

## BJP, Congress birds of a feather: Mayawati on Rafale verdict

Agency  
New Delhi Dec 14,

Two days after offering support to Congress for forming government in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati Friday called both BJP and Congress "ek hi thali ke chatte batte (birds of a feather)". Mayawati made the remark in response to the Supreme Court's decision dismissing all pleas seeking a court-

monitored probe into procurement of Rafale fighter jet. Mayawati said both Congress and BJP have faced the allegations of corruption in defence procurement deals as both parties have been in power at the Centre. "In such matters, the public has an apprehension that both the parties have been 'ek hi thali ke chatte batte' and none of the two is any less than each other. Congress has faced the allegations in Bofors and BJP in

Rafale," Mayawati said. In a statement, Mayawati said the Supreme Court's verdict would be some relief for the central government but there was a need for basic changes at the level of the government in matters of defence-related deals. Mayawati also asked the Centre to draft a long-term and transparent policy for defence procurement deals while taking the alliance parties and the prominent opposition parties into confidence.

## 22-year-old Indian guitarist found dead in Dubai

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A 22-year-old popular Indian guitarist has been found dead in his apartment in Dubai, a media report said Friday. Himanshu Sharma, popularly known as Shaggy, was found dead at his apartment in Garhoud, about 14 kilometres from Dubai on Wednesday. The Dubai Police have confirmed Sharma's death. The police have referred his body to the forensic medicine department and the report showed no irregularity in the guitarist's death, the Khaleej Times reported.

"His body will be handed over to his family after the completion of administrative procedures," the police said. Sharma was doing his internship as a fifth-year architecture student at Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE Dubai Campus) at the time of his death. The guitarist from the local band Metal Head was very popular across all colleges in Dubai Academic City and was known for his guitar skills, said his friend and fellow rock artist Gaurav Manna. "The University has been informed today by the Police of the tragic death of Himanshu

Sharma, a student of MAHE Dubai. It's a moment of shock for all of us at the University. We are awaiting further information on the same," said a spokesperson of MAHE. Sharma stood out for his great taste in music. "He was popular in college, too, as he played guitar with a couple of successful bands like Slaves of Conspiracy and Nutmeg," Manna said. "He was very friendly to everyone. It was always easy being around him. Even a stranger could become best friends with him in five minutes. His death affected everyone around him, close or not," he said.

## At Justice Lokur farewell, CJI says it feels like 'right arm has been taken away'

Agency  
New Delhi Dec 14,

Friday was the last working day for Supreme Court Justice Madan B Lokur, and during his farewell event at the apex court lawns, Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi spoke about how it was an emotional moment for him. "This is an emotional moment for me... I feel that my right arm has been taken away... There can be no debate that Justice Lokur is an outstanding judge," CJI Gogoi said. Justice Gogoi said Justice Lokur was a 'pro-

citizen, pro-victim judge', adding that it was clear from his decision to protect the identity of rape victims in the Nipun Saxena case. "I have been at the receiving end of Justice Madan Lokur's judicial philosophy and have debated with him fiercely. But at the end of every debate, I have left with more respect for him. His heart and empathy in the right place, integrity unquestioned," Attorney General KK Venugopal who was also present at the event, was quoted by Bar and Bench as saying. Justice Lokur's notable judgments include

the minority sub-quota ruling of 2012 which struck down government's decision to allocate sub-quotas for minorities, and the illegal mining scam involving the Reddy brothers from Karnataka. Justice Lokur was also among the four judges who held a press conference in January 2018 to highlight their concerns about the workings of the Supreme Court. Of the four judges, Justices J Chelameswar and Kurian Joseph have since retired, while Justice Gogoi was elevated to the post of Chief Justice.

