Cong gears up to ensure passage of Hindu Shrines bill

Avtar Bhat

JAMMU, June 18: Realizing the importance of Kashmiri Hindu Shrines and Religious Places Bill, the Congress is all set to get it passed during . Autumn session of the State Legislature to be held in Srinagar.

According to highly placed sources the Congress, which is under constant pressure from the Kashmiri Pandits whose leaders have also taken up the issue with Party High Command in New Delhi did not want to lose any more time in passage of the much talked about KP Hindu Shrines Bill.

Sources said the Congress state president Prof Saif-ud-Din Soz has taken a personnel interest in this regard and has discussed the issue threadbare with senior functionaries of the Party in the State as well the prominent members of Kashmiri Pandit community.

Sources said Prof Soz has made it clear to the party leaders in the State that passage of the Bill will lead to Confidence Building Measure (CBMs) among the community and a base for their return to the Valley.

Sources said that Prof Soz has asked the Minister of Housing, Horticulture and Culture Raman Bhalla to act as a link between the Kashmiri Pandits and the Government regarding the passage of the Bill and find out the modalities as to how the Bill can be passed as early as possible. It may be recalled that the Kashmiuri Hindu Shrines and Religious Places Bill which was introduced in last budget Session in the Assembly in March-April was sent to Select Committee for consideration.

Sources said Congress was already annoyed with the National Conference (NC) for not including any member from the Party in the Select Committee constituted by the Speaker Assembly Mubarak Gul on May 17 to consider the Bill and discuss it threadbare before its passage.

However one of the Congress leaders informed a delegation of KPs at Srinagar on Monday that Select Committee is no issue as the Party is particular for the passage of the Bill and it can frame an opinion with the coalition partner for passage of the Bill.

Sources said the Congress High Command is also in favour of the passage of the Bill as the issue is linked to aspirations of the lakhs of Kashmiri Pandit community all over the globe. The issue was taken with UPA chairpersons Sonia Gandhi by Ahmed Patel her Political Secretary and senior Congress leader on the request of some KP leaders recently.

Sources said Congress has decided to study the issue of religious places of Hindus in Kashmir from case to case basis and those bodies and trusts who make claim on religious property will be asked to give some relevant proof which justifies their claim otherwise these trusts will not be allowed to become any hurdle in the passage of the Bill how influential they may be.

When contacted, Prof Soz said that his Party wanted that there should be a mechanism for the protection of Hindu Shrines and Religious Places in Valley. He told Excelsior that when there is Wakf Board for protection of Shrines and religious places of Muslims and Gurdwara Prabandhak Board for protection of religious places of Sikh community why be a Shrine Board for protection of Shrines of Kashmiri Hindus in the Valley can't be set up?

He however said that Party did not want any interference be made with Dharmarth Trust which is managing some shrines in the State but for the protection of rest of the religious places, Congress favoured formation of the Board and we will see that the Bill was be passed.

Meanwhile, a delegation of Kashmiri Pandits led by B L Bhat Katal of Pt Prem Nath Bhat Memorial Trust also met Mr Bhalla at Kheer Bhawani and Minister of Tourism Ghulam Ahmed Mir at Srinagar yesterday and discussed the condition of Hindu religious places in Valley with them. The duo was asked to use their good offices in enactment of law for preservation of age old religious places which are the cultural monuments of the Valley linked to hundreds years old rich civilization of Kashmir.

Mr Bhalla has assured them that Congress Party was keen in passage of the Bill and Party is working hard in this direction.

They also expressed concern over the denial of permission to members of the community to visit the holy temple of Lord Shiva situated on the bank on Neelnag, Veerinag by the Veerinag Development Authority (VDA) without seeking the proper tickets from the VDA.

Another delegation led by senior Congress leader Ashok Bhan and M K Koul chairman National Peace Movement (NPM) M K Koul met Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Ghulam Nabi Azad and stressed on passage of the

Bill for upkeep and maintenance of KP shrines and religious places in Valley which is the long pending demand of the community. The delegation also demanded construction of a satellite township for displaced people in the Valley.

