

Let every Indian ask PM & his ministers questions I asked on Rafale: Rahul

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Stepping up his attack on the Modi government over the Rafale deal issue, Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Saturday urged all Indians to ask Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his ministers the questions he posed in Parliament on the fighter jet agreement with France.

"RM (Raksha Marti) spoke for 2 hrs in Parliament, but she couldn't answer the 2 simple questions I asked her," Gandhi tweeted. He also posted a video of the two questions he posed to the defence minister in Parliament. Gandhi had asked who gave the offset contract to Anil Ambani and whether the defence ministry officials had raised an objection when the prime minister carried



out a "bypass surgery" for the deal. He had asked Sitharaman to reply in a yes or no. Posting the video on his Twitter account, Gandhi said: "Watch & SHARE this video. Let every Indian ask the PM & his Ministers these

questions." With his tweet, Gandhi used the hashtag "#2SawalDoJawab". Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while giving the government's reply on the Rafale deal discussion in Parliament on Friday, had accused the

Congress of spreading "falsehood" on the issue and said while the Bofors scam brought the party down, Rafale will help Prime Minister Modi retain power.

Wrapping up a rancorous debate in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman, in her over two-hour speech, also accused the Congress of stalling the contract during its rule because it "didn't get the money". The Congress has alleged irregularities in the deal for 36 aircraft and claimed that the Narendra Modi government is buying them at a price much higher than the one that was being negotiated by the previous government. The party has also been accusing the government of favouring Anil Ambani's firm in the deal. However, the government, as well as Ambani, have rejected all the allegations.

As GST compliance rate takes a hit, Centre scrambles to locate missing taxpayers

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As compliance rate of tax filers, including composition scheme dealers, under Goods and Services Tax (GST) shows a declining trend, authorities are working on hunting these missing taxpayers. The percentage of taxpayers who have not filed returns under GST has steadily increased over the last 12 months to over 28 per cent in November 2018 as against 10.56 per cent in November 2017, data shared by Minister of State for Finance Shiv Pratap Shukla in response to a Lok Sabha question on Friday showed.

The composition scheme fares along similar lines, with the percentage of filers who have not filed returns rising to 25.37 per cent in July-September 2018 as against 15.03 per cent in July-September

2017, the data showed. Under the composition scheme, traders, manufacturers and restaurants pay a low nominal tax rate.

On a question on whether the authorities are considering putting in place an extensive plan to hunt for these missing GST taxpayers, which includes visiting their premises, the MoS for Finance replied in the affirmative.

"The details of the non-filers of returns are regularly shared with the jurisdictional tax authorities and measures including inspection, visit of premises, search and seizure are being undertaken wherever required," Shukla said in his written reply.

The government has also detected cases wherein fake invoices are being used to claim input tax credit.

In 2018-19, upto December, 499 cases of fake invoices used for

claiming input tax credit have been detected involving amount of Rs 3,894.94 crore as against detection of 4 cases involving Rs 9.75 crore in July 2017-March 2018, the details in reply showed.

"The government is committed to increase the percentage of compliance by taxpayers under Goods and Services Tax. In this regard, an extensive outreach program has been carried out across the country to create awareness among traders, industry bodies and other stakeholders," the minister said in his reply.

Further, effective enforcement measures are being undertaken to check cases of tax evasion and fake invoices," it further said. Low compliance rate coupled with a series of rate cuts under GST will translate into more revenue concerns for the government.

Revenue collections

under GST are already a worry for the government, with the Budget targets likely to be missed this year. The government has collected Rs 8,71,043 crore as GST revenue in April-December, the first nine months of this financial year, and is still short of the overall target by Rs 4.77 lakh crore. Government finances are already under strain, with government's fiscal deficit for April-November period rising to Rs 7.17 lakh crore or 114.8 per cent of the full-year target of Rs 6.24 lakh crore. The low compliance rate could be one of the possible roadblocks in extending the composition scheme to service providers.

