

Parrikar denies quitting Centre over Kashmir, Opposition calls him 'bhagoda'

Panaji, April 15 : Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar on Saturday denied media reports that he quit as Defence Minister due to "pressure" over the Kashmir issue, but Opposition parties lashed out at the BJP leader, accusing him of being "anti-national" and a "bhagoda" (deserter). All India Congress Committee Secretary Girish Chodankar said the only thing Parrikar had learnt from Pakistan, during his stint as Defence Minister, was staging coups, referring to the 'coup' staged by the BJP, which upstaged the Congress to come to power in Goa last month.

"The Congress believes that securing the borders of the country are more important than becoming Chief Minister of Goa. Parrikar's return to Goa is an 'anti-national' act. He has clearly run away from the Defence Ministry. In fact, Parrikar was the worst Defence Minister India has ever had," Chodankar told reporters at a press conference in Panaji at the party's state headquarters.

"The only thing Parrikar has learnt from Pakistan as Defence Minister is how to stage coups, which are popular in Pakistan, where the army dethrones popularly elected governments. No wonder Parrikar staged a coup in Goa, where he led the BJP to power using unfair means," Chodankar said. Reports in a section of the media on Friday quoted Parrikar as saying that he had quit his sensitive central ministry brief because of pressures generated by the Kashmir crisis, among other issues. Parrikar on Saturday took to Twitter to post a clarification, saying the news report was "factually incorrect". The BJP media cell in Goa said the Chief Minister had been misquoted. "This is to clarify that Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar has never given any such statement that he had pressure of any sort working as Defence Minister," a statement issued by the Goa BJP media cell stated.

Farooq Abdullah wins Srinagar by-poll, calls for Governor's rule

Srinagar, April 15 : National Conference President Farooq Abdullah on Saturday won the by-poll to the Srinagar-Budgam parliamentary seat, that was marred by large-scale violence and very poor turnout on balloting day. The former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister urged the central government to impose Governor's rule in the state, terming the election as the "bloodiest ever".

Abdullah defeated the ruling Peoples Democratic Party's Nazir Ahmad Khan by 10,776 votes.

Of the 89,865 votes cast, Farooq polled 48,555 while Khan polled 37,779. A total of 963 people voted for NOTA (none of the above), election officials said.

The NC said it would not celebrate the victory because of the violence on polling day on April 9 in which eight civilians died in firing by security forces.

Addressing reporters after his win, Abdullah



urged the BJP-led central government to dismiss the ruling BJP-PDP alliance.

"I request the Government of India and the President to dismiss the present government right away. Governor's rule should be imposed and elections conducted under Governor's rule," Farooq told the media.

Thanking the people who supported him, he said: "This was the bloodiest election ever. I am not happy with the win. But results show that people are in favour of NC."

In a statement issued by the party, spokesperson Junaid Azim Mattu said, "We won't celebrate the victory in the by-poll in

view of the deaths that occurred on balloting day."

Voting for the parliamentary seat saw a record low turnout of 7 per cent on April 9. Re-polling was held on April 13 for 38 polling stations in Budgam district, that saw a mere 2 per cent balloting. There were nine candi-

dates in the fray, but the main battle was between PDP's Khan and Abdullah.

Abdullah, 79, a two-time Chief Minister, will be Lok Sabha member for the third time. He had lost the Srinagar constituency to PDP's Tariq Hameed Karra in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

BJP cheated people to come to power, Akhilesh alleges

Lucknow, April 15 : Former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Samajwadi Party (SP) President Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of cheating the people to win power in the state.

Addressing a press conference, the 44-year-old leader also alleged that the electronic voting machines (EVMs) were manipulated and tampered to favour the BJP in the state assembly elections.

"I met lots of party workers and supporters, who told me that they were bewildered over the victory of BJP,

as many of them had pressed the button against SP symbol," he said, adding that people had lost faith in EVMs. He also demanded that all future polls in the state be held through the tradi-

tional ballot papers method.

The SP also started a membership drive from Saturday.

Akhilesh Yadav said the party had decided to involve all sections of the society in party work.

He also accused the state's Yogi Adityanath government of taking credit for the work done by his government in the past.

"We worked a lot to change the power scenario in state, got many sub-stations made and installed new transformers,"

he said while pointing out that the present BJP government was now taking credit for all this.

He also alleged that there was law and order failure in the state under the watch

of the Chief Minister and said that only recently the BJP workers had

bashed up police officials in Kannauj.

"People are being set afire alive, rapes have increased and the state government is doing nothing," Yadav said pointing out how during the SP government even a small crime was blown out of proportions to defame it.

