



BJP threatens defamation case against Rahul

PTI, New Delhi

BJP yesterday threatened to file criminal defamation case against Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi for terming external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj's actions in the Lalit Modi issue as a "criminal act".

"Rahul Gandhi using these words is very unfortunate, undemocratic. And because of these words, I am demanding that Rahul Gandhi should make an apology to the country because it is not only defaming Sushma Swaraj, but defaming the foreign minister of the country, who is the representative of India in the world," Union minister Nitin Gadkari said.

"If Rahul Gandhi does not apologize, then it is a serious problem. We will have to file criminal defamation case against him," the BJP leader said while describing Gandhi's remarks against Swaraj as "childish" and "immature politics".

Stressing that allegations against Swaraj were "baseless", he said that she had not violated the law, constitution or indulged in any corrupt activities.

"Allegations against Sushma Swaraj are all baseless."

She has neither violated any law nor our constitution. She has not indulged in any corrupt or illegal activity. She is a very prominent leader of the country," Gadkari said.

Speaking on the Lalit Modi controversy, Gandhi had said, "What we have said is that (there will be) no discussion without resignation. Sushma has done a criminal act. He (Lalit Modi) is a 'fugitive'. You have signed it (the recommendation for grant of travel document)."

Carter hails peshmerga as model for Iraq

AFP, Arbil

Pentagon chief Ashton Carter yesterday said during a visit to Kurdistan that the autonomous region's peshmerga force was a model for the rest of Iraq in its fight against jihadists.

The US defence secretary, on the second day of his first visit to Iraq since taking office earlier this year, praised the efforts of what is the region's de facto army.

"We are trying to build a force throughout the territory of Iraq, and someday in Syria, that can do" what the peshmerga have achieved, Carter said.

He was speaking in the Kurdish capital Arbil in front of members of the US-led coalition deployed in Kurdistan to help push back the Islamic State group.

Moments earlier, he met Kurdish President Massud Barzani.

Carter "commended President Barzani on the battlefield successes they've achieved on the ground in coordination with US and coalition air power," a Pentagon statement said.

Several high-ranking Kurdish military officials attended the talks with Carter, on his first trip to Iraq since taking office earlier this year.

The threat posed to Arbil by an IS advance early last August was one of the reasons cited days later by US President Barack Obama for announcing US air strikes.

An international coalition has since developed and carried out thousands of air strikes, many in support of peshmerga forces fighting ISIS.

More than 1,200 peshmerga fighters have been killed in fighting with ISIS, which last year swept into several areas controlled by the Kurds, who are now trying to take them back.

Al-Qaeda suffers another blow

US strike kills top leader in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

A US air strike in Afghanistan killed a senior al-Qaeda commander, the Pentagon said yesterday, in the latest blow to the worldwide militant network struggling with the rise of the Islamic State group.

The attack, which occurred in Paktika province on July 11, killed Abu Khalil al-Sudani, a "high-ranking Al-Qaeda operational commander", the Pentagon said in a statement released to reporters in Iraq who were travelling with US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter.

The Pentagon described Sudani as a senior member of the group's "shura", or council, and head of Al-Qaeda's suicide and explosive operations, adding he was directly linked to plotting attacks against the United States.

Al-Sudani was responsible for training new fighters and also taking care of financial matters for the group in the area, according to the Afghan Taliban source.

Already struggling with the rise of rival jihadists from the Islamic State group, al-Qaeda has suffered a series of setbacks in recent months with several commanders reported killed.

Its second-in-command Nasir al-Wuhayshi, head of its powerful Yemeni branch, was killed in a US drone strike in June, in the heaviest blow to the jihadist network since the death of Osama bin Laden. Meanwhile in Syria, a US-led coalition air strike this month killed Muhsin al-Fadhli, the leader of Al-Qaeda's offshoot Khorasan Group, which is accused of plotting attacks against the United States and its allies.



Love affairs behind farmer suicides!

