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SC gives SBI tongue-lashing, asks it to disclose all details by Mar 21

Chambers of Commerce & Industry of India (AS-SOCHAM) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in the case. The industry bodies, through senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, wanted an urgent hearing on their interim application against the disclosure of bond details.

Salve told the bench it should not seem that the bank is "playing with" the court as they have no difficulty in disclosing the details of electoral bonds.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the petitioner NGO in the case, claimed that major political parties have not given the donor details and only some parties have given it.

"There is enough assistance by public-spirited citizens," Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said, claiming that these sponsored NGOs are "fudging figures".

The apex court also refused to take note of a letter by senior advocate Adish C Aggarwala, the president of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), seeking a suo motu review of the judgment on disclosure of electoral bond details.

"Apart from being a senior counsel, you are president of SCBA. You know the procedure," CJI Chandrachud said, adding, "You have written a letter asking me to invoke my suo motu jurisdiction. What is the locus to mention? These are all publicity-oriented stunts. We will not permit it".

"Do not make me say anything more. It will be distasteful," the CJI told Aggarwala, who had written a letter in his personal capacity.

Solicitor General Mehta said on behalf of the Central government, "I completely disassociate myself with what Aggarwala has written. It is completely unwarranted and ill-advised".

He also said that after the apex court's verdict on electoral bonds, "witch hunting has started at some other level, not at the governmental level". Those before the court started giving press interviews, "deliberately embarrassing" the court and this creates a non-level playing field, Mehta said

The solicitor general also referred to social media posts and said that these were intended to cause embarrassment. He stressed that the Centre's case was that they wanted to curb the black money.

To this, the CJI said, "Mr solicitor, we are only concerned about enforcing the direction which we issued. As judges, we decide according to the Constitution. We are governed by the rule of law. We are also the subject matter of comments in the social media and the press."

"Surely, as an institution, our shoulders are broad enough. Our court has an institutional role to play in a polity which is governed by the Constitution and the rule of law. That is the only job," Justice Chandrachud said.

The apex court also refused to entertain an application seeking disclosure of the details of electoral bonds sold from March 1, 2018, to April 11, 2019.

MeT predicts rains, snow

snow at many places with thunder, lightning and gusty winds over plains of Kashmir and Jammu divisions.

He also said that after March 23, the weather would remain generally dry.

The official added that from March 24 to 25, the weather was expected to remain partly to generally cloudy with light rain and snow at few places in Jammu and Kashmir.

Car falls off road, 1 killed

stated to be the reason behind the incident. Police had registered a case in this connection.

Mortar shell found near school

Forces later carried out searches in the area but no more explosive device was found, the officials added.

KDA calls for half-day strike in Kargil

body planning to chalk out a joint strategy after their meeting with the Union Home Ministry early this month hit a deadlock.

Wangchuk, a key campaigner for constitutional safeguards for Ladakh, on Monday said that 250 people slept hungry in minus 12 degrees Celsius to "remind the Indian government of their promises to safeguard Ladakh's environment and tribal indigenous culture".

"This government likes to call India the 'Mother of Democracy'. But if India denies democratic rights to people of Ladakh & continues to keep it under bureaucrats controlled from New Delhi then it could only be called a Stepmother of Democracy as far as Ladakh is concerned," Wangchuk wrote on X.

Wangchuk has been on "climate fast" here since March 6, a day after talks between the representatives of KDA-Apex body and the Central government failed.

In Kargil, the KDA announced a half-day general strike on March 20 and a protest rally in support of Wangchuk and the ongoing agitation.

"The decision to observe the half-day strike was taken at a meeting. We will also brief the people about the talks with the government," KDA co-chairman Qamar Ali Akhoon told reporters.

Asgar Ali Karbalai, who is also the co-chairman of the KDA, said the ongoing agitation in Ladakh is not restricted to one community or one district as is being projected by some vested interests who want to pitch the people of Ladakh against each other.

"We have called a strike and protest rally to put all types of rumours to rest. Everyone in Ladakh is part of the agitation and united in support of the demands," he said.

Karbalai said the leadership of both KDA and Apex body are shortly meeting in Leh or Kargil to chalkout the future strategy after the Centre's rejection of the main demands — statehood and constitutional safeguards under the sixth schedule.

Army raises Elite Unit to work on 6G, AI

considering the future battlefield, they said.

"It will be a premier organisation, the first of its kind equipped with the capability to harness niche technology, leverage cutting-edge solutions and identify suitable cases for defence applications by fostering collaboration with academia and industry," one of the officials said.

The elite unit will focus on all upcoming critical technology domains including electronic exchanges, mobile communications, software defined radios, electronic warfare systems, 5G and 6G networks, quantum technologies, AI, machine learning, etc., he said.