The proposal for extension of the scheme for small service providers will be discussed in the upcoming GST council meeting slated to be held on January 10.

Andhra Pradesh CM Chandrababu Naidu gives 30 Swift Dzire cars to unemployed Brahmin youth

Agency
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Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu has found a unique way to appease voters before the Lok Sabha elections. The AP CM and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief distributed 30 Maruti Swift Dzire cars to the poor youths from the Brahmin community at his rally in Amravati. Naidu said this move will ensure that families of marginalized and economically backward

Brahmins also get support like other communities from the state government.

Apart from this, the state government has established Andhra Pradesh Brahmin Welfare Corporation for the upliftment of poor Brahmins. The scheme was introduced in December 2014 and under this scheme, the government has started almost half-a-dozen schemes for the Brahmins. According to media reports, about 10,000 poor

Brahmins received loans and subsidies. Addressing the gathering, the CM said that the youths can use the car as a taxi and can earn income. Reports suggest that beneficiaries will have to pay 10 per cent of the cost of the car.

Andhra Pradesh is perhaps the first state in the country where such a comprehensive scheme has been introduced for the Brahmin community. The corporation ensures that members of the poor

Brahmin family of every age get financial support for education, coaching, skill development, entrepreneurship and welfare and culture.

Naidu had earlier announced that every family of the state will get a free smartphone through which the state will provide government facilities to every person. Naidu had made this announcement on January 1 while releasing a white paper on the state's financial and economic growth.

Agency
Washington, Jan. 5

Ruing that talented foreign students are leaving the United States after studying in the country's best educational institutions, President Donald Trump has said he wants people with merit to stay in America and help the growth of companies.

Addressing a press conference on Friday, Trump said the US is "losing out on great minds" as the country has a "ridiculous" immigration policy.

He reiterated his wish to end loopholes in the legal immigration system so as to attract more people based on merit. Trump said his administration wants people to come into the country legally and on merit.

"We have all these companies coming in. We need great people. But we want them to come in on a merit basis, and they have to come in on a merit basis. They can't come in the way they've been coming in for years," Trump told reporters during a news conference in Washington.

"I get calls from the great tech companies, and they're saying we don't allow people at the top of their class, at the best schools in the country, we don't allow them to stay in our country," he said.

"So, they end up going back to China and Japan and so many other countries all over the world, and we don't keep them. They get educated at our finest schools, and then we don't allow them, through a various set of circumstances, to have any guarantees of staying. So we lose out

on great minds. We can't do that," he said.

Trump was referring to difficulties being faced by foreign students to stay and work in the US after they complete their education in the country.

Trump said that this issue was discussed with Democratic Congressional leadership during a meeting at the White House on Friday.

"We discussed that with the Democrats, and I think they agree. We're working on that. But we don't want to lose our great companies because we have a ridiculous policy that we won't accept smart people. So, call it politically correct or not, but we have to let these great, brilliant companies have the smartest people in the world," Trump said.

He said if somebody wants to seek asylum, there's a way to do that. "There are legal ways to come to this country, and legal immigration has made this country great." Referring to the killing of California's Indian-origin police officer Ronil "Ron" Singh allegedly by an illegal immigrant, Trump said the US needs a "secure border" to keep "Americans safe" and check illegal immigration.

"America lets in over a million people every single year. By far, the most generous nation in the world. And yet, we have laws that need to be followed to keep Americans safe and to protect the integrity of a system where, right now, there are millions of people who are waiting in line to come to America to seek the American Dream, like Officer Singh did when

he sought his chance at the American Dream," he said.

"That dream was taken. It was taken because we don't have a secure border. We can't let this continue," he said.

Trump Thursday spoke with the widow and colleagues of the Indian-origin police officer who was killed at a traffic stop on December 26 by an illegal immigrant named Gustavo Perez Arriaga when he was planning to flee to his native Mexico.

