



Chinese President Xi Jinping (R), shakes hands with Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra in Beijing, China



Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, welcomes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the Pentagon, during a ceremony, in Washington



Motorcyclists wearing face masks to protect themselves from air pollution wait at a stoplight in Bangkok, Thailand



Britain's Prince Edward, the Duke and Sophie, Duchess of Edinburgh visit the Veterans Residential Home at the Gurkha Welfare Trust Welfare Centre in Pokhara, Nepal

Cong warns against using UCC as tool for political polarization

PTI, NEW DELHI: The Congress on Thursday said a uniform civil code can only come about after widespread discussion with the objective of building a genuine consensus and cannot become a political instrument designed to keep the country in a state of "permanent polarisation".

The opposition party's assertion comes days after the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh implemented the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in the state and the Gujarat government formed a committee under a retired Supreme Court judge to assess the need for the UCC in the state as well as prepare a draft bill for the same.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the

“It is not an instrument of legal reform in the slightest as there is nothing that addresses the actual concerns expressed with regard to family law over the last decade. It has been forcibly imposed as an integral part of the BJP's divisive agenda”



Uttarakhand UCC is a poorly drafted piece of legislation that is highly intrusive.

"It is not an instrument of legal reform in the slightest as there is nothing that addresses the actual concerns expressed with regard to family law over the last decade. It has been forcibly imposed as an integral part of the BJP's divisive agenda," Ramesh said in a statement.

Noting that the Gujarat

government has announced the formation of a panel to formulate a uniform civil code to be introduced in the state, Ramesh said this comes after the Uttar Pradesh government recently enforced a uniform civil code in that state that, however, exempts scheduled tribes.

The 21st Law Commission appointed by the Modi Government had submitted its 182-page 'Consultation Pa-

per on Reform of Family Law' on August 31, 2018, he said.

"Para 1.15 of that consultation paper states the following: 'While diversity of Indian culture can and should be celebrated, specific groups, or weaker sections of society must not be dis-privileged in the process. Resolution of this conflict does not mean abolition of all differences.'"

"This Commission has therefore dealt with laws that are discriminatory rather than providing a uniform civil code which is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage. Most countries are now moving towards recognition of difference and the mere existence of difference does not imply discrimination, but is indicative of a robust democracy," Ramesh pointed out.

MP Govt official abducted, rescued within hours; 13 arrested

PTI, NEEMUCH: The Chief Executive Officer of a local civic body in Madhya Pradesh's Neemuch district was abducted on Thursday morning following which the police rescued him within hours after a chase, an official said here.

As many as 13 persons including a woman allegedly involved in the abduction were arrested after the police caught up with them in Ujjain district, 150 km away, he said.

The kidnapers who came in two SUVs accosted Jawad Janpad Panchayat CEO Akash Dharve (26) from Neemuch Cantt police area, and forced him to sit in one of the vehicles before speeding away, said additional superintendent of police Naval Singh Sisodia.

IAF Mirage fighter jet crashes in MP; both pilots eject safely

PTI, GWALIOR: A Mirage-2000 fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force crashed in an agriculture field in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri district on Thursday afternoon after encountering a system malfunction, said the IAF.

Both pilots ejected safely but suffered minor injuries and were being airlifted to Gwalior by a helicopter, officials said.

The twin-seater trainer aircraft, which was on a routine sortie, caught fire after crashing at around 2.40 pm, said a Central Air Command spokesperson, adding a snag led to the accident.

"A Mirage 2000 aircraft of the IAF crashed near Shivpuri (Gwalior), during a routine training sortie today, after encountering a system



An injured pilot of a Mirage-2000 fighter aircraft of the Indian Air Force after it crashed in an agriculture field following a system malfunction, in MP

lots ejected safely. An enquiry has been ordered by the IAF to ascertain the cause of the accident," the Air Force said in a post on social media platform X.

The fighter jet, which crashed in an agriculture field near a village in Shivpuri district, had taken off from the Gwalior Airbase, said the officials.

"Villagers informed that a plane had crashed near Barheta Sunari village under Karera police station limits. The Mirage aircraft with two pilots took off from the Gwalior Airbase. Both pilots ejected safely and suffered minor injuries. A helicopter was sent to the spot to airlift the pilots," Shivpuri district Additional Superintendent of Police Sanjeev Mule said.

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WALKOUT DRAMA LAYS BARE OPPN DISUNITY

In a press conference in his chamber later, Yuri Alemao expressed frustration over the government's lack of attention to pressing issues, saying, "When there are so many burning issues, the opposition wanted to ask the Governor whether he would address them in his speech. When they refused to address these issues, we walked out. They are pushing bills without giving us enough time to study them."