The hi-tech unit will carry out technical scouting, evaluation, development, management of core ICT solutions, and provide user interface support by maintenance and upgradation of contemporary technologies available in the environment, the official added.

Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande has been highlighting the need for acquiring new technologies by the force in view of the changing nature of warfare.

"Aligning itself with the tenets of Atmanirbhar Bharat and Start-Up India, STEAG will help bridge the divide between the armed forces on the one hand and industry and academia on the other," the official said on condition of anonymity.

The new Centre of Excellence is expected to be a game changer in fostering self-reliance in high-end communication technologies, which have thus far been a monopoly of select countries with advanced economies and research ecosystems, he said.

The Army believes communications are going to be an important component of military operations.

"In the fast-evolving technologies for the battlefield, the side with better communication technologies and the ability to connect the various constituents for information sharing will have an edge over its adversary," another official said.

He said modern warfare necessitates the induction of new equipment to provide seamless communication support to units and formations during operations.

"To imbibe such advancements in technology, the Indian Army has raised this groundbreaking technology-oriented unit STEAG which will bolster its capabilities in the digital domain," he added.

Rise of China, unsettled borders will be most formidable challenge for India: CDS

to create new facts or markers, toponymy (the study of place names), cartographic aggression, or to create a new narrative.

"This again will have to be countered collectively by all of us at all levels, which includes academicians, thinkers, and strategists," the Chief of Defence Staff said.

General Chauhan referred to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's statement wherein he had said that there is more to the Sino-India relations than the border disputes.

"Similarly, in an increasingly inter-connected world, Sino-India relations cannot be viewed in a binary kind of perspective. The rise of China affects other nations as well, and we must look at like-minded nations for an equitable balance while remaining cognisant of the fact that one must be prepared to fight its own battle," the Chief of Defence Staff said.

Speaking about the challenges related to technology, General Chauhan said as technology emerges as the new currency of power, there is a tendency of nations to deny competitors.

"Technology denial regimes existed in the past, but what we are witnessing now is a race to retain technological edge. India cannot afford the emergence of a major technological gap between us and our immediate adversaries, and that would be fatal for us," the Chief of Defence Staff said.

He said this "battle of increasing technological gap" has to be fought not only by soldiers but also by academics, scientists, and everyone as a nation together.

General Chauhan also spoke about the challenge of rising fragility and the outcome of political, social, and economic stability in the immediate neighbourhood.

"India seems to be the only island of stability in a sea of turmoil and turbulence. Political, social, and economic instability in countries in our immediate neighbourhood make them vulnerable to foreign influence," he said.

General Chauhan further said adversaries in the past have taken advantage of this situation, thereby increasing India's vulnerability and security problems, which is a major security challenge.

SIA files charge-sheet in narco-terror financing case

and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, officials said.

Lone, who hails from Kashmir, is an active terrorist of the LeT operating from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the officials added.

Officials said Khoja was arrested in September last year when he was transporting a consignment of heroin weighing 3.565 kg. The value of the seized narcotics was estimated to be more than Rs 25 crore, the officials added.

Khoja and Lone along with members of terrorist organisations had hatched a criminal conspiracy to raise funds by illegally smuggling and trafficking narcotics from across the border, the SIA said.

The proceeds from the sale of the drug were used to financially support terrorist acts and fund the terror ecosystem, the agency said.

In pursuance of the larger criminal conspiracy, Khoja and Lone, and their associates through conversations over encrypted messaging applications systematically planned spreading communal disharmony through terrorist acts targeted at minority communities in Kashmir, the SIA

said.

"The terror funds were used for personal enrichment and for furtherance of terrorist acts, including setting ablaze government buildings, residential houses of minority communities and police personnel, and office of a political party, as directed by various terrorist organisations, active in Jammu and Kashmir," the agency said.

It said further investigation against other associates of those charge-sheeted in the case will continue.

8 killed as Pak conducts airstrikes inside Afghanistan; Taliban reacts

Afghanistan provinces of Paktika and Khost along the Pakistan border have taken place. There was no immediate reaction from the Pakistani side.

At "around 3 am, Pakistani aircraft bombed civilian homes" in Khost and Paktika provinces near the border with Pakistan, Mujahid said, claiming that all eight people killed were women and children.

Mujahid said that Pakistani planes had bombed the Laman area in Paktika's Barmal district.

Alleging that "houses of common people were targeted", he said three women and three children were killed in Paktika and a house collapsed while two women were killed in Khost, where a house was destroyed as well.

"The Islamic Emirate strongly condemns the attacks and describes these as non-serious actions and violation of Afghanistani territory," Mujahid said.

The spokesperson asked Pakistan to stop blaming Afghanistan for its problems and failure to control violent incidents.

"Such acts can lead to dire consequences which will not be in control of Pakistan," he warned.

The strikes come a day after President Asif Ali Zardari vowed retaliation following the killing of seven soldiers, including two officers, in a terrorist attack on a security forces' post in North Waziristan.