Another rifle, ammunition seized

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, June 18: Army today recovered another AK rifle and ammunition from Sabjian sub sector in Poonch district near the Line of Control (LoC). Three AK rifles were recovered from the same area yesterday.

Reports said troops recovered one AK-47 rifles with broken butt, 26 magazines, 500 rounds and two packets of bandages during continued searches in Sabjian area this afternoon. With this, a total of four AK rifles have been recovered in the area in addition to a large quantity of ammunition.

The militants had made an infiltration attempt in the same area. Reports said the arms might have been kept by the Over Ground Workers (OGWs) to be picked up by the militants.

However, since the infiltration attempt failed, the arms remained hidden in the forests and the troops seized them during searches for the past two days.

Troops continued searches in the area in anticipation of more recoveries. However, there had been no traces of the movement of militants during the searches.

Soz releases IRCON film on Railway development in J&K

Excelsior Correspondent

SRINAGAR, June 18: Prof Saif-ud-Din Soz, president J&K Pradesh Congress Committee, visited Pahalgam today to dedicate the film produced by IRCON, a reputed Railway Construction Company, on the Railway Development in Jammu and Kashmir.

The DVDs of the films were distributed by the IRCON among the audience.

Prof Soz was accompanied by Bashir Ahmad Magrey, Mohd Abdullah Nadaf, Gulzar Ahmad Wani, Anayatullah Rather, Hilal Shah, Gulam Mohd Mir, Shaheena Nadaf and others. On this occasion Senior officers of IRCON, Khanna and Anand were also present.

While releasing the DVD of the film, Prof Soz said that it was his dream to have Kashmir on the Railway map of India and as the records of proceedings in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha will show that he had struggled for extension of Railway Line to Kashmir for all these years. He said the Railway travel in Kashmir Valley from Qazigund to Baramulla has become a celebration for people and it is heartening that general trend is that people in Kashmir never try to travel without tickets.

Prof Soz further said it was his fond hope that after Qazigund getting connected with Banihal shortly, the efforts are redoubled to connect Kashmir with Jammu and Delhi.

Prof Soz also said that there will be a day when Jammu will get connected to Rajouri and Poonch and Baramulla will get connected with Kupwara and Uri.

Court grants one day transitory remand of SI Sonu, PSO

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, June 18: Vacation Sessions Judge Y P Bourney today granted one-day transitory remand of encounter specialist SI Shiv Krishan Sharma alias Sonu and his PSO Mohd Ayub with the direction to produce them before the competent Magistrate.

The order was passed in an application filed by DySP Koushal Kumar seeking judicial remand of Shiv Krishan Sharma and Mohd Ayub, which was opposed by Advocate Parimoksh Seth appearing for the accused SI.

After hearing both the sides, Vacation Sessions Judge observed, "the accusations reflect that the alleged occurrence has taken place within the jurisdiction of Police Station Thathri. The application is presented before the Court on ground that it is only Principal Sessions Judge Jammu, who is authorized to try the offences under the Prevention of Suppression of Sabotage Act".

"Trial is to be held by the Sessions Court specifically empowered as per the procedure prescribed under the Act. At the same time the other provisions of CrPC not inconsistent with the provisions of Act (supra) are made applicable mutatis mutandis", the Court said, adding "there is no specific provision under the Act so reference is made to the provisions of Section 167 CrPC under which a Magistrate is competent to grant remand irrespective whether he has or has not got the jurisdiction to try or commit for trial".

"However, in case he has no jurisdiction and considers further detention un-necessarily then he has to forward the accused to the Magistrate having jurisdiction after expiry of 15 days. Therefore, remand has to be granted by the Magistrate of the concerned area only", the Court said.

With these observations, the application of remand was returned for presentation before the competent Magistrate. However, considering the request of IO that it would not be possible to produce the accused before the competent Magistrate today itself one day transitory remand was granted with the direction to produce the accused before the competent

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'Erring politicians, officials will be exposed'

Work on Ganpat bridge to be resumed shortly: Wani

Excelsior Correspondent

JAMMU, June 18: Minister for Roads and Buildings, Abdul Majid Wani today said that work on the Ganpat bridge, whose fate is hanging in balance during the past quite long time, would begin shortly. He, however, vowed to expose the politicians and officials who sabotaged the project.