Akhilesh Yadav also rebutted the charges levelled by Union Power Minister Piyush Goel on Friday that

Uttar Pradesh was deprived of the benefits of many central government-aided schemes, including "Power for All", as he wanted his picture to be displayed over everything relating to the schemes.

"I had only said that if Prime Minister's picture will be there, then the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's should also be there," he said.

- Over two dozen students injured in Kashmir clashes



Srinagar, April 15 : Over two dozen students were injured in clashes with the security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama town on Saturday, police said.

Students of a local college objected to the setting up of a 'Naka' (check-post) outside the college and engaged in stone-pelting at the security forces, police said.

Security forces used tear smoke shells to dis-

perse the protesting students who kept on regrouping to engage the security forces in pitched clashes.

Reports from the town said around two dozens students including some girls were injured in these clashes.

One of the protesting students was hit on the head by a tear smoke canister and has been shifted to Srinagar city for treatment.

INTERNATIONAL

Two killed in US restaurant shooting

Washington, April 15 : A shooting at a crowded restaurant in an Arizona state mall has left two dead authorities said.

The incident happened at the Firebirds restaurant inside the La Encantada mall in north Tucson during an altercation between three people who knew each other. The fight led to the shooting at about 7.30 p.m. on Friday said officials. The shooting was confined to the restaurant

said Pima County Sheriff's Department spokesman Cody Gress reported CNN on Saturday.

One woman was injured with a gunshot to the leg and is being treated at a local hospital Gress said.

All three individuals were known to each other but the specifics of the relationship are unknown he said. Authorities said it's unclear how the situation escalated into a shooting. It looked like two gen-

tleman were fighting it was hard to tell witness Laura Harder told CNN affiliate KGUN-TV in Tucson.

I saw a gun come out and he just shot him in the head right in front of us.

Harder said the restaurant was full when she noticed something was happening at a nearby table.

After the shooting she saw how the gunman grabbed the other man s

company by the arm and pushed her down a hallway.

Harder heard two more gunshots while crawling on the ground for an exit.

I assumed he had shot her she said.

As gunshots erupted patrons began screaming and running out of the restaurant.

There were probably about 10 shots. It was pretty harrowing said another witness.

Former Afghan president calls decision to drop massive U.S. bomb 'treason'

Kabul, April 15 : Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai accused his successor on Saturday of committing treason by allowing the U.S. military to drop the largest conventional bomb ever used in combat during an operation against Islamic State militants in Afghanistan.

Karzai, who also vowed to "stand against America", retains considerable influence within Afghanistan's majority Pashtun ethnic group, to which President Ashraf Ghani also belongs. His strong words could signal a broader political backlash that may endanger the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan.

Afghan defense officials have said the 21,600-pound (9,797-kg) GBU-43, dropped late on Thursday in the eastern province of Nangarhar, had killed nearly 100 suspected militants, though they acknowledged this

was an estimate and not based on an actual body count. "How could you permit Americans to bomb your country with a device equal to an atom bomb?" Karzai said at a public event in Kabul, questioning Ghani's decision. "If the government has permitted them to do this, that was wrong and it has committed a national treason."

Ghani's office said the strike had been closely coordinated between Afghan and U.S. forces and replied to Karzai's charges with a statement saying: "Every Afghan has the right to speak their mind. This is a country of free speech."

Public reaction to Thursday's strike has been mixed, with some residents near the blast praising Afghan and U.S. troops for pushing back the Islamic State militants. While the bomb has been described as one of the largest non-nuclear

Rajya Rani derailment: Rampur SP says cannot rule out sabotage, Adityanath and Prabhu announce compensation

Lucknow, April 15 : A three-foot portion of the track where eight coaches of the Rajya Rani Express derailed on Saturday was missing and sabotage angle cannot be ruled out, Uttar Pradesh police said.

KK Chaudhri, Rampur SP, who visited the accident site, said the track was found broken and some of its portion buried. "Sabotage cannot be ruled out," he said when asked about possible reasons behind the accident.

A railway source in New Delhi also said the derailment was caused, prima facie, due to the rail fracture. "Weld was found broken. But the reason of the fracture would be ascertained through investigation only," the source said.

Chaudhri said an investigation has been initiated and entire fact would come out only after its completion.

The accident occurred two kilometers from Rampur junction and about 100 meters from the Kosi river bridge.

While Rampur police said 15 passengers were injured, three of them seriously, the railways have maintained that only two passengers—Amit Katiyar and Megh Singh—have received injuries.

According to the police, seven passengers have been discharged from the district hospital after first aid treatment.

The three seriously injured passengers are out of danger, the SP said. Several senior railway and police officers are present on the site.

Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath have announced a compensation of Rs 50,000 for each of the seriously injured passengers in the derailment of the Rajya Rani Express near Rampur on Saturday. The railway Minister has also ordered an enquiry into the accident.