Offering the funeral prayers of the two officers, Zardari on Sunday said that the blood of the martyrs would not go in vain and the country would avenge the deaths. The president said Pakistan would not hesitate to strike back if attacked by anyone at borders or inside its territory.

The Hafiz Gul Bahadar group had claimed responsibility for the deadly attack. Security officials say that fighters of the Gul Bahadar group operate from the Afghan side of the border, mostly from Khost.

The Paktika province is located near Pakistan's South Waziristan District while Khost is situated near North Waziristan.

Pakistan's Special Representative to Afghanistan Ambassador Asif Durrani on Saturday said that an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 militants from the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have taken shelter in neighbouring Afghanistan.

"If we include their families, then the number goes up to 70,000," Durrani said.

Reacting to Durrani's charge, Afghanistan has dismissed his statement, saying that Afghan soil is not allowed to be used against other countries, including Pakistan.

"We reject the presence of any ... foreign groups in Afghanistan and they are not allowed to operate on Afghan soil. In this regard, we have made our utmost effort and continue to do so. But one thing we must accept is that Afghanistan shares a very long border area with Pakistan, and there are places with rugged terrain including mountains and forests, and places that might be out of our control," Zabiullah Mujahid was quoted as saying by Tolo News on Sunday.

Durrani, who spoke at a think-tank event in Islamabad last week, said Pakistan's peace talks with the banned TTP failed in the past because the militant group was neither ready to surrender nor swear allegiance to the Constitution of Pakistan.

Durrani said Pakistan had told the interim government in Kabul that the latter needed to make TTP surrender and disarm the group and detain its leadership. He clarified that "TTP is the redline for Pakistan".

The TTP, which has ideological linkages with the Afghan Taliban and is also known as the Pakistan Taliban, was set up as an umbrella group of several militant outfits in 2007.

The TTP's main aim is to impose its strict brand of Islam across Pakistan. Pakistan had hoped that the Afghan Taliban after coming to power in Kabul in 2022 would stop the use of their soil against Pakistan by expelling the TTP operatives. However, Islamabad says Kabul has refused to rein in the TTP.

Meanwhile, cross-border clashes were also reported at Kurram District's Parachinar.

Malik Nazeer, a resident of the border area of Borki, told the Dawn newspaper that people on both sides of the border have started evacuating the area.

Putin vows Russia can't be held back in victory speech

Russian territory by pro-Kyiv sabotage groups and vandalism at polling stations.

The Kremlin had cast the election as a moment for Russians to throw their weight behind the full-scale military operation in Ukraine, where voting is also being staged in Russian-controlled territories.

Putin singled out Russian troops fighting in Ukraine for special thanks in his post-election speech in Moscow.

And he was unrelenting in claiming his forces had a major advantage on the battlefield, even after a week which saw Ukraine mount some of its most significant aerial attacks on Russia and in which pro-Ukrainian militias baraged Russian border villages with armed raids.

"The initiative belongs entirely to the Russian armed forces. In some areas, our guys are just mowing them — the enemy — down," he said.

Kyiv and its allies slammed the vote — which was also

staged in parts of Ukraine under Russian forces' control — as a sham. President Volodymyr Zelensky lashed out at Putin as a "dictator" who was "drunk from power".

"There is no evil he will not commit to prolong his personal power," Zelensky said.

As early as Friday, the first day of voting in the election, EU chief Charles Michel had sarcastically congratulated Putin on his "landslide victory".

If he completes another full Kremlin term, Putin will have stayed in power longer than any Russian leader since Catherine the Great in the 18th century.

Allies of the late Alexei Navalny — Putin's most prominent rival, who died in an Arctic prison last month — had tried to spoil his inevitable victory, urging voters to flood polling stations at noon and spoil their ballots.

His wife, Yulia Navalnaya, was greeted by supporters with flowers and applause in Berlin. After voting at the Russian embassy, she said she had written her late husband's name on her ballot.

Some voters in Moscow answered the call from the opposition, telling AFP they had come to honour Navalny's memory and show their opposition in the only legal way possible.

"I came to show that there are many of us, that we exist, that we are not some insignificant minority," said 19-year-old student Artem Minasyan at a polling station in central Moscow.

Putin said the protest had had no impact and that those who spoiled their ballots would "have to be dealt with".

In his first public comments on Navalny's death last month, Putin called his passing a "sad event".

Using his name in public for the first time in years during a televised news conference, Mr. Putin said: "As for Navalny. Yes, he passed away. This is always a sad event."

Putin said a colleague had proposed swapping Navalny several days before he died for "some people" who are currently held in prisons in Western countries.

"The person who was talking to me hadn't finished his sentence and I said 'I agree'".

Former Russian leader Dmitry Medvedev meanwhile congratulated Putin on his "splendid victory" long before the final results were due to be announced.

