

Rahul Gandhi faces heat over 'woman' remark on Nirmala Sitharaman

Agency
New Delhi Jan 10

Congress president Rahul Gandhi came under severe criticism from all quarters after his 'woman' remark on Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at a rally in Jaipur on Wednesday. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on the same day rebuked the 48-year-old Congress chief for what the latter said in the rally. While trying to target the PM over the Dassault Rafale deal, Gandhi said that PM Modi got a "woman" to defend him in Parliament.

"The watchman with a 56-inch chest ran away and told a woman, Sitharaman ji, defend me. I won't be able to defend myself, defend me. For two and a half hours, the woman could not defend him. I had asked a straight



question - answer yes or no - but she couldn't answer," Rahul said, using the Hindi word 'mahila' for a woman, at the rally. Reacting strongly to Gandhi's remark on Sitharaman, the PM lambasted the Congress chief for "insulting" the Defence Minister.

"Our defence minister shut the opposition leaders in Parliament and exposed all their lies, so they have resorted to insulting her now. This is

an insult to the women in the country," the PM in his rally in Agra held after Gandhi's rally.

But Gandhi remained unapologetic. In a response to the PM, he continued his charges on Dassault Rafale.

"With all due respect Modi Ji, in our culture respect for women begins at home," he wrote.

"Stop shaking. Be a man and answer my question: Did the Air Force and Defence Ministry object

when you bypassed the original Rafale deal? Yes? Or No?" he added.

In spite of his response, Gandhi continued to draw flak for his comment.

According to reports, the National Commission for Women also criticised Gandhi and sent a notice to him for his comment.

"We've asked explanation from Rahul Gandhi for why he said what he said yesterday in tweets. The statement was pathetic, sexist and misogynistic. That's why we've sent him a notice. He has to explain what does he mean when he is trying to talk low of women," NCW chairperson Rekha Sharma was quoted as saying by ANI on Thursday.

Taking a jibe at Gandhi today, Union Textiles minister Smriti Irani called him a misogynist.

Assam 3 AGP ministers resign after pulling out of BJP-led coalition over Citizenship Bill row

Agency
Guwahati Jan 10,

Three Asom Gana Parishad Ministers Wednesday resigned from the Assam Cabinet, two days after their party exited the government over the Citizenship Amendment Bill.

Agriculture Minister Atul Bora, Water Resources Minister Keshav Mahanta and Food and Civil Supplies Minister Phanibhusan Choudhury submitted their resignations to Chief Minister

Sarbananda Sonowal at the state secretariat in Assam capital Guwahati. Bora told reporters after submitting their resignations.

The AGP had pulled out of the BJP-led coalition government a day before the bill seeking to provide Indian citizenship to non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan was passed in Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, the AGP executive met at the party headquarters in Guwahati to discuss the

resignations and the future course of action. Bora, who is also the party president, told reporters after the meeting that he would announce the party's future strategy regarding the bill after submitting their resignations.

The AGP pulled out of the state government after its "last-ditch attempt to convince" the centre to withdraw the proposed legislation failed on Monday.

The withdrawal of the AGP, which has 14 MLAs in the 126-

member assembly, will not have any immediate effect on the future of the Sarbananda Sonowal-led government that still has the backing of 74 MLAs.

The BJP has 61 members and the party has support of 12 MLAs of the Bodoland People's Front and the sole Independent member.

The opposition Congress and the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) have 25 and 13 members respectively.

Assam Citizenship Bill BJP wants to destroy state & push future of youth to darkness, says Tarun Gogoi

Agency
Guwahati, Jan 10,

Termining the passing of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 by Lok Sabha on Tuesday as a "Black Day" for Assam and the country, former chief minister Tarun Gogoi accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government of polarising the country on the basis of religion.

"By passing the bill, the BJP government has polarised citizens as Hindus and Muslims and accepted Jinnah's politics of dividing the country," the senior Congress leader said.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill 2016, seeking to provide Indian citizenship to non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, was passed by the Lok Sabha on Tuesday amid protests by opposition parties who termed the proposed law "divisive" and "flawed".

"The bill has endangered Assam's culture, heritage, existence for whose preservation Assam's people have been agitating

for long. Assam Accord was signed at the end of the 6-year long Assam Agitation (from 1979), 855 became martyrs during the agitation and even Congress people became victims," he said.

Mr Gogoi claimed that even in the Assam Accord, those illegally entering Assam after midnight March 24, 1971 would be detected as foreigners. "Aliens are not to be identified on the basis of religion. Our country is a secular one, it is in our Constitution's Preamble."

