

India launches, deploys Cartosat, 30 satellites in Earth's orbit

Sriharikota (Andhra Pradesh), Jan 12 : India on Friday deployed a remote sensing Cartosat and 30 other satellites, including 28 from six countries, into the Earth's orbit after a copybook launch of a polar rocket from its spaceport here in Andhra Pradesh.

"The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C40) deployed India's 710-kg Cartosat and 10-kg nano satellite and 100-kg micro-sat along with 28 foreign satellites into the Earth's orbit after a perfect lift-off from the launch pad," said outgoing Indian Space Research Organisation Chairman A.S. Kiran Kumar at the mission control facility, about 80 km northeast of Chennai.

The four-stage rocket had deployed the Cartosat-2 in the sun synchronous orbit about 17 minutes 33 seconds after its lift-off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota High Altitude Range (SDSC-SHAR).

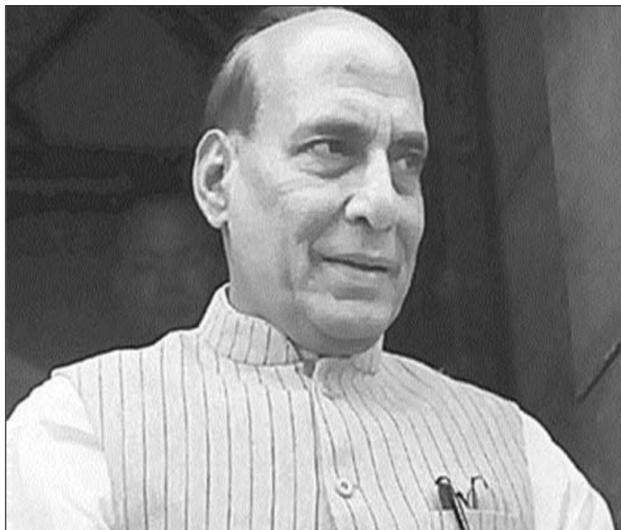
The Cartosat-2 was injected into its 505-km sun synchronous orbit. It has a five-year life span.

The 100-kg micro satellite, which was India's 100th satellite, was slotted into its sun synchronous orbit, at an altitude of 359 km above the Earth.

The mission control had fired the engines to restart the fourth stage for lowering the rocket to deploy the micro satellite in its intended orbit. The first space mission in 2018 on board the PSLV-C40 comes four months after a similar rocket failed to deliver the country's eighth navigation satellite in the earth's lower orbit on August 31, 2017.

"We took rigorous measures to ensure that the heat shield issue that prevented the last mission (PSLV-C39) from deploying the satellites would not be repeated," Kumar asserted. The rocket carried a total of 31 satellites, among which three were Indian: Cartosat-2, nano satellite and micro satellite. The performance of the deployed Cartosat-2 was satisfactory as monitored by the mission control facility, Kumar added.

Rajnath assures expedited environmental clearance for strategic projects



New Delhi, Jan 12 : Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said the government will expedite forest and environmental clearance issues that bog down strategic projects and that relaxations will be obtained to facilitate completion of projects in national interest.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also laid emphasis on the subject, Rajnath Singh said at the inau-

guration of 43rd Annual Day function of the MES Builders Association of India here.

Military Engineer Services (MES) is one of the largest government construction agencies in India and provides works cover to Army, Navy and Air Force. It has a large number of units and sub units spread across the entire country.

"The government will expedite

forest and environmental clearance issues which still continue to dog such strategic projects.

The relaxations will be obtained to facilitate completion of projects in national interest," Rajnath Singh said.

He also said the government has embarked upon a five year ambitious project during 2017-2022 worth over "seven lakh crore rupees to build road infrastructure".

"The project includes more than 2,000 km border roads," the Minister said.

He also highlighted the importance of Private-Public Partnership model, saying "it would be crucial to create strategic infrastructure in the country".

Pointing out that e-tendering process has led to transparency, he said quality delivery of the projects will be paramount.

The Minister also called upon the paramilitary forces and armed forces for better coordination on the creation of border infrastructure.

"For the first time in India's history, this government has continued to roll out economic reforms even while the economic situation in the country has remained comfortable; normally the previous governments were compelled on the path of reforms after landing in dire financial position," he said.