Eight coaches of Lucknow-bound Meerut-

Lucknow Rajya Rani Express derailed at 8.15 am near Rampur in Uttar Pradesh leaving at least two passengers injured. Railways sources said two of the eight affected coaches have capsized.

However, there was no casualty, Northern Railway spokesperson Neeraj Sharma said.

"Personally monitoring situation. Directed senior officers to rush to the spot. Ensure speedy relief and rescue operations (sic)," Prabhu tweeted.

The Minister also said on the social networking site that an enquiry has been ordered and strict action will be taken against defaulters.

Adityanath also announced a compensation of Rs 50,000 to those seriously injured in accident while Rs 25,000 to those who suffered minor injuries, a state government spokesman said.

The CM has asked Minister of State for Irrigation Baldev Olakh to distribute the financial help on the spot, the spokesperson said.

Adityanath has asked district officials to continue the relief and rescue operations on a war footing and directed the Chief Secretary, and the Principal Secretary, Home, to effectively monitor them.

Top railways officials, including Moradabad DRM Pramod Kumar, have reached the spot and medical teams have been pressed into action. Meanwhile, IG ATS, Aseem Arun, has rushed a team to Rampur to probe the matter keeping in mind the "sensitivity" of the issue, a UP home department spokesman said.

ASP Noida, ATS, Brijesh Kumar has left for Rampur and a team already present on the spot has started the probe, he said.

The Railways have also operationalised help-lines to facilitate communication between the affected passengers and their family members.

North Korea 'ready for nuclear attack'

Pyongyang, April 15 : North Korea on Saturday warned the US not to take provocative action in the region, saying it is "ready to hit back with nuclear attacks".

The comments came as North Korea marked the 105th anniversary of the birth of its founding President, Kim Il-sung, grandfather of leader Kim Jong-un.

A huge parade in Pyongyang was held amid speculation that current leader Kim Jong-un could order a new nuclear test, reported BBC.

Among the hardware on display appeared to be new intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

On display for the first time were what appeared to be the Pukukksong submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), which have a range of more than 1,000 km.

Weapons analysts said there also appeared to be two new types of intercontinental ballistic missiles in canister launchers, but it remains unclear whether they have been tested. The show of strength comes

amid mounting tension, with a US aircraft carrier group steaming towards the region.

"We're prepared to respond to an all-out war with an all-out war," said Choe Ryong-hae, believed to be the country's second most powerful official. "We are ready to hit back with nuclear attacks of our own style against any nuclear attacks," he said. Rows of military bands and goose-stepping and sword-wielding soldiers marched through Pyongyang's main Kim Il-sung square for the "Day of the Sun" celebrations, as a black-suited Kim Jong-un watched. He was seen clapping and smiling from a reviewing box.

Pictures on state television showed thousands of soldiers marching in formation alongside tanks, balloons and enormous crowds. During the pomp and circumstance at Kim Il-sung square, citizens showed their revolutionary fervour with choreographed performances while

vehicles displaying North Korea's military arsenal rolled

by. On Friday, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi warned that "conflict could break out at any moment", adding that if war occurred there could be no winner.

Unlike at previous Pyongyang parades there did not appear to be any Chinese representatives present, according to a BBC report.

Adding to Chinese unease, US President Donald Trump said on Thursday that "the problem of North Korea" would be "taken care of".

"If China decides to help, that would be great. If not, we will solve the problem without them! USA."

Vice-President Mike Pence will be in South Korea on Sunday as part of a 10-day Asia trip.

The aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson and an accompanying battle group have also been sent to the Korean peninsula.

"We are sending an armada. Very powerful," Trump had told the Fox Business Network. "He is doing the wrong thing," he said of Kim Jong-un. "He's making a big mistake."

16 killed in Sri Lanka garbage dump collapse

Colombo, April 15 : At least 16 persons died after a rubbish dump collapsed and buried their homes under tonnes of garbage outside the Sri Lankan capital, officials said.

"Sixteen people died and seven were injured after the collapse of the Meethotamulla rubbish dump, a worker at the Sri Lanka Disaster Management Centre (DMC) told Efe news.

The 300-foot-high pile had shifted

after floods and a fire, and subsequently collapsed on Friday evening onto homes located around the dump, where some 600 people lived, the official said.

Rescue and emergency services were still working in the area.

According to reports, over 60 houses were damaged, with some witnesses saying more than 100 homes were destroyed.

Several others were admitted to

hospital for treatment and over 180 people have been displaced, officials said.

Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena instructed the Disaster Management Centre to provide assistance to the affected families.

The residents of the area have been protesting over the past several months urging the authorities to move the garbage to another location.