The Minister was chairing a meeting in which T K Basu and V P Singh, consultants appointed by the Jammu and Kashmir Projects Construction Corporation (JKPCC), presented their detailed report regarding various aspects of Ganpat bridge.

Rejecting all the previous findings by IIT Delhi and CES Consultancy, the experts apprised the Minister that the stress level of both the existing pillars doesn't exceed the permissible limit and with some minor changes in design and reduced load, the construction of the bridge can be resumed.

"The bridge is safe and after the further sub-soil investigation, the work can be started with the M45 concrete strength material", they said and highlighted various shortcomings of those reports. They stressed that the new findings and detailed investigation by them makes it clear that Ganpat bridge can become a reality without compromising any safety concerns.

While issuing directions for completion of all the remaining formalities and resuming work on the project, the Minister said that Ganpat bridge is vital for the better connectivity and development of Doda. "It is unfortunate that the recommendations made by Mr Basu in 2009 were not adhered to by the Government for obvious reasons", he said.

"Had the corrective measures suggested by Mr Basu been taken at that time the fate of the project would not have been hanging in balance", he further said. According to the consultant the work on the bridge should not have been stopped especially after expending crores of rupees and M/s A K Constructions should have provided solutions instead of abandoning the work.

Stating that certain politicians and officials sabotaged the project for ulterior motives, the R&B Minister said, "we will expose all such persons, who scuttled the work on the bridge".

It is pertinent to mention here that public of Doda, Bhaderwah and Kishtwar prior to construction of Baglihar Power Project used to adopt the motorable road via Pul Doda adjoining river Chenab to reach their destinations. The 263 meters span balanced cantilever Ganpat Bridge across Chenab was mooted to provide alternate connectivity to the people of Doda, Bhaderwah and Kishtwar.

Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah had also ordered enquiry into the abandoning of work on the bridge and even constituted a committee to recommend administrative action against the erring officers besides necessary penal action against M/s A K Constructions, Builders and Engineers, which left the work halfway, sources said. They, however, regretted that nothing specific has come out of this initiative on the part of Mr Omar till date.

State Vigilance Organization has already been carrying out investigation in this regard while as State Accountability Commission (SAC) is also holding regular enquiry into a complaint filed under Section 11 of the J&K State Accountability Commission Act, 2002 in this regard.

Parliament Standing Committee reviews implementation of Jan Aushadhi Scheme

Excelsior Correspondent

SRINAGAR, June 18: The Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) on Chemicals and Fertilizers, comprising of 11 Members headed by Gopinath Mundi visited Red Cross House.

The aim of the visit was to review the implementation of the Jan Aushadhi Scheme, a Government of India initiative through which Quality Generic Medicines are being made available at affordable prices for the general public.

Pertinently, Indian Red Cross Society, J&K has been entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the scheme in the state. As many as three Jan Aushadi Stores, one each at Srinagar, Leh and Anantnag are already functioning in the State.

An interactive session was also held in the office of the Honorary General Secretary, Indian Red Cross Society, J&K at Srinagar in which Principal GMC, Srinagar and President of the Bureau of Pharma Public Sector Units of India (BPPI) participated. The committee also visited the Jan Aushadhi Generic Drug Store in the complex.

The Honorary General Secretary Roma Wani highlighted the benefits of the Jan Aushadhi scheme especially for the poor people who cannot afford high-priced branded life-saving medicines. She said that opening of many more Jan Ashudhi Stores is on cards and steps are afoot to extend the benefits of the scheme to large number of people of the State.

She also drew the attention of the high-powered Committee and the president of the BPPI towards the shortcomings of the Scheme and the challenges being faced by the Red Cross for effective implementation of the scheme in the State.