Congress says SC judges' revolt is 'extremely disturbing'

New Delhi, Jan 12 : The Congress on Friday described the comments made by four Supreme Court judges as "extremely disturbing" and appealed to the Full Court of the Supreme Court to find solutions to preserve the independence of the judiciary even as party President Rahul Gandhi demanded that its senior-most judges should supervise an SIT probe into the mysterious death of Special CBI Judge B. H. Loya.

The Congress issued a statement after Gandhi met senior party leaders, including P. Chidambaram and Kapil Sibal who are also leading lawyers, and discussed the situation arising out of the press conference by four senior-most judges -- Justices J. Chelameswar, Ranjan Gogoi, Kurian Joseph and Madan B. Lokur -- who were critical of Chief Justice Dipak Misra.

The Congress and Gandhi demanded that the PIL concerning the death of Judge B. H. Loya, who was hearing the Sohrabuddin fake shootout case, should be entrusted to the senior-most judges of the Supreme Court who should ensure a thorough and impartial investigation of the case by an independent SIT.

Gandhi, who made a brief statement to the media, said it was "a sensitive and important matter" and that "the points raised by the judges are extremely important".

"The points that have been raised by the four judges are extremely important.

They have mentioned that there is a threat to democracy. I think it needs to be looked into carefully." "They have also made a point about Judge Loya's case. I think that is also something that needs to be investigated properly. It needs to be looked at from the highest levels of the Supreme Court."

He said the press conference by judges "never happened before". "It's unprecedented. I think all citizens who love the idea of justice, who believe in the Supreme Court are looking at this issue."

CJI faces revolt from four senior most SC judges

New Delhi, Jan 12 : Divisions in the Supreme Court burst out in the open on Friday when four senior most judges took an unprecedented step of addressing the media to accuse Chief Justice Dipak Misra of breaching rules in assigning cases to appropriate benches, with one of them pointing to the plea regarding the mysterious death of Special CBI judge B. H. Loya.

At a hurriedly called press conference at his residence, Justice J. Chelameswar and three other colleagues said the Supreme Court administration was "not in order" and their efforts to persuade Justice Misra even this morning "with a specific request" failed, forcing them to "communicate with the nation" directly.

The four judges -- Justices Ranjan Gogoi, Kurian Joseph and Madan B. Lokur besides Justice Chelameswar -- released a letter they wrote to Justice Misra a couple of months ago, conceding that he was the master of roster but that was "not a recognition of any superior authority, legal or factual of the Chief Justice over his colleagues".

Asked specifically if they were upset over reference of the matter seeking a probe into the suspicious death of Judge Loya, Justice Gogoi said: "Yes."

Judge Loya, who was hearing a case relating to the killing of gangster Sohrabuddin Sheikh in an alleged fake shootout in which BJP chief Amit Shah was named an accused (later discharged), died of cardiac arrest in 2014. His family has raised doubts over the circumstances in which Judge Loya died and have sought an independent probe into it.

Pleas seeking probe came up for a hearing in the Supreme Court on Friday when the top court expressed concerns over it and said it was a "serious issue". It asked the Maharashtra government to produce all the documents related to the case before January 15.

In a seven-page letter, the four judges said they were not mentioning details of the cases only to avoid embarrassing the institution because "such departures have already damaged the images of this institution to some extent". The clash among the judges in the highest court also

comes in the wake of a controversial order in November in which Justice Misra declared that the Chief Justice "is the master of the roster" having exclusive power to decide which case will go to which judge.

The CJI had given the order a day after a two-judge bench headed by Justice Chelameswar had passed an order that a five-judge bench of senior most judges in the apex court should be set up to consider an independent probe into a corruption case in which bribes were allegedly taken in the name of settling cases pending before Supreme Court judges. Holding that the Chief Justice was only the first among equals, the four judges contended that there were well-settled and time-honoured conventions guiding the Chief Justice in dealing with the strength of the bench required or the composition thereof.

"A necessary corollary to the above mentioned principle is the members of any multi-numbered judicial body, including this court, would not arrogate to themselves the authority to deal with and pronounce upon matters

which ought to be heard by appropriate benches, both composition-wise and strength-wise with due regard to the roster fixed," they wrote in the letter.

