

Govt introduces ONOE bills in LS; oppn says nos. won't add up to pass them

Bills Set To Be Referred To JPC For Scrutiny

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Centre on Tuesday introduced two bills in Lok Sabha — the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill and the Union Territories Amendment Bill, 2024 — to change laws for holding simultaneous elections of Lok Sabha and state assemblies along with UTs amid massive uproar from the opposition parties, underlining the challenge Modi govt would face to synchronise polls.

In the 90-minute debate, the opposition claimed the 'one nation, one election' (ONOE) plan was against the spirit of federalism and exceeded the legislative competence of Parliament and was part of a conspi-

20 BJP MPs ABSENT DESPITE WHIP

Total votes	MPs for Introduction of bill	Against
461	263	198

> Introduction of bill requires simple majority of those present and voting. On Tues, the required number was 231 and govt comfortably crossed it

> To amend Constitution, 2/3rds majority of members present and voting required. In full LS, govt would need 362. (Oppn pointed out on Tues, govt

would have needed 307 votes) Electronic voting used for the first time in LS in new Parliament House. After this, MPs voted by paper slips

> BJP plans to seek explanation from 20 of its MPs who were absent during voting despite party issuing a whip asking all members to be present

...The votes today have demonstrated that BJP does not have the two-thirds majority required to pass a constitutional amendment

ruling side prevailing with a 263-198 score despite the glaring absence of 20 members, including ministers, from BJP. The opposition pointed out that govt did not have the two-thirds majority required for LS to clear the bill.

► Continued on P 16

Cong wants 50% cap off to give Muslims quota: Shah

In perhaps the first articulation of Modi govt's opposition to the demand by Congress and a few others for lifting the SC-mandated 50% cap on quota, home minister Amit Shah said, "They (Congress) do not want any welfare of the OBCs, they want to give reservations to Muslims by increasing the limit of 50%... But today, once again I say with all responsibility in this house that as long as BJP has even one MP, we will not allow reservation on the basis of religion."

Shah was replying to the two-day debate in Rajya Sabha to mark 75 years of the Constitution. He also asserted that BJP would bring Uniform Civil Code in every state through democratic processes. P 15



Amit Shah in Rajya Sabha

Rahul slams HM's Ambedkar remarks

Those who believe in Mahatma will have problems with Ambedkarji," Congress MP Rahul Gandhi said following Amit Shah's remarks that Nehru never cared for Ambedkar or his views. P 16

'NTA will only hold entrance tests'

The National Test Agency (NTA) will conduct only competitive entrance tests for admission into educational institutions from next year and won't hold any recruitment exams, education minister Dharmendra Pradhan said. P 20

Sensex tanks over 1,000 pts

A cross-the-board selling pulled the sensex down by nearly 1,100 points on Tuesday with all 30 constituents of the index closing in the red. The sensex settled 1,064 points lower at 80,684 pts. P 27

Noida may have a city bus service of its own by Feb

The development authorities in Noida, Greater Noida and Yamuna Expressway have come together to form a special purpose vehicle to operate an electric bus service — attempting to fill a major gap in public transport that is often felt by commuters in Noida, whose recent expansion is away from the metro network. The SPV will operate a fleet of 500 electric buses, some of which will connect Noida with Delhi and other cities. Noida CEO Lokesh M said the service could start by Feb next year. P 5

Retrospective 5% GST likely on food app delivery charge

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New Delhi: Amid its focus on health and term insurance, the GST Council, which will meet on Saturday, is expected to clarify that a 5% levy on delivery charges by apps such as Zomato and Swiggy will apply retrospectively from 2022, and also state that tax has to be paid by builders on charges paid for 'floor space index', including additional FSI, to local authorities.

The fitment committee, comprising top officers, has backed the two moves with the proposal on food delivery apps likely to create a liability

FM: ED restituted ₹22k cr assets to scam victims

PM Nirmala Sitharaman informed LS that ED has restituted Rs 22,280 crore worth of assets to the victims of various scams, including return of over Rs 14,000 crore to various banks from the sale of assets of fugitive Vijay Mallya and Rs 1,053 crore of Nirav Modi. P 15

as it will not be possible for the players to collect taxes on past transactions.