"BJP MPs, MLAs took oath accordingly. By passing the bill on religious ground they have insulted their oath. What is the difference between them and Jinnah who partitioned India on the basis of religion," he questioned.

Mr Gogoi, who is a former three-time chief minister of the state, said: "Assam is burning. BJP wants to destroy Assam and push the future of the youth to darkness".

He said "this will cause loss to both the North East region and the country. If such unrests continue,

Assam will always remain disturbed and troubled".

The senior Congress leader said this Bill is a "jumla", through which the BJP is hoping to get Bengali speaking people's votes. He criticised the Centre's decision to appoint a high-level committee to go into Clause 6 of the Assam Accord as "it is already stated there that Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people."

Mr Gogoi said Assam Finance Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is "misleading the people" by claiming Assam will go the Jinnah way if the Citizenship Bill is not passed.

"Sarma's claim suggests that Assamese people are weak and so need Bangladeshis to come in and strengthen them," he said.

Mr Gogoi called for shutting down of the National Register of

Citizens (NRC) office. "NRC updation was undertaken as part of the Assam Accord. NRC will now become waste paper and of no value," he said.

"After he (Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal) clapped when Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced at Silchar on Friday that the bill will be passed by Parliament, I realised Sonowal is no longer the chief minister of Assam but a puppet chief minister of (PM) Modi." He said the BJP has now become Bangladesh's party.

The role of the All Assam Students Union is important, he said, praising it for carrying on the movement against the bill.

Gogoi said, "this agitation has to continue peacefully and jail bhara movement has to be undertaken to save Assam and its people. The central government is fascist... Narendra Modi, Sarbananda Sonowal and Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary are dangerous and they will destroy Assam".

Nagaland BJP-led NDA govt playing with sentiments of Naga people: NPF leader

Agency
Kohima, Jan 10,

Former Nagaland Assembly Speaker and senior Naga Peoples' Front (NPF) legislator Dr Chotisuh Sazo has accused the BJP-led NDA Government at the Center of playing with

the sentiment of the Naga people over resolution of the Indo-Naga political issue.

According to a report on Wednesday, addressing the Thevonu Memorial Trophy Tournament at Khulazu Basa under Phek District on

Tuesday, Dr. Sazo said Naga people had desire to see the Naga political issue resolved before the general elections in the State.

Even the Naga civil societies had constituted a Core Committee to urge the

Government of India to resolve the issue before the general elections. Questions were also raised as to why the BJP-led NDA Government at the Center was remaining silent on what they had declared for resolving the Naga issue.

Speech of Dr. Najma Heptulla, Governor of Manipur at The 4th Convocation Ceremony of Central Agricultural University

"I consider it a privilege to address the Fourth Convocation of this prestigious, Central Agricultural University having its headquarters at Imphal and jurisdiction over the seven North Eastern States of Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. The University is also celebrating its Silver Jubilee having completed 25 years of service for the rural community since its establishment by an Act of Parliament in 1993.

"On this auspicious occasion, I would like to begin by congratulating the students and scholars who received their degrees and medals today. It is a great feeling to be amongst brilliant hard working young people who are ready to step into their most creative years. Young boys and girls, as you step out from the comfort zone of the University, remember that the challenge ahead of you is quite big, but never bigger than your intrinsic potential worth. To excel on your new path, you need to pursue the excitement of intellectual curiosity. I am sure that with the application of knowledge and skills you gained during the past few years, you will make significant contribution in the nation building. While you must rejoice and celebrate your achievements, you must also realize the enormity of responsibility that has been placed upon you. I am confident that you will rise to the occasion and deliver service with sincerity, industry and dedication. I wish you all the very best.

"The Central Agricultural University with its thirteen major campuses in the seven States has become over the years a premier institution of agricultural education, research and extension in the country. Opening of six new colleges, six multi technology testing centres, six vocational training centres, three new Kishan Vikas Kendras and creating new infrastructure and human resource with the support of Central and State Governments are indeed praiseworthy initiatives. The record of academic achievements of the University with 2nd position third in All India ranking in ICAR-JRF Examination, 13th rank out of 74 Agricultural and Deemed Universities in the country and recipient of FICCI Higher Education Excellence Award, 2018 is indeed a remarkable achievement. I must congratulate

the Vice-Chancellor and the entire CAU family for these academic laurels. I am well aware that the University after facing several problems in the beginning is now making outstanding contributions in the region. It is most gratifying that the intensity of contribution of this University to the national talent pool is one of the highest in the country.