They said any departure from the two rules would not only lead to "unpleasant and undesirable consequences of creating doubt in the body politic about the integrity of the institution" but would create "chaos".

The four judges also touched upon another controversial issue, the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) on appointment of judges over which the Supreme Court had locked horns with the government.

The government, the letter said, had not responded to the communication and "in view of this silence it must be taken that the MoP has been accepted by the government on the basis of the order of this court".

Justice Chelameswar told the media that they were "convinced that unless this institution is protected and maintains its requirements, democracy will not survive in the country or any country... The hallmark of a democracy is independent and impartial judges.

Mumbai pub blaze: 913 illegal structures razed in 14 days

Mumbai, Jan 12 : Continuing its single-biggest drive against illegal constructions after the December 29 Mumbai pub blaze that claimed 14 lives, the BMC has razed a whopping 913 unauthorised structures which could be hazardous in case of a fire, an official said here on Friday.

"The demolished structures include hotels, restaurants, pubs, bakeries, big and small eateries and places where bulk foods are prepared across the city," said an official spokesperson for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). In the ongoing action on Friday, the demolition squads sealed eight restaurants/ establishments not complying with fire safety norms, illegal constructions were demolished at 52 places and 271 others were warned to comply immediately, besides seizing 197 gas cylinders. Since December 30 till January 12, the BMC has inspected 2,568 establishments from the fire safety perspective and seized a whopping 1,410 gas cylinders. The Corporation has issued notices to 718 establishments to carry out necessary fire safety amendments since the tragedy. The total number of establishments sealed for large-scale irregularities including non-com-

pliance of fire norms has now touched 55, including the eight shut on Friday.

The 52 BMC teams set up for the purpose in 24 divisions include personnel of the Mumbai Fire Brigade, Health Department, Building & Factory Department, who scrutinize construction-related works, entrances-exists, open spaces, etc., and break down illegal doors within the premises.

The BMC's massive drive, termed as "belated" by some, came after a raging inferno in two rooftop pubs -- Mojo's Bistro and Above restaurants -- in the Kamala Mills Compound in Lower Parel killed 14 patrons and injured another 55.

In a related incident, Maharashtra Congress's Leader of Opposition Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil on Friday demanded a probe by the CBI into the pub blaze and suspension of BMC Commissioner Ajoy Mehta. "The BMC Commissioner has publicly admitted that he has received calls from some politicians pressurizing him to 'go slow' on the illegal constructions drive, but he has not revealed the identity of the callers. The series of fire incidents in the city which claimed many innocent lives are an outcome of the illegalities perpetrated by the BMC," Vikhe-Patil said.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump denies 'crude outburst' against migrant countries



Washington, Jan 12 : US President Donald Trump, who reportedly slammed presence of migrants

and African countries.

"The language used by me at the DACA meeting was tough, but this was not the language used," Trump tweeted after reports of his remarks sparked international outrage with the UN's human rights office calling them "racist" and "shameful".

"Never said anything derogatory about Haitians other than Haiti is, obviously, a very poor and troubled country. Never said 'take them out'. Made up by Dems. I have a wonderful relationship with Haitians. Probably should record future meetings - unfortunately, no trust!"

Reports earlier quoted Trump, in an Oval Office meeting on Thursday, as asking why the US would accept more immigrants

from Haiti and "s**thole countries" in Africa rather than places like Norway. "Why do we need more Haitians... Take them out," Trump was quoted as saying.

Trump's reported remark came as both Republican and Democratic lawmakers visited him on Thursday to propose a deal on immigration, the BBC reported.

In Thursday's meeting, lawmakers were reportedly proposing restoring the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) permits for certain countries, while offering \$1.5bn for a wall that Trump wants built on the US border with Mexico. Reacting to Trump's remarks on Thursday, Elijah Cummings, a Maryland

Democratic lawmaker, tweeted: "I condemn this unforgivable statement and this demeaning of the office of the Presidency."

Mia Love, a Utah Republican and the only Haitian-American in Congress, demanded Trump apologise for the "unkind, divisive, elitist" comments.

The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) accused the president of falling "deeper and deeper into the rabbit hole of racism and xenophobia", the BBC reported.

Three weeks ago, The New York Times reported that Trump had said Haitians "all have Aids" during a similar June meeting.