IANS, New Delhi

Dowry, love affairs and impotency were among the reasons for the deaths of over 1,400 farmers in India this year, Union agriculture minister Radha Mohan Singh said yesterday. "According to the National Crime Records Bureau, causes of (farmer) suicides include family problems, illness, drugs ... dowry, love affairs and impotency," he told the Rajya Sabha in a written reply to a question as to what caused the death of so many farmers in the country. The minister's reply, however, did not rule out debt as one of the reasons. The remarks on suicide by over 1,400 farmers in the last one year, by the government's own admission, are bound to provide fresh fodder to a belligerent opposition, which has been targeting the Narendra Modi government on the controversial land bill, dubbed as "anti-farmer and anti-poor". A total of 5,650 farmers committed suicide in 2014, with the maximum deaths reported from Maharashtra, Telangana and Chhattisgarh, official data revealed. Bankruptcy/indebtedness and family problems were major causes behind the suicides, accounting for 20.6 per cent and 20.1 per cent of the deaths respectively. Other causes included crop failure (16.8 per cent) and illness (13.2 per cent).

Maldives takes U-turns on Nasheed

Court commutes ex-president's 13-year term to house arrest

AFP, Colombo

The Maldives yesterday said it would appeal against the controversial conviction of former president Mohamed Nasheed for terrorism as it emerged his 13-year jail sentence had been commuted to house arrest.

The United Nations had described Nasheed's jailing in March after a quick-fire trial as "vastly unfair" while Washington had warned the conviction meant the honeymoon islands' fledgling democracy was in danger.

But in a surprise announcement contained in a government statement, authorities sought to distance themselves from the conviction before later confirming Nasheed was no longer behind bars.

"The prosecutor-general of the Maldives has decided to appeal the case of former president Mohamed Nasheed," said the statement.

The decision to appeal had been based on Nasheed's complaint of "procedural irregularities" in his trial, the statement added, including "the violation of some fundamental rights and inadequate time to prepare his defence".

Supporters of Nasheed, the archipelago's first democratically-elected leader before being toppled in 2012, have maintained the conviction was part of a strategy by President Abdulla Yameen's regime to silence him.

The sentencing on March 13 came less than a month after his arrest on February 22.

The government's own legal officers had pushed for the maximum sentence to be imposed on Nasheed and had



The mother of Turkish soldier Mehmet Yalcin Nane cries during the burial ceremony in Gaziantep, yesterday. Turkish fighter jets on July 24 bombed positions of Islamic State jihadists inside Syria for the first time, as police arrested hundreds of suspected extremists after a wave of violence.

Another mass shooting hits US

Gunman opens fire in movie theater killing two; Obama says gun laws are his 'biggest frustration'

AFP, Chicago

The author of the latest mass shooting in the United States was a drifter who tried to escape after killing two women in a movie theater, then took his life as police closed in, authorities said yesterday.

The incident came just hours after President Barack Obama said an inability to enact "common sense" gun controls was one of the greatest frustrations of his time in office.

It was not yet clear how John Houser -- a 59-year-old white male with a criminal record -- obtained his gun. Nor was his motive immediately known.

Police said Houser tried to flee after shooting 13 rounds from a single handgun into the crowded cinema in Lafayette, Louisiana Thursday evening. Nine people were wounded.

Houser had been staying at a nearby motel where authorities found glasses and wigs apparently intended for disguises.

"He's kind of a drifter," Craft said, adding that Houser -- who he said had acted alone -- had arrived in Louisiana recently from Alabama.

Craft later told CNN that Houser had a criminal record, including previous arrests for arson and a misdemeanor charge for selling alcohol to a minor.

Louisiana state police chief Michael Edmonson said they were investigating Houser's motive, and had spoken



to his friends and family.

It is possible that he may have been inspired by a 2012 theater massacre in Colorado that left 12 dead and 70 injured, Craft said.

More than 100 people were in the Louisiana cinema when Houser began shooting indiscriminately into the audience about 30 minutes into a screening of "Trainwreck."

Seven people remained in hospital Friday, one of whom is in critical condition.

The shooting came just hours after Obama said the issue he felt "most frustrated and most stymied" was gun control.