► Related report, P 27

'Must hear rape survivor in bail case of accused'

New Delhi: In a short ruling, SC said no court can grant bail to persons facing rape charges without hearing the survivor or her parents/guardians, in addition to the public prosecutor, reports Dhananjay Mahapatra.

Cancelling bail granted by Allahabad HC to persons accused of gang-raping a 14-year-old in Ghaziabad in 2021, Justices Bela M Trivedi and Satish Chandra Sharma expressed concern over HC ignoring provisions of law.

► Continued on P 10

Canada political crisis deepens, PM Trudeau faces fresh calls for resignation

TORONTO, Dec 17 (IANS)

CANADIAN Prime Minister



Justin Trudeau faced fresh calls for resignation, hours after Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland quit in a surprise move after disagreeing with him over US President-elect Donald Trump's tariff threats.

A third of the ruling Liberal Party's MPs have called for a change in leadership in Canada further deepening the political crisis in the country.

On Monday evening, Canadian media outlets reported that Trudeau has not yet decided whether he will continue as Prime Minister or resign. The number of rebel MPs who have sought his ouster has grown to nearly 60 of the 153-strong caucus in the House of Commons.

Freeland also stepped down as Canada's Finance Minister, and her resignation marked the first open dissent against Prime Minister Trudeau from within his cabinet threatening his hold on power.

Liberal Party leader Trudeau lags 20 points in polls behind his main rival, Conservative Pierre Poilievre, who has tried three times since September to topple the Trudeau Government and force a snap election.

"Our country today faces a grave challenge," Freeland said on social media platform X in her resignation letter, pointing to Trump's planned 25 per cent tariffs on Canadian imports.

Give legal guarantee to buy at MSP, says House panel

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

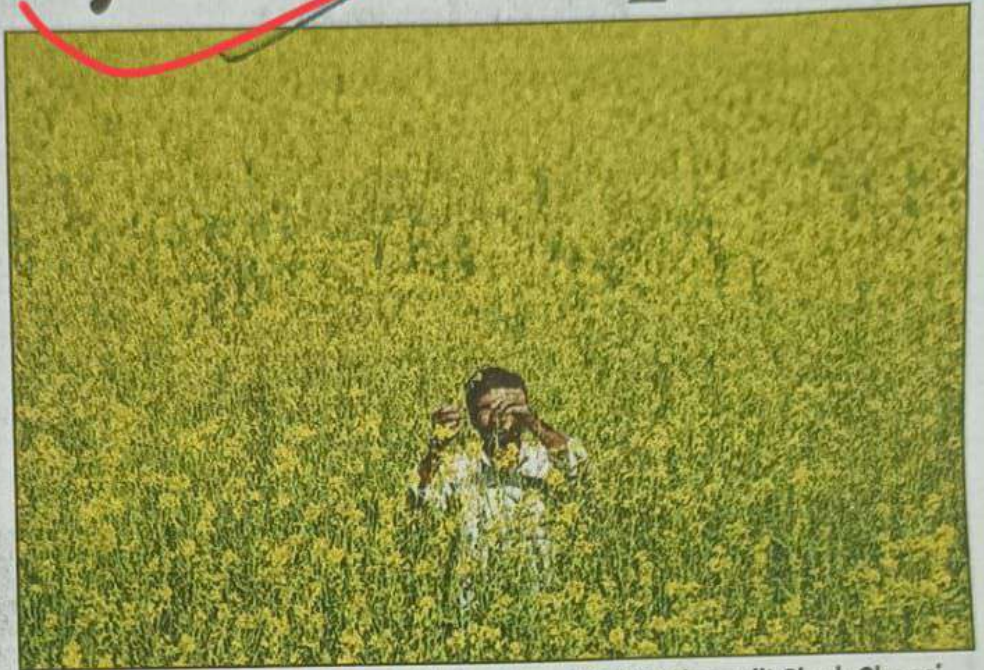
New Delhi: A parliamentary panel on Tuesday recommended legal guarantee to procurement of crops at minimum support price (MSP), introduction of a scheme to waive debt of farmers and farm labourers, and increasing the financial support given under the PM-Kisan from existing Rs 6,000 per annum to Rs 12,000 annually.