## Congress Leader's advice to Yogi Adityanath on Ram Statue in Ayodhya

Agency  
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A giant Lord Ram statue planned in Ayodhya should have one of Sita by its side, Congress leader Karan Singh has suggested in a letter to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. "If you have taken the decision to construct a magnificent idol of Lord Rama, then it is better to reduce the height of Rama statue to half and build a couple statue of both Ram and Sita instead," Mr Singh wrote of the 221-metre statue project announced by the Uttar

Pradesh government two weeks ago. The Congress veteran wrote that Sita statue deserves a respected place in Ayodhya as she never got to live in the holy city. "After getting married, Sita came to Ayodhya, but soon after she had to accompany Ram and Lakshmana on a 14-year exile. During that time, she was kidnapped by Ravana and had to live in captivity in Sri Lanka," Mr Singh said. After Sita was saved by Ram, she had to take the 'agni pariksha' (trial by fire), he added, and she had to then spend the

rest of her life in exile despite being pregnant. "Sita deserves her place in Ayodhya," Mr Singh suggested in the letter. The Uttar Pradesh government had announced that the proposed statue of Lord Ram would be made of bronze and will measure 221 metres along with its pedestal, and the "chattri" over his head would be 20 metres, a press release by the state government had said. A representational photograph of the statue was also shared with the media. The possible location or cost of the statue were not detailed.

## BJP-led Centre thinks it owns RBI: P Chidambaram

Agency  
New Delhi, Dec. 14

Former Union finance minister P Chidambaram on Thursday alleged the BJP-led Centre thinks that it "owns" the Reserve Bank of India and does not understand the independence of the central bank, while asserting that the Union government is only after "hoard of cash" and "pot of gold". Addressing the Lokmat National Conclave, he hit out at the Union government over the appointment of Shaktikanta Das as the RBI governor, saying it "worries" him that an official who was a "vocal supporter" of demonetisation has been given the key post at the country's central bank. He also hoped that Das stands up to the autonomy and rights of the RBI. "Anyone who vocally supported demonetisation was wrong. It does not mean that if you are wrong on one issue, you cannot be right on other issues. But you must have the humility and honesty to accept that you made a mistake. Whether

Shaktikanta Das has the freedom to acknowledge that demonetisation was a mistake, I doubt that. "It worries me that they have appointed two persons to two key posts, both of who were vocal supporters of demonetisation," he said when asked about his views on the appointment of Das as the RBI governor. Shaktikanta Das took charge as the 25th Governor of the Reserve Bank early Wednesday and promised to take all stakeholders, including the government, along on key policy issues to maintain growth while keeping inflation under check. Das was appointed to the post on Tuesday evening — within a day after the sudden resignation of Ujjit Patel following deep friction between the RBI and the government over a host of issues, including the central bank's governance, capital reserves and also certain regulatory policies like the PCA framework for half the state-run banks and credit concerns to some key vote-banks in the industry. "I sincerely hope and

appeal to Shaktikanta Das. You are now the RBI governor and no longer ex-secretary of economic affairs, ex-member finance commission. You are the governor of India's central bank, and therefore you must stand up for the central bank's autonomy and rights," Chidambaram said. Asked whether Ujjit Patel meekly accepted demonetisation, the senior Congress leader said, "He should not have called a board meeting in Delhi, and passed a resolution endorsing demonetisation. He should have stood his ground. He was wrong. He suffered a huge reputational slide by endorsing demonetisation." He said finance ministers and RBI governors must have healthy differences. To a question on what was at the heart of the disagreement between the government and the RBI, Chidambaram said this government thinks it "owns the RBI" and that it is its department. "It thinks CBI listens to us, why does not RBI listen? This government made the (number) one and two of the CBI fight

each other. This government simply does not understand what central bank independence is," he said. Asked about his analysis of the specific differences between the government and the RBI and whether it was on non-performing assets (NPAs) or if the government is wanting to access RBI reserves, Chidambaram said on prompt corrective action and on liquidity, government does not have the final say. "It is the RBI which must have a final say. You can present your data. You can persuade the RBI to see that liquidity is required in some sectors. You can present data to say that credit flow is not adequate. But ultimately it is the RBI which has to take the final call on liquidity and prompt corrective action. "But this government is not interested in that. This government is interested in the hoard of cash lying there. It thinks that there is so much cash is lying there, I can meet my fiscal deficit, my GST revenues are less than expected, I have not provided for food subsidy fully and Ayushman programme... what do I