"If you look at the number of Americans killed since 9/11 by terrorism, it's less than 100. If you look at the number that have been killed by gun violence, it's in the tens of thousands," Obama said in an interview with the BBC taped before the shooting.

"And for us not to be able to resolve that issue has been something that is distressing," he said.

The White House said the president was briefed late Thursday while en route to Kenya about America's latest mass shooting tragedy.

This latest incident also comes a week after Mohammad Youssuf Abdulazeer, 24, opened fire on two military centers in Chattanooga, Tennessee and killed four US Marines and a Navy sailor before dying in a shootout without police.

No more struggling, kids

Indian state says no to oversized schoolbags, sets weight limit

AFP, Mumbai

Children struggling under the weight of an oversized schoolbag is a common sight the world over, but now one Indian state has ordered parents to ensure kids lighten their load. The government of Maharashtra, in the west of India, has passed a resolution saying no child must carry to school a backpack that exceeds 10 percent of their body weight. Five-year-olds in grade one are being asked to pop their satchels on weighing scales when they arrive for class so teachers can check they don't exceed 2.5 kilograms (5.5 lbs). Grade eight pupils aged 12 are limited to carrying 4.2 kilograms, all in a bid to prevent lasting injury, the state government said in a resolution passed earlier this week. The government ruling said teachers should stagger homework and timetables so children don't need to carry several textbooks to school every day. It also asked parents to ensure children do not pack unnecessary items. The order did not mention any punishment for violating the weight restriction.



Greece creditors due in Athens 'in coming days'

AFP, Brussels

Representatives from Greece's international creditors are due in Athens in the coming days, the European Commission said, with sources saying logistical issues had pushed back an expected arrival date of Friday.

The officials from the European Commission, European Central Bank and IMF are due in Athens after Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras agreed to start talks on a new bailout for Greece.

The aim of the new cycle of talks is to finalise a third international bailout for debt-stricken Greece by August 20, when it has to pay more than 3.0 billion euros to the ECB.

Modi backs call for India to be compensated by British

TIME ONLINE

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has joined a chorus of support for lawmaker Shashi Tharoor, who gave a now viral speech in which he called for Britain to pay reparations to India for centuries of colonial rule.

To date, a video of the speech posted on YouTube has garnered almost 1.5 million views. The speech was recently delivered at the Oxford Union debating society in Oxford, England.

"Tharoor's speech reflected the feelings of patriotic Indians on the issue and showed what impression one can leave with effective arguments by saying the right things at the right place," Modi said at an event at the New Delhi Parliament on Thursday, the Guardian reports.

In his 15-minute speech, recorded in May, Tharoor attacked the U.K. for the negative economic and social repercussions its

colonial rule over India had on the country.

"It's a bit rich to oppress, enslave, kill, torture, maim people for 200 years and then celebrate the fact that they are democratic at the end of it," Tharoor said in the speech. "What is required, it seems to me, is accepting the principle that reparations are owed."

One columnist and publisher, Minhaz Merchant, calculated the reparations due to India at close to \$3 trillion.

"I am very touched and grateful," Tharoor apparently said in response to Modi's praise, according to the Guardian.

Though Tharoor is part of the center-left opposition Congress Party, the direct competitor of Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, he has been rather vocal of his support for Modi, the Guardian says. He was even stripped of his title as party spokesman last year by Congress Party leader, Sonia Gandhi, for speaking too favorably of Modi's policies.



China cops foil Spartan 'invasion'

AFP, Beijing

Beijing police said Thursday they halted the march of dozens of semi-naked young foreigners dressed as Spartan warriors because the muscular contingent had disturbed public order by drawing large crowds onto the city's busiest streets. Wearing dark capes and skimpy shorts as part of a restaurant marketing stunt, pictures of the foreigners went viral online, with some showing at least two of the performers pinned down to the ground by blue-shirted police. It was not clear whether any of them were arrested. Chinese media reported the incident on Thursday with headlines including "Beijing police put valiant Spartan warriors under control". Some images featured the warriors holding aloft cups of fruit and vegetables, rather than swords, with restaurant company Sweetie Salad saying in a statement it hired the "foreign models" to deliver food to customers to celebrate its first anniversary.