Sardesai, speaking on the matter, criticised the cabinet, saying the ministers were avoiding accountability. "Members of the cabinet do not want to give answers, which is why the session has been called for just a day. There is a need to fix dates on the calendar for the Assembly session and also the number of days it will be held," he remarked.

Alemao reiterated his point, stating, "The Governor did not address the issues that were raised, and we walked out as a sign of protest. This was a spur-of-the-moment decision. The government is not serious about the pressing issues we face." He added that the opposition would continue to press for a more robust and transparent session calendar to ensure accountability in governance.

AAP's Benaullim MLA Venzy Viegas said, "Is it possible to have 'Sabka Saath (everybody's support), Sabka Vikas (everybody's development), Sabka Vishwas (everybody's trust) and Sabka Prayas' (everybody's attempt) in a session of one day? We condemn this one day assembly session because it lacks 'Saath' (support), 'Vikas' (development) and 'Prayas' (attempt). I condemn this government for trying to show this is development for all."

CASH-FOR-JOBS SCAM: PONDA POLICE FILE CHARGESHEET

This is the first case reported at Ponda Police Station, but investigations are also underway at Mardol, where Deepashri Sawant faces allegations of scamming multiple job aspirants.

In addition to the Ponda case, Sawant is also accused of defrauding two job seekers of Rs 25 lakh. At Mardol, Sawant, along with other accomplices, is linked to a larger scam involving Rs 3.88 crore from 44 job aspirants. The total amount across both stations is approximately Rs 4.1 crore.

The scam, which began in 2024, first came to light with the arrest of Pooja Naik in Mardol on October 22, 2024, for collecting Rs 14 lakh from a job seeker. Sawant's involvement was uncovered shortly after, with additional complaints emerging from both Ponda and Mardol. Other suspects, including Shruti Prabugaonkar, have also been arrested in connection with the scam.

While arrests have been made, police are still investigating the deeper network behind these scams.

DON'T TURN GOA INTO CONCRETE JUNGLE, SC TELLS STATE GOVT

The legal battle over the ODPs has been ongoing for over a year, with the State government defending the plans and attempting to allow their implementation. The matter is now set for final hearing on February 21, 2025.

The controversy began in April 2022 when the State government suspended both ODPs on emergency grounds. Following this, the government appointed a Review Committee that uncovered large-scale rezoning of plots, which appeared to benefit private parties and bypass standard procedures. Despite these findings, the government re-notified the ODPs in December 2022, retaining many of the controversial zone changes, including alterations to several newly identified survey numbers.

In a bid to maintain the ODPs, the Goa government withdrew the five villages from planning areas, rendering the ODPs ineffective. However, on December 22, 2022, the government issued a circular to keep the ODPs active, which was promptly stayed by the High Court. In response, the State issued an Ordinance to uphold the contested ODPs. The Goa Foundation challenged this move, and the High Court, in its order on May 2, 2024, stayed the operation of the ODPs.

The State government then approached the Supreme Court in May 2024, which initially stayed the High Court's order. However, the Apex Court ruled that any construction under the ODPs would be subject to the final outcome of the ongoing High Court petition. It also directed that no changes could be made to the five villages until the case was resolved.

In December 2024, the Goa Foundation discovered that the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Department had begun issuing construction permits within the ODP zones. The foundation subsequently moved the High Court, which issued a restraining order on January 23, 2025, affirming that no construction could proceed in these areas.

In the latest turn of events, the Goa government once again appealed to the Supreme Court, which, after a brief hearing on Thursday, dismissed the SLP and upheld the

High Court's stance.

With the matter now scheduled for a final hearing in February, the fate of the ODPs and the future of development in these key coastal villages remains uncertain.

UGC SLAPS SHOW CAUSE NOTICES ON 18 COLLEGES

The Anti-Ragging Regulations, 2009 mandate that every student and their parents and guardians must submit an anti-ragging undertaking at the time of admission and at the beginning of every academic year.

"This undertaking is a crucial measure to prevent and deter any incidents of ragging within educational institutions. The failure to secure these undertakings not only constitutes non-compliance with the regulations but also puts the well-being and safety of the students at risk," Joshi said.

The colleges include Vardhman Mahavir Medical College and Safdarjung Hospital and Hamdard Institute of Medical Sciences and Research in Delhi; Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences in Uttar Pradesh; Institute of Post Graduate Medical Education and Research in West Bengal and Osmania Medical College in Telangana.

Lakhimpur Medical College and Nagoan Medical College and Hospital in Assam; Government Medical College (Betiah), Katihar Medical College (Katihar) and Madhubani Medical College in Bihar; and Andhra Medical College (Vishakhapatnam), Guntur Medical College and Kurnool Medical College in Andhra Pradesh are also on the list.

