia Model Police Station around 4:30pm, he added.

The BCL supporters chased and beat JCD men using brick chips, bamboo sticks and iron rods.

At one stage, the JCD supporters took cover in the BNP district office, when the BCL men attacked the office and vandalised three motorcycles there.

Police hurried to the spot and dispersed the attackers.

JCD Secretary Kamal Uddin said, "The BCL supporters beat up our activists mercilessly."

District General Secretary Abdullah Al Mamun, who led the BCL procession, said, "The JCD members used abusive words about Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and this provoked our people."

Of the injured, joint convener Abdul Hakim Masud, Kushtia Government College unit president Shahriar Sumon, JCD town unit president Abdul Hakim and the unit secretary Mahfuzur Rahman Mithun were admitted to Kushtia General Hospital.

BNP district president Syed Mehedi Ahmed Rumi condemned the attack.

Normalcy returning to Gaza as truce holds

BBC ONLINE

People in Gaza have been attempting to return to normal life as a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, in effect since Wednesday, appears to be holding.

The Egyptian-brokered ceasefire agreement came into force at 21:00 (19:00 GMT) on Wednesday evening.

A number of rockets were fired from Gaza in the first few hours of the truce, but Israel did not respond. However, Israeli schools close to the Gaza Strip were kept closed yesterday as a precaution.

Overnight, Israeli security forces arrested 55 people in the West Bank who it said were

"terror operatives".

Hamas has declared Thursday a public holiday, to mark what it is describing as its victory over Israel.

Israel launched an offensive against Gaza, which it says was aimed at ending rocket fire from Gaza, with the killing of a Hamas military leader last week.

Gaza medical officials told reporters that 162 Palestinians, more than half of them civilians, including 37 children and 11 women, were killed. Nearly 1,400 rockets were fired into Israel, killing four civilians and a soldier, the Israeli military said.

Under the deal, Israel has agreed to end all hostilities and targeted killings of militants, while all Palestinian factions

will have to stop firing rockets into Israel and staging border attacks.

Israel must also begin talks about opening Gaza's border crossings and easing restrictions on the movement of people and goods.

Both sides have said they will retaliate if the other breaks the truce.

"If Israel complies, we are compliant. If it does not comply, our hands are on the trigger," said Hamas's exiled leader, Khaled Meshal, at a news conference in Cairo.

Israeli media quoted Defence Minister Ehud Barak as saying that the truce was not a formal agreement but a set of understandings.

SYRIA CRISIS

Rebels seize keytown; toll hits 40,000

AFP, Damascus

Rebels seized the eastern Syria town of Mayadeen yesterday, the latest in a series of strategic advances, as the number of people killed in the increasingly violent conflict passed the 40,000 mark.

Defeated government troops fled from Mayadeen to a military airport near the main eastern city of Deir Ezzor, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

The oil and gas-rich province of Deir Ezzor is home to Sunni Muslim tribes whose ties extend across the border into Iraq.

Despite its battlefield losses, most oil and gas fields in the large desert province remain still under regime control, said the Britain-based Observatory.

Meanwhile, Russia yesterday warned Turkey against deploying surface-to-air Patriot missiles to protect its troubled border with Syria, saying it should instead use its influence to help broker peace in the war-torn country.

"The militarisation of the Syrian-Turkish border is of course a worrying sign," foreign ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashевич told a briefing.

ELECTRONIC TRACKING

New hurdle for Saudi women

AFP, Riyadh

Denied the right to travel without consent from their male guardians and banned from driving, women in Saudi Arabia are now monitored by an electronic system that tracks any cross-border movements.

Since last week, Saudi women's male guardians began receiving text messages on their phones informing them when women under their custody leave the country, even if they are travelling together.

Manal al-Sherif, who became the symbol of a campaign launched last year urging Saudi women to defy a driving ban, began spreading the information on Twitter, after she was alerted by a couple.

The husband, who was travelling with his wife, received a text

message from the immigration authorities informing him that his wife had left the international airport in Riyadh.

"The authorities are using technology to monitor women," said columnist Badriya al-Bishr, who criticised the "state of slavery under

which women are held" in the ultra-conservative kingdom.