"Agriculture has a significant role in the emergence and development of human civilization. It remains the lifeline and livelihood for more than 70 percent of the country's population. It is true that agriculture receives top priority in our policy formulation ever since independence and our Agricultural Universities are the focal points of agricultural growth and change. Central Agricultural University, Imphal has spearheaded agricultural education in the region for the last 25 years and made significant contributions in research and technology development. Whether it is development of high yielding crop varieties or women friendly equipments or producing knowledgeable graduates and scholars to harness the advances of technology or promoting farmer-friendly approaches in its extension programmes, this University has always been at the forefront. I wish CAU would continue to be a pacesetter in taking a multi-disciplinary approach to solve emerging challenges on the agricultural front and supplement the States' efforts in improving production and productivity.

"In order to perpetually benefit from science-led growth of agriculture, agricultural education has to be in the forefront of building a scientific base and human resource capital for research and extension. Our agricultural universities have to play an important role in imparting quality education to students, making them professionally competent, socially sensitive and ethically strong. To harmonize agricultural education with excellence in science and technology, they have to undertake initiatives aimed at faculty and institution development, and reforms in governance and curricula. I am pleased to mention that the ICAR has launched the National Agricultural Education Project (NAEP) and the Fifth Deans Committee is already in action to

improve and sustain the quality of higher agricultural education.

"Agriculture is an integral part of hill farming systems on which majority of the population is dependent for their livelihood. Food production in the region is only about 5.89 million tonnes against the requirement of 7.5 million tonnes and it is not keeping pace with population growth. The area for expansion in agriculture is stagnant over a long period. Due to demographic reasons and development demands, per capita availability of land, water and other natural resources, which are already stressed, will continue to decline, making economic viability of farming a big challenge. Integrated farming systems to increase productivity, climate resilience and rural employment opportunities, especially of marginal and sub-marginal families will be needed to address such challenge. It is also necessary to aim at vertical expansion in production by improving productivity through improved varieties, management practices, value addition of products, market analysis and exploitation of new market channels.

"Agriculture is faced with limited and declining availability of land and water due to the fast changing climate. Our approach to agriculture, therefore, needs to be redefined in the context of this changing scenario. We must take necessary steps to enable all farmers to adapt to and mitigate the impact of climate change through appropriate technologies and innovative practices that would improve the resilience of farming systems, thus enhancing the food security. Increased production will require enhancing productivity levels of existing resources, through increased input-use efficiency leading to enhanced net returns to farmers and improving the terms of trade in favour of farmers. In retrospect, the Green Revolution had by-passed the vast rain fed areas, and also could not climb the hills. As a result, the hill agriculture in India could not progress as much.

"This part of the country is gifted by nature with tremendous biodiversity and widely varying agro-climatic conditions. The region is known to have at least 8,000 flowering plant species, 700 species of

orchids, 63 species of bamboo and 64 species of citrus and other fruits. Some of the citrus, banana and rice gene pools and nearly 50 percent of the total flowering plants in India are known to have originated in this region. The region has tremendous potential in organic agriculture, food processing, horticulture, commercial cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants, floriculture and minor forest products. The advantage of organic farming needs to be exploited suitably through technical and institutional interventions and the North East should be developed as an exclusive economic zone for organic products.

"Being the main stakeholder in agriculture, the farmers must be involved in all concerned decision making processes. Assured and remunerative markets hold the key to retain the interest of farmers in farming and also to attract the youth in farming. Farmers should be looked at as agripreneurs who interact with corporate entrepreneurs, needing business models to be worked out to provide win-win options. Appreciating that agriculture is the biggest private sector economic activity in the country, we must move from 3Ps to 4Ps that is, public-private-producer-partnership.

"Our youth will be the driver of India's growth in the years to come. Agriculture offers great scope to our youth to realize and lead a fulfilling career. There are many avenues within agricultural science which are yet to be fully explored namely specialization in broader areas of soil science, plant science, livestock management and food science to name just a few. The Nation needs a huge pool of skilled professionals to fully realise the potential of agricultural sector. Here, the role of Agricultural Universities is very important to meet the country's need with sound agricultural education. Our vision should be to make CAU a world-class University for agricultural studies and research. Much is expected from the faculties, scientists, research scholars and students of the University. They must strive to contribute their best to cultivate a safe and sound future for agriculture and allied sectors. I wish CAU will leave no stone unturned to achieve the goal.