Though these suggestions are merely recommendatory in nature, the panel—standing committee on agriculture, animal husbandry and food processing—in its report sought to flag all the issues which have been dominating the farmers' demands for the last four years.

The panel, headed by Congress Lok Sabha member Charanjit Singh Channi, suggested that the financial support, given to farmers under the PM-Kisan scheme, should be extended to tenant farmers and farm labourers. Currently, the scheme is meant for only landholder farmers irrespective of the size of their landholdings.

It also recommended that a National Commission for Minimum Living Wages for farm labourers be established at the earliest to provide them their long due rights.

Observing that the implementation of MSP remains a focal point in the dialogue



The parliamentary panel, headed by Congress LS MP Charanjit Singh Channi, recommended that a National Commission for Minimum Living Wages for farm labourers be established at the earliest to provide them their long-due rights

surrounding agricultural reform and farmers welfare, the report said, "Since the Committee believe that implementing a robust and legally binding MSP in the country could play a crucial

The panel suggested that financial support, given to farmers under the PM-Kisan scheme, be extended to tenant farmers and farm labourers too

role in reducing farmer suicides in India by providing financial stability, protecting against market volatility and alleviating debt burdens, they recommended implementation of the same."

The committee also urged the govt to enhance allocation to agriculture especially to improve productivity. It noted that though the data showed that the department of agriculture and farmers welfare got higher allocations in absolute amount from 2021-22 to 2024-25, its percentage share in the total central plan outlay witnessed decline from 3.53% in 2020-21 to 2.54% in 2024-25.

Besides making these recommendations, the panel urged govt to explore possibility of providing compulsory Universal Crop Insurance to small farmers with land holding of up to two hectares on the lines of the central govt's health insurance scheme, being provided to all citizens.

NTA to be restructured in 2025

To only conduct higher education entrance exams, says Pradhan

NEW DELHI, Dec 17 (PTI)

THE NTA will not conduct any recruitment exams from 2025, instead focusing only on higher education entrance tests, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan announced on Tuesday.

The agency will be restructured next year and new posts are being created, he added.

The move is part of examination reforms based on the recommendations of a high-level panel set up earlier this year following alleged leaks in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) medical entrance exam and a series of cancellations of others due to suspected leaks and other glitches. The Education Ministry is also in conversation with the Health Ministry on conducting NEET in the traditional pen-and-paper mode or switch to a Computer Based Test (CBT).

“The National Testing Agency (NTA) will be limited to conducting only entrance exams for higher education and not con-

duct any recruitment exams from next year,” Pradhan told reporters. He clarified that the Common University Entrance Test - Undergraduate (CUET-UG) would continue to be held once a year.



The high-level panel headed by former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief R Radhakrishnan noted that the NTA outstretched itself to

accommodate diverse requests from many test indenting agencies for handling end-to-end operations of tests.

“The NTA should primarily conduct entrance examinations. Enhancing its scope for other examinations may be considered after the capacity of the NTA is augmented,” the panel said in its report.

Suggesting restructuring of the NTA, the committee recommended 10 specific verticals, headed at the director level. The verticals will be related to technology, products and operations, test security and surveillance.

DRDO should expand R&D efforts: Parlt panel

NEW DELHI, Dec 17 (PTI)

UNDERLINING that the ongoing conflict in the international arena has revealed the "hazards of a hybrid warfare", a parliamentary panel has recommended that the DRDO should expand its R&D efforts to enhance combat readiness against any non-conventional warfare and security threats.

In its report tabled in Parliament on Tuesday, the committee has noted "with concern that out of 55 projects, 23 were not completed within the stipulated time".

"Although, 571 projects worth Rs 34161.58 cr have been successfully completed and closed during the last 10 years (1 Jan 2012 -- till date), with respect to projects which were partially successful or unsuccessful, eight such projects worth Rs 770.31 cr

were stage closed during this period," the report said.