Women are not allowed to leave the kingdom without permission from their male guardian, who must give his consent by signing what is known as the "yellow sheet" at the airport or border.

The move by the Saudi authorities was swiftly condemned on social network Twitter.

"Hello Taliban, herewith some tips from the Saudi e-government!" read one post.

Saudi Arabia applies a strict interpretation of sharia, or Islamic law.



ILLEGAL CAMPAIGN FUND

Judges grill Sarkozy

AFP, Bordeaux

French judges yesterday grilled ex-president Nicolas Sarkozy about accusations his 2007 election campaign was financed with funds secured illegally from France's richest woman.

In a case that could wreck the 57-year-old's hopes of a political comeback, Sarkozy is suspected of taking financial advantage of elderly L'Oreal heiress Liliane Bettencourt when she



was too frail to fully understand what she was doing.

Examining magistrate Jean-Michel Gentil and two other judges were expected to spend most of the day quizzing Sarkozy about how he obtained funding from Bettencourt.

Judicial sources have told AFP that Sarkozy could be formally indicted on a charge of taking

advantage of someone in a position of weakness, although the magistrate also has the option of interrogating him as a witness under caution.

The allegation against Sarkozy is two-fold: that the money obtained from her took his campaign financing over legal limits and that it had been secured without her full knowledge or consent.

Sarkozy, who lost his immunity from prosecution after losing the presidential election to Hollande in May, is facing a slew of legal inquiries.

As well as the Bettencourt case, Sarkozy is facing probes into contracts for opinion polls, an illegal police investigation into journalists and alleged kickbacks on a Pakistani arms deal used to finance the right in 1995, when Sarkozy was budget minister.

Defence for mercy

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to why contempt charges should not be brought against them for their 'misconduct' during case proceedings.

The tribunal held off the proceeding of the show-cause notices for good judgment till December 23. Defence counsel Tajul Islam, who was barred from entering the tribunal until yesterday since November 6 for his 'high-grade contempt', cannot appear before the tribunal till then.

The tribunal served a show-cause notice to three defence counsels -- Mizanul Islam, Tajul Islam and Tanvir Ahmed Al-Amin -- on November 6. Another show-cause notice was served separately to Tajul

Islam on October 22.

Mentioning that Tajul has been appearing before the tribunal since the first day of proceeding, tribunal chairman Justice Md Nizamul Huq observed that his conduct was getting worse day by day.

"After the second notice [served on October 22], he was mentioned in several reports published in both local and international media which the tribunal has collected. All those reports, if taken into count, go against him," Justice Huq added.

Justice Huq also said the statements on the tribunal's proceedings which have been given in the media are twisted and have drawn the tribunal's atten-

tion.

He added, "There won't be any benefit talking outside the tribunal. The tribunal's proceeding has been going on in its own way and it will continue."

On November 5, the defence created a commotion at the tribunal over the alleged 'abduction' of a prosecution witness by plainclothes policemen and boycotted the courtroom when the tribunal took time to investigate the matter.

At one stage, the chaos forced the judges of the three-member tribunal to leave the courtroom.

While boycotting the tribunal, defence counsel Mizanul Islam repeatedly called Chief Prosecutor Ghulam Arief Tipoo a 'liar'.

The same day Tajul told journalists the tribunal may have involvement in the 'abduction'.

Defence counsel Barrister Abdur Razzaq yesterday read out both the notices and the reply.

In his reply, Razzaq sought unconditional mercy from the tribunal saying Tajul and others had no intention to disrespect the tribunal.

Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Barrister Rafiqul Islam Miah and President of Supreme Court Bar Association Zainul Abedin also appeared before the tribunal for Tajul and sought unconditional mercy.

Admitting that the tribunal's dignity is also the counsels' dignity, Moudud

said Tajul had made so many mistakes which should not have been done.

Zainul Abedin said the allegations are serious, adding that the show-cause notices were enough for Tajul.

Razzaq pleaded that the tribunal lift its bar on Tajul and allow him to appear at the courtroom saying otherwise the defence may be prejudiced.

"We have not yet seen his absence causing the defence to be prejudiced," Justice Huq responded.

Later, the defence placed argument in the war crimes case against Sayedee and exhibited defence documents in another case against former Jamaat ameer Ghulam Azam.

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