"...A wonderful, young police officer — I spoke

to his wife yesterday — was shot, viciously shot, for simply stopping a person that came over the border illegally. Got shot. Killed. We don't want that happening," he said.

The president has shut down the government, demanding USD 5 billion for his border wall with Mexico but Democrats have refused to meet the demand.

The impasse has left more than 800,000 federal workers furloughed or working without pay since December 22.

Nirav Modi terms PNB scam 'civil transaction'

Agency
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Nirav Modi, a prime accused in the multi-crore PNB fraud case on Saturday said that he has done nothing wrong and that the scam was a "civil transaction" which is now being blown out of proportion.

Modi, on Saturday, filed a response before the PMLA court opposing the Enforcement Directorate's complaint to have him declared a "fugitive economic offender" under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act. In the response, the absconding diamondaire also stated that he is

unable to fly back to India citing security reasons. Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi, who are wanted in India for loan default, fled the country in the first week of January last year after their companies were found cheating the state-run PNB of Rs 13,000 crore. The duo has not returned

to India since then despite repeated summons from probe agencies and courts.

Modi is said to be in London while Choksi is residing in the Caribbean country of Antigua and Barbuda. The government has also sent formal requests to both seeking their extradition.

China's Xi Jinping calls on army to be battle-ready

Agency
Shanghai, Jan. 5

China's armed forces must strengthen their sense of urgency and do everything they can to prepare for battle, President Xi Jinping told a meeting of top brass on Friday. China is keen to beef up its armed forces amid territorial disputes in the South China Sea and escalating tension with the United States over issues ranging from trade to the status of Taiwan. The official Xinhua news agency said Xi told a meeting of the top military authority that China faced increasing risks and challenges, and the armed

forces must work to secure its security and development needs.

Xi, who is also chairman of the Central Military Commission, said the armed forces must devise strategies for the new era and take on responsibilities for preparing and waging war.

"The world is facing a period of major changes never seen in a century, and China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity for development," he was quoted as saying.

He said the armed forces needed to be able to respond quickly to emergencies, needed to

upgrade their joint operations capabilities and nurture new types of combat forces.

Xi's comments followed his remarks on Wednesday that China still reserved the right to use force to achieve "reunification" with

Taiwan and prevent the island's independence. Xi's Taiwan speech came just days after US President Donald Trump signed the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act into law, reaffirming the US commitment to the island's security.

Assam Government clerk held for taking bribe at Darrang

Agency
Guwahati Jan 5,

One Nasir Rahman, 56-years-old was arrested by the anti-corruption branch of Assam Police on Friday at Darrang on charges of corruption. According to Times of

India report, Rahman, a lower division clerk at the office of inspector of drugs was caught red-handed by the wing's sleuths while he was accepting a bribe amount of Rs 25,000 from the complainant, Azgor Ali.

Encounter breaks out between militants, security forces in J&K's Pulwama

Agency
Srinagar, Jan 5

An encounter broke out between militants and security forces in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday, police said.

The security forces launched a cordon and search operation in Aripal village of the south Kashmir district this

morning following specific information about the presence of militants there, a police official said. He said the search operation turned into an encounter after the militants opened fire at the search party, who retaliated.

The gunfight was on, the official said, adding further details were awaited.

Six children, driver killed as school bus falls into gorge in Himachal Pradesh

Agency
Shimla Jan 5,

Seven people, including six schoolchildren, were killed and 12 injured on Saturday when a private school bus rolled down a deep gorge in Himachal Pradesh's Sirmour district, police said. The accident occurred in Sangraht town on Saturday morning. A private bus carrying

students of DAV School fell into a gorge. Seven people — six schoolchildren and the bus driver — were killed, Superintendent of Police, Sirmour, Rohit Malpami said. The twelve people injured in the accident have been hospitalised. The condition of some of them is critical, he said, adding more details are awaited.