The report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence is titled -- 'Action Taken by the Government on the Observations/Recommendations contained in the Forty-Second Report (17th Lok Sabha) of the Standing Committee on Defence on the subject -- A Review of the Working of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)'.

The committee in its report recalled that in its 42nd report (17th Lok Sabha), it was of the opinion that the DRDO should establish their research laboratories in premier institutes of technologies such as the IITs and IISc, Bengaluru so that students having interest in defence and military technology can be moti-

vated to undertake further research in the area.

In this regard, the defence ministry has submitted that in response to the recommendation of the committee, the DRDO has instituted various DRDO Industry Academia-Centre of Excellence (DIA-COE) in various IITs, IISc and central universities across the country for research engagement with academia and industries, it said.

The committee said it expresses its "satisfaction at the extant mechanism" in DRDO for research engagement with academia and industries.

It further said that the panel in its "original report had also urged the DRDO to focus more on new and emerging areas of technology applications such as artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics" for furthering their research-base and also explor-

ing the possibility of AI's application in various systems and sub-systems developed by them.

"Further, the committee feel that the ongoing conflict in the international arena has revealed, to a great extent, the hazards of a hybrid warfare, with both kinetic and non-kinetic operations. Keeping in view such drastic transformation in the warfare technology, the Committee feel that there is a need for fervid focus on research and development in the field of hybrid warfare, especially kinetic and non-kinetic warfare," the report said.

"Therefore, the committee recommend that the DRDO, in collaboration with academia and industries, should further broaden their R&D efforts to include areas such as hybrid, kinetic and non-

kinetic warfare as well as anti-drone capabilities including sea drones and interceptive drones by according highest priorities in order to enhance our combat readiness against any non-conventional warfare and security threats," it added.

Under the 'Recommendation (Para No. 7)', the panel shared its earlier recommendation and the reply of the Ministry.

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Gen Highest-Profile Military Official To Be Killed Inside Russia Since War

Moscow Launches Terror Probe Into Assassination

Ukraine's Security Service, or SBU, has claimed responsibility for killing Lt General Igor Kirillov, 54, who was in charge of the Russian military's nuclear and chemical weapons protection forces, in a bombing in Moscow.

The bomb used in Tuesday's attack was triggered remotely, according to Russian news reports. Images from the scene showed shattered windows and scorched brickwork. The killing was the highest-profile apparent assassination of a Russian military official far from the battlefield since the start of the 2022 invasion. While other Russian generals have



Lt Gen Igor Kirillov was charged in absentia by the SBU for 'ordering the use of banned chemical weapons against Ukraine's forces'

died in occupied Ukraine or near front line, he is the highest-ranking military official to have been killed inside Russia.

An official with the SBU, who spoke on condition of anonymity, described Kirillov as a "war criminal and an entirely legitimate target." On Monday, Kirillov was charged in absentia by the SBU for "ordering the use of banned chemical weapons against Ukraine's Defense Forces." Kirillov was under sanctions from several countries, including the UK and Canada, for his actions in Moscow's war in Ukraine.

The SBU has said it recorded more than 4,800 occasions when Russia used chemical weapons on the battlefield since its full-scale invasion in Feb 2022. In May, the US state department said that it had recorded the use of chloropicrin, a poison gas first deployed in WWI, against Ukrainian troops. Russia has denied it, and

has in turn accused Kyiv of using toxic agents in combat.

Kirillov, who took his current job in 2017, was one of the most high-profile figures to level those accusations. He held numerous briefings to accuse the Ukrainian military of using toxic agents and planning to launch attacks with radioactive substances — claims that Ukraine and its Western allies rejected as propaganda. Kirillov, who once headed a Russian military academy, was prominent in Russia's propaganda campaign against Ukraine and the West. In 2023, for instance, he said that the US was planning to use drones "designed to spread infected mosquitoes."

As the head of Russia's radioactive, chemical and biological defence forces, Kirillov helped develop a thermobaric rocket launcher, the TOS-2. The Russian military frequently reports its use in Ukraine.