HANDCUFFED ON FLIGHT, DEPORTEES' PLIGHT RAISES A STORM IN LOK SABHA

Several opposition leaders, including the Congress' Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi, had submitted notices to move an adjournment motion over the mistreatment of deportees from the US.

The Lok Sabha was first adjourned during Question Hour and later at 12 noon when the presiding officer allowed the tabling of parliamentary papers.

BJP member Dilip Saikia, who was in the chair, adjourned the proceedings till 2:00 pm.

Similar scenes were witnessed when the House reconvened at 2:00 pm, leading to an adjournment till 3:30 pm.

Amid the sloganeering, Union Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Arjun Ram Meghwal informed the Lower House that Jaisankar would make a statement on the deportations at 3:30 pm, raising expectation that the proceedings would resume after the external affairs minister's statement.

Jaisankar said US policy on dealing with immigration had provisions to use restraints during deportations and the government would engage with the US to ensure that there was no mistreatment of returning deportees.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla adjourned the proceedings for the day as the opposition protests continued after Jaisankar's statement.

Earlier in the day, opposition leaders, including Malikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra (Congress), Akhilesh Yadav (Samajwadi Party), and those from the Left parties, protested against the treatment meted out to the Indians by US authorities by staging a demonstration in Parliament complex.

Some of the opposition leaders protested while wearing handcuffs.

Carrying placards that read "Humans. Not prisoners", the opposition leaders said they would not tolerate the insult to India and raised slogans such as "Indians insulted. India won't stay silent" against the government.

"We, the INDIA parties, shall not tolerate the humiliation of Indian nationals," they said.

RULES ALLOW FOR USE OF CHAINS: EAM

"However, we have been informed by ICE that women and children are not restrained.

Further, the needs of deportees during transit related to food and other necessities, including possible medical emergencies are attended to," he informed the house.

During toilet breaks deportees are temporarily unrestrained if needed in that regard, he said, adding, "this is applicable to chartered civilian aircraft as well as military aircraft."

"There has been no change from past procedures for the flight undertaken by the US on February 5, 2025," Jaisankar said, referring to the US military aircraft carrying 104 illegal Indian immigrants that landed in Amritsar on Wednesday.

SHORTCUT TO AMERICAN DREAM TURNS NIGHTMARE

Handa, who studied till class 12, left his native Ismail-abad village in Haryana's Kurukshetra district on July 18

last year and by the time he reached the US border, he had paid Rs 45 lakh to different agents while his mobile phone was also snatched, his father claimed.

He was handed over to the "immigration mafia" in Mexico and they tortured him for money. Here he gave them Rs 20 lakh, Singh said.

With the dreams of an improved financial condition in ruins, Singh now blames the travel agent for defrauding them with the false promise of getting Handa settled in the US.

Families of the deportees alleged that the travel agents adopted unfair means to facilitate the youths' travel to the US without their knowledge. They now seek strict action against these agents.

Among the deportees hailing from Punjab, Sukhpal Singh from Darapur village in Hoshiarpur had decided to move to the US after working as a chef in Italy for a year.

In Italy, he and two of his friends came in contact with a travel agent who promised them safe passage to the US for Rs 30 lakh each, Sukhpal told PTI on Thursday.

To pay the travel agent, he used his savings and borrowed money from his friends. The agent assured him of a flight to the US.

"Instead of being taken to the US, the group I was travelling with was taken to Nicaragua. Upon arrival, everyone's passports were confiscated by the agent's men and then began an arduous journey through Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico," Sukhpal said.

"It included a 12-hour journey in a small boat across the sea from Mexico to the US border in California. Tragically, one of my fellow travellers drowned during this dangerous journey," he said.

Sukhpal said, "Soon after reaching the US border, I and others were apprehended by US authorities and taken to a detention camp where we were held for 12 days."

He said they were treated badly in the camp, with no access to legal counsel or immigration officials. "Only snacks and beef were available. I survived on snacks as I do not consume beef," he said.

The detainees were handcuffed and their feet shackled before they were put on the flight to India. Sukhpal said those on the flight were not allowed to move from their seats and even washroom access was highly restricted.

"To avoid using the washroom, I barely ate or drank anything on the flight," he said, adding, "The shackles were removed after the flight landed in Amritsar and I was finally provided a meal."

Another deportee, Harwinder Singh (41) from Tahli village in Hoshiarpur, narrated a similar ordeal.

He left home on August 5 last year after striking a Rs 42-lakh deal with a travel agent who is also his distant relative. He was promised a visa to a European country and eventually a passage to the US. Once Harwinder reached Brazil, his family paid Rs 25 lakh to the travel agent as agreed.

Though he was told that he had a flight from Belem, he was forced to undertake a journey by road through Ecuador and Colombia, finally reaching Panama. There, he was forced to pay the remaining amount to the travel agent in India.