And state-run television praised how Russians and rallied with "colossal support for the president" as well as the "unbelievable consolidation" of the country behind its leader.

At Navalny's grave in a Moscow cemetery, AFP reporters saw spoiled ballot papers with the opposition leader's name scrawled across them on a pile of flowers.

"We live in a country where we will go to jail if we speak our mind. So when I come to moments like this and see a lot of people, I realise that we are not alone," said 33-year-old Regina.

There were repeated acts of protest in the first days of polling, with a spate of arrests of Russians accused of pouring dye into ballot boxes or arson attacks.

Any public dissent in Russia has been harshly punished since the start of Moscow's offensive in Ukraine on February 24, 2022 and there were multiple warnings from the authorities against election protests.

The OVD-Info police monitoring group announced that at least 80 people had been detained across nearly 20 cities in Russia for protest actions linked to the elections.

Soundararajan resigns as Telangana Guv, Puducherry LG

on the BJP ticket.

"Governor of Telangana and Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry Tamilisai Soundararajan has tendered her resignation with immediate effect. The resignation has been submitted to the President of India," reads a communique from Raj Bhavan.

Tamilisai, the former president of BJP's Tamil Nadu unit, had taken over as the first woman Governor of Telangana in 2019.

EC orders large-scale transfers of bureaucrats, WB DGP

the electoral process, especially in matters related to law and order and deployment of forces, they noted.

The poll panel usually takes such action during the parliamentary and the assembly polls when an issue of conflict of interest or possibility of such officials disturbing a level-playing field for all comes up.

Ahead of elections, the EC always directs states to transfer officers connected with election related work, who have completed three years or are in their home districts. If such officers are not transferred by the states, the EC orders their removal.

Days after announcing the schedule for the Lok Sabha elections, the poll panel under CEC Rajiv Kumar also ordered the removal of Brihanmumbai Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal, and additional commissioners and deputy commissioners.

Maharashtra had not complied with the directions of transferring such officers in respect of a few municipal commissioners and some additional and deputy municipal commissioners.

While conveying displeasure to the state chief secretary, the commission directed the transfer of BMC and the additional and deputy commissioners with the direction to report by 6 pm on Monday.

The chief secretary was also directed to transfer all the similarly-placed municipal commissioners and additional or deputy municipal commissioners of other corporations in Maharashtra.

The move comes after the commission comprising CEC Kumar and fellow ECs Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu met here on Monday.

The elections for the 18th Lok Sabha will begin on April 19 followed by subsequent phases on April 26, May 7, May 13, May 20, May 25 and June 1. Counting of votes will be undertaken on June 4.

Separately, assembly elections are being held in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh.

7 killed in Kolkata building collapse, CM Mamata assures stern action against illegal construction

KOLKATA, MARCH 18: At least seven people, including two women, were killed and several others injured after an under-construction five-storey building collapsed in the Garden Reach area of Kolkata, police said on Monday.

The toll could go up since at least four people were spotted trapped under the debris, 16 hours after the collapse, and only one of them showed signs of life, a fire services official engaged in rescue operations said.

Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim said the rescue operations were carried out on war footing at the site where the building was being constructed illegally.

While Md Wasim, the promoter of the building, was arrested, the mayor said stringent action would be taken as per law.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visited the building collapse site at Azan Molla Lane in the city's western periphery and assured locals of stern action against illegal construction.

In a horrific accident, the under-construction five-storey building collapsed around midnight, Hakim said.

"We are using gas cutters and other equipment to clear the debris and reach those who are stuck underneath. It's taking a long time since we are proceeding cautiously towards the victims," the fire services official told PTI, adding that the personnel from NDRF, the state and Kolkata Police disaster



management teams were also working in tandem. Owing to the massive pile-up of debris, rescue workers are finding it tough to reach those who have been trapped, he said.

"We have compiled a list of victims of the building collapse. Seven people died and two of them were women. Of the 15 injured people, 11 are undergoing treatment at hospitals and four were discharged after preliminary treatment," a senior officer said.

"Sad to learn about the house collapse disaster of an under-construction building in the Garden Reach area of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation. Our Mayor, Fire Minister, Secretaries and Commissioner of Police, civic, police, fire and disaster management officers and teams (including NDRF, KMC and KP teams) have been on site throughout the night for mitigating the disaster," the chief minister wrote on X.

She said the government will provide compensation to the next of kin of each deceased and the injured persons.

"We stand by the distressed families and rescue operations shall continue," Banerjee said on the microblogging site.

Hakim, also West Bengal's urban development minister, said, "I spoke to the chief minister and we will provide Rs 5 lakh to the next of kin of each deceased and Rs 1 lakh to each injured person."

TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee said the building collapse incident is "extremely sad" and asserted that it should not be politicised.