The Members of the Standing Committee unanimously impressed upon President of the BPPI to do away with the lacunas of the scheme and ensure smooth and timely supplies of medicines for the Jan Aushadhi stores. The committee was assured by the President of the BPPI that every possible help would be extended to make the Jan Aushadi scheme a success.

Chief Minister, Omar Abdullah addressing public gathering at Lamayuru in Leh district on Tuesday.

Certain elements trying to create wedge between faiths: Omar

Excelsior Correspondent

LEH, June 18: Stating that certain elements want to create a wedge between the followers of different faiths for their vested interests, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah today called for nurturing communal harmony in the State.

"All religions teach amity and brotherhood and create conducive atmosphere in the society for all to grow equitably and in a peaceful environment," Omar while addressing a congregation of thousands of devotees at Lamayuru, a remote village in this district of Ladakh region, after inaugurating Great Fotang Shrine and Amphitheatre.

"Certain elements, for their vested interests, want to create a wedge between the followers of different faiths and disturb the peace of the world," he said, adding "no religion preaches hatred but holds high, the principals of humanity and brotherhood".

The Chief Minister said that peace and coexistence of the people of different faiths and cultures makes the society strong and ensures equitable development of all. He said that pilgrim tourism constitutes an important aspect of the State's tourism and all the three regions— Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh possess rich pilgrim destinations.

He said renowned religious scholars and preachers have contributed a lot to keep the candle of communal harmony alive and inculcate the spirit of love, brotherhood and mutual respect for each other in the hearts and minds of people.

"My Government has taken new initiatives to showcase Ladakh's tourist potential and attract more and more visitors here", he said while referring to the beauty of Lamayuru.

The Fotang Shrine and Amphitheatre has been constructed by Tourism Department and the Centre has granted Rs 1.07 crore for its construction. It will promote pilgrim tourism in the area and help generate wide-ranging economic activities for the people in this remote are. The shrine will also be utilised to observe the Great Snake Year 2013, which comes after every twelve years.

Minister for Urban Development, Nawang Rigzin Jora also spoke on the occasion while Chief Executive Councilor, LAHDC Leh, Rigzin Spalbar was also present on the occasion.

Besides, people from all parts of Ladakh and the State, a huge number of tourists from foreign countries have arrived here to observe the Great Snake Year.

'Jail Bharo Andolan' by BJP at Samba

Excelsior Correspondent

SAMBA, June 18: On the second day of BJP's country wide "Jail Bharo Andolan" against corruption and mis-governance of UPA rule and demanding Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's resignation over 500 Party activists from different parts of district Samba courted arrest today at Vijaypur.

Led by State Party president Jugal Kishore Sharma, they were accompanied by National executive member and State chief spokesperson Dr Jitendra Singh, State vice-president Chander Prakash Ganga, State spokesperson Sanjeev Sharma, district president Kashmira Singh, BJYM State president Ravinder Raina, Rashpal Verma, Subash Bhagat, Omkar Padha, Sheetal Sambyal, Shashi Pal Vaid and others. Before courting arrest BJP activists resorted to Dharna and later Sharma led a protest march through the main bazaar of Vijaypur.

Jugal Kishore Sharma, while addressing the dharna, said that the Party has launched "Jai Bharo" programme at the district level throughout the country to take the masses to people and expose the Congress-led UPA for its policy of promoting corruption and misusing CBI.

Dr Jitendra Singh said that it is a matter of honour for Samba that after taking over as Election Campaign chief, one of the first visits by Narendra Modi on June 23 will be to address a public rally at Madhopur, which is in neighbourhood of Samba. Dr Jitendra Singh said that while today's protest is a part of a country-wide campaign against corruption and mis- governance, in Samba too there are several complaints of corruption and favoritism against the local legislator.

Chander Prakash Ganga said that the Congress rule has always been corrupt and driven the country to disaster right from first PM Jawaharlal Nehru. He also alleged that the present coalition is knee deep involved in corruption and cases are lying with State Accountability Commission for years and the Government is influencing the organization to protect corrupt elements.

BJP activists protesting at Vijaypur on Tuesday.
-Excelsior/Gautam