do. There is a pot of gold and I want to reach that pot of gold. That is the only aim of this government," he said. He said demonetisation has first, second and third order effects. The first order effect was drastic for 15 days but there was an appearance that things will come back to normal when currency started flowing in. The second order effect, which were deeper, was jobs which were lost and never came back. Small and medium industries which were shut never reopened among others, Chidambaram said. "The third order effect is when there is so much uncertainty about policy that foreign investor pulls out... As we move from first to second and third effect, more people have realised what a foolish decision it was," he said. About NPAs, Chidambaram said there were two worse NPA situation in the past — one when Yashwant Sinha was the Union finance minister, but there was no scare like the present one and the second was during his own tenure, both of which were resolved.

## BJP gears up for 2019 battle, banks on Modi magic: PM to address over two dozen rallies in 122 constituencies

Agency  
New Delhi, Dec. 14

Following the Assembly poll debate in the Hindi heartland states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, the Bharatiya Janata Party is already gearing up for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections battle. Times Now has learned that the top leadership has already

got into a huddle to prepare strategies in order to come back to power next year. It has been learned that the party has again decided to rely heavily on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's image to win the 2019 battle. The party has already prepared a hectic campaign schedule for the Prime Minister as part of which he will address over two dozen rallies in

122 cluster constituencies where the BJP is relatively weak. This campaigning is expected to go on until the end of January or the first week of February. In fact, the PM may visit the key battleground of West Bengal on January 24 where the party is weak and the ruling Trinamool Congress under Mamata Banerjee is on a strong footing.

The development comes in the wake of the BJP losing out to the Congress party in MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, where the latter is going to form the governments. While the Congress witnessed a landslide victory in Rajasthan, it fell short of a majority in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh by a slender margin of one or two seats. However, with the support of its

allies and Independents, it is in a comfortable position to form the government. The verdicts in key battle states have brought the Congress party back in the game for 2019 and the party cadre, under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi, is more confident than ever before that the party can give a fight to the BJP under Modi in the next Lok Sabha elections.

## Congress seeks JPC probe in Rafale deal, BJP calls for Rahul Gandhi's apology to PM; Parliament adjourned

Agency  
New Delhi Dec 14,

Mounting attack on the opposition parties led by Congress, Home Minister Rajnath Singh called for Rahul Gandhi's apology in Parliament after the Supreme Court dismissed a clutch of petitions calling for a court-monitored probe into the Rafale deal. Both the houses were adjourned for the day following disruption of proceedings by sparring ruling and opposition legislators. Rajnath Singh, quoting the Supreme Court verdict in the Lok Sabha, said, "The Congress president tried to mislead public for political benefits and maligned India's image globally, he should apologise to the house and to the people of the country. He thought 'Hum to doobe hain sanam tum ko bhi le doobenge'." Responding to the calls for Gandhi's

apology, senior Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharge said, "Our demand was for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) (into the Rafale deal) and it still stands, the main issue is pricing which SC said it did not want to comment on, as it is not in its jurisdiction. Home Minister is speaking on an incomplete judgment given on a PIL." The Winter Session of Parliament, which is yet to see a full day of business, witnessed a ruckus over the Rafale deal in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha following which the proceedings were adjourned for the day. Amid huge uproar in the Rajya Sabha, Leader of the House and Finance Minister Arun Jaitley was heard saying that the Opposition has been demanding a debate on the Rafale jet deal and so the question hour should be suspended to take up the issue. Meanwhile, the



Congress legislators trooped into the well of the House seeking constitution of a JPC to probe the Rafale deal. As the uproar continued, Deputy Chairman Harivansh first adjourned the House till 11.30 am and then later for the day. Similar scenes also prevailed in the lower house, where

opposition members trooped into the Well carrying placards on various issues, including the alleged scam in Rafale deal. Opposition parties had expressed earlier that they will continue their protest against the government on four issues — farm woes, "assault" on institutions like the CBI and RBI,

jobs and price rise and Rafale. The Supreme Court Friday gave a clean chit to the Narendra Modi government on the procurement of 36 Rafale fighter jets from France. The apex court said there was no occasion to doubt the decision-making process in the multi-billion dollar Rafale deal.