'A mad scramble': How Trump tweet on Pakistan blindsided U.S. officials

Washington, Jan 12 : A surprise New Year's Day tweet by President Donald Trump in which he appeared to decree an end to U.S. aid for Pakistan, sent U.S. officials scrambling to suspend security assistance without even knowing how much aid they were freezing, four U.S. officials said. The decision to freeze up to about \$2 billion in security aid, according to a later estimate by U.S. officials, to a nuclear-armed ally is the latest example of how, nearly a year into Trump's presidency, U.S. officials sometimes have to scurry to turn his tweets into policy.

(For a graphic on historical U.S. aid to Pakistan, click tmsnrt.rs/2DbVEyQ

The Trump administration had been weighing an aid freeze for months, including in a meeting of top national security advisers before Christmas. Washington has for years demanded that Islamabad stop providing sanctuary and other support for the Afghan Taliban and the allied Haqqani network.

At the time of Trump's tweet, a U.S. assessment of Pakistani compliance with those demands was still under way. A cohesive U.S. policy - including preparations for possible Pakistani reaction - was not expected to be completed until March or April, three U.S. officials interviewed said.

"None of the elements of a coherent policy was in place, or even close at hand, when the president, in effect, made a policy announcement," said one U.S. official, who like others spoke on condition of anonymity. "Despite a mad scramble to backfill a tweet, we still don't have ... an effective policy in place."

Michael Anton, a spokesman for the National Security Council, did not address whether the tweet had sped up the policy process, saying Trump had made clear his intent to take a new, tougher

stance toward Pakistan as part of the Afghanistan war strategy he unveiled in August.

"This action is being taken after months of careful interagency review. Any suggestion to the contrary is false," he said.

The State Department declined to comment.

Trump was at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida when he posted his tweet at 7:12 a.m. on Jan. 1, after hosting a lavish New Year's Eve party. Until then he had kept a relatively low public profile while he mostly golfed.

The United States, he tweeted, had "foolishly" given Pakistan more than \$33 billion in aid and "they have given us nothing but lies and deceit, thinking our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!"

It is not clear what prompted Trump to issue the tweet, which infuriated Pakistani officials. Pakistan's National Security Committee of senior civilian and military chiefs denounced it as "completely incomprehensible." U.S. Ambassador David Hale was summoned to the foreign ministry for an explanation.

Israel's Netanyahu eyes trade, defence ties on India trip

Israel, Jan 12 : Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu begins a six-day visit to India on Sunday hoping to boost trade ties and iron out differences arising from New Delhi's decision to scrap a defence deal, officials from both countries said. Israel's state-owned defence contractor Rafael announced on Jan. 3 that India had cancelled a \$500 million order to buy its Spike anti-tank guided missiles. Indian media said Delhi would instead opt for home-made anti-tank missiles.

"If there is a problem, it can, it should and it will be solved," said Daniel Carmon, Israel's ambassador to India

referring to the cancellation of the defence deal. India is Israel's biggest arms market, buying around \$1 billion worth of weapons every year. Despite the cancellation of the missile deal, India's Defence Ministry said this month it had cleared a plan worth \$72 million to buy 131 Barak surface-to-air missiles built by Rafael.

The two countries have grown closer since Narendra Modi became Indian prime minister in 2014, widening commercial cooperation beyond their long-standing defence ties.

Netanyahu will be accompanied by a 130-member delegation drawn from the

cyber and agriculture sectors as well as from defence. As well as New Delhi, they will also visit India's financial capital Mumbai and Modi's home-state of Gujarat.

"The intention of the prime minister and the whole delegation is to boost trade, investment and tourism between both countries," said Gilad Cohen, deputy director-general for Asia and the Pacific in Israel's foreign ministry.

Deals for gas and oil cooperation, cyber security and agricultural projects are on the agenda. The trip comes about half a year after Modi became the first sitting Indian prime minister to visit

Israel. On that trip Modi did not travel to the occupied West Bank to meet Palestinian leaders, as visiting leaders usually do. However, India was among more than 120 countries last month to vote in favour of a resolution calling for the United States to drop its recent recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

The status of Jerusalem is one of the thorniest obstacles to a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, who want East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state. Carmon said India's vote against Israel at the U.N. General Assembly on the Jerusalem issue would not affect bilateral ties.