The SBU official provided video that they said was of the bombing. It shows two men leaving a building shortly before a blast fills the frame. Russia's top state investigative agency said it's looking into Kirillov's death as a case of terrorism.

Since Russia invaded, several prominent figures have been killed in targeted attacks believed to have been carried out by Ukraine. Darya Dugina, a commentator on Russian TV channels and the daughter of Kremlin-linked nationalist ideologue Alexander Dugin, died in a 2022 car blast that investigators suspected was aimed at her father. Vladlen Tatarsky, a popular military blogger, died in April 2023, when a statuette given to him at a party in St. Petersburg exploded. In Dec 2023, Illia Kyva, a former pro-Moscow Ukrainian lawmaker who fled to Russia, was shot and killed near Moscow. On Dec 9, a bomb planted under a car in the Russian-occupied Donetsk city killed Sergei Yevsyukov, the ex-head of a prison where dozens of Ukrainian prisoners of war died in a missile strike in July 2022. AGENCIES

THE KILL BUTTON

A few notable recent assassinations done remotely

July 31, 2024 | Ismail Haniyeh

Israeli intelligence Mossad kills Hamas political chief in Tehran by planting a bomb in his room and detonating it remotely by operatives present on Iranian soil



Nov 27, 2020 | Mohsen Fakhrizadeh

Iran's top nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, dies of gunshots fired from a truck-mounted machine gun attached to a remote-controlled robotic apparatus, according to an NYT report



Aug 31, 2018 | Alexander Zakharchenko

Self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic leader dies in Ukraine in a bomb

explosion in a cafe, device was planted above the door inside and activated remotely



Feb 14, 2005 | Rafiq Hariri

Former Lebanese PM dies as a truck bomb blast hits his motorcade, leaving a massive crater and ripping the facades of the surrounding buildings. 21 others die in blast; according to some reports, explosives remotely triggered to ensure precision timing



Jan 3, 2020 | Qassim Suleimani

Iranian General Qassim Suleimani dies by a US Reaper drone equipped with precision missiles near Baghdad International Airport in Iraq. According to Saudi-based Arab News, drone launched from Al Udeid air base in Qatar, controlled remotely by operators at the US air force base in Creech, Nevada



Sept 17-18 | Pager Attack

37 DIE, thousands hurt in Lebanon by coordinated explosions of pagers and walkie-talkies believed to have been booby-trapped by Israel

Source: Agencies

Trump says letting Kyiv use long-range US missiles stupid, may reverse decision

Palm Beach: US President-elect Donald Trump on Monday suggested that he may reverse President Joe Biden's recent decision to allow Ukrainian forces to use American long-range weapons to strike deeper into Russian territory.

Trump called the decision made by Biden last month "stupid". He also expressed anger that his incoming administration was not consulted before Biden made the move. With the loosening of the restrictions, Biden gave Ukraine long-sought permission to use the Army Tactical Missile System provided by the US to strike Russian positions hundreds of miles from its border. "I don't think that should have been allowed, not when there's a pos-

sibility — certainly not just weeks before I take over," Trump said during a wide-ranging news conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort. "Why would they do that without asking me what I thought? I wouldn't have had him do that. I think it was a big mistake."

Asked if he would consider reversing the Biden administration decision, Trump responded: "I might. I think it was a very stupid thing to do." The White House pushed back on Trump's criticism, noting that the decision was made after months of deliberations.

Trump on Monday reiterated his call on both Ukrainian President Zelensky and Russian President Putin to negotiate an end to the war. AP

Now, Nato and not US, to handle coordination of military aid to Kyiv

Berlin: Nato has taken over the coordination of Western military aid to Ukraine from the US, as planned, a source said on Tuesday, in a move widely seen as aiming to safeguard the support mechanism against Nato sceptic Donald Trump.

The step gives Nato a more direct role in the war against Russia's invasion while stopping well short of committing its own forces. Diplomats, however, acknowledge that the handover to Nato may have a limited effect given that the US under Trump could still deal a major setback to Ukraine by slashing its support as it is the alliance's dominant power and provides the majority of arms to Kyiv. AP

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