From Panama, he and many others were compelled to embark on a perilous journey through a dangerous 'dunki' route to enter the United States. Harwinder said that he was along with many others were arrested at the US border.

Having exhausted his family's savings for nought, Harwinder now demands help from the Punjab government to recover the money paid to the travel agent.

Daler Singh, who hails from Salampur village in Amritsar, too said that he was cheated by the travel agent who had promised to take him to the US legally. He, however, was taken to Brazil via Dubai and then had to traverse the infamous 'dunki' route.

Singh (37), who was a driver before deciding to migrate to the US, said, "I raised the money by borrowing from relatives and friends, besides mortgaging our farmland."

"I wanted to migrate to the US for a better future for my family," he added.

Pardeep Singh (22), who hails from Lalru in Amritsar, reached the US after travelling across countries for six months. He was arrested immediately after reaching the US border by the patrolling forces, his family said.

His parents took a loan of Rs 41 lakh to send him to the US. Now, they do not know how they will pay it back.

Harpreet Singh Laliya, a resident of Maharashtra's Nagpur who was deported from the US on Wednesday, claimed that he had planned to go to Canada but a mistake by his agent got him in ignominy with handcuffs and chains around his legs.

He also rued the loss of Rs 50 lakh he raised from banks and kin to migrate, besides enduring gruelling treks to get to the US and the gut-wrenching uncertainty that accompanied every step.

He travelled to Guatemala on flights with short stays in

Egypt and Spain. From there he was sent to Nicaragua, and then to the US border via Honduras and Mexico. His ordeal included being "caught by the mafia in Mexico and held by them for 10 days", a four-hour mountain trek in that nation and then a gruelling 16-hour walk to the US border, Laliya told reporters.

Three Uttar Pradesh men -- Rakshit Baliyan (19) of Raulpur Jatan village and Devindra Singh (38) of Marakpur village in Muzaffarnagar district and Gurpreet Singh (24) from Pilibhit district -- were among the 104 Indians deportees.

Rakshit Baliyan's father Sudhir Baliyan, a retired Army jawan, told PTI that his son had gone to the US seven months ago and was working in a private company.

Sudhir Baliyan, who owns 20 bighas of agricultural land, said his son would continue his education. "My son has passed his Class 12 examination. He will continue his education since he is interested in pursuing a B.Tech degree," he said.

Kulbir Singh, father of Devindra Singh, the other deportee from UP's Muzaffarnagar, said his son had left for the US two months ago. He was caught shortly after arriving in the US and remained in custody at a detention camp until his deportation.

Jayantibhai Patel, a resident of Gujarat's Vadodara district, could not hold back his emotions after seeing his daughter, who was deported from the US, reaching home safely.

Khushbu Patel (29) too was handcuffed during the journey onboard the US military aircraft which landed in Amritsar on Wednesday, her brother said, adding she had gone to the US on a tourist visa.

"She was deported for not having some documents. We don't know what route she had taken to reach the US. She is not in a position to speak now because of the 36-hour journey," he said.

Her father Jayantibhai Patel said, "I was under enormous stress. Now I am extremely happy that she has come back safely. Our Government has helped us in every way. I have no idea how she reached the US and what exactly happened to her there," he said.

MORE OBITS ON PG 12

DEATH AND FUNERAL ANNOUNCEMENT

MARIA AUGUSTA FERNANDES e BORGES
Igrejwado, Agonda, Canacona -Goa

DOB: 1-12-1942 | DOD: 06-02-2025

Relict of (Late) Emiliano Borges, Mother/ Mother-in-law of Tomacina / Abel Fernandes, Benny/Joao Francisco (Siridao), Adriana, Abel Tome Borges (Ex-Sarpanch VP Agonda) / Sherona, Anthony, (Late) Assunta/Officio Feli Afonso, Grandmother of Myron, Joeben, Joywin, Avilon, Joycece, Lency, Valankai (Eva), Asvil, and Venezia.

Funeral cortege will leave her residence at Igrejwado, Agonda, at 3.30pm on Friday 7th Feb 2025 to St. Anne's Church, Agonda for Eucharistic celebrations and thereafter for burial at Church Cemetery.

Relative, friends and neighbours may kindly accept this as only intimation

FIRST DEATH ANNIVERSARY

REV. FR. JOSE FRANCISCO DIAS, SFX

Born: 19-04-1940 | Ordained: 08-06-1969 | Died: 09-02-2024

The Superior General and confreres of the Society of Pillar will celebrate the Eucharist for the soul of their beloved confrere **REV. FR. JOSE DIAS, SFX** (From Silvassa, Dadra and Nagar Haveli) on **8th February 2025, Saturday at 04:00 p.m.**, in the **Pillar Monastery Church**, followed by prayers at the grave