

Lok Sabha functions under rules, no member has privilege to speak beyond framework: Birla

NEW DELHI: The House functions strictly according to rules and no member has the privilege to speak at any time and on any subject, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla asserted on Thursday, a day after a resolution seeking his removal from office was defeated.

Birla said the Chair does not belong to any individual, but is a symbol of the prestige of the House.

The Lok Sabha will continue to function according to laid down rules and procedures irrespective of whether it is acceptable to any member or not, he said, underlining that he will conduct the proceedings with sincerity and fairness.

"No member in this House possesses any privilege to speak outside the framework of these rules," Birla said amid thumping of desks by the ruling side.

He said he was grateful to the members of the House for reposing their faith in him during debate. He also thanked all those who spoke in favour of him as well as against him.

"The House has been



running with rules and regulations and will continue to function in future, irrespective of whether it is acceptable to any member or not. I will continue to discharge my duty with all sincerity and impartiality," he said.

Thursday was the first time Birla came to the House to conduct the proceedings since the notice of no confidence was given against him by the opposition on February 10 during the first part of the Budget session, which ended on

February 13. The second part of the session began on March 9.

The speaker said that during the debate over the last two days, some members said Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi is not given enough opportunities to speak, and he should be allowed to speak whenever he wishes and on any subject.

"Everyone has the right to speak in the House, but by following rules and regulations. No member, not even the prime minister

or any minister, can speak without the permission of the Chair. No member of the House has the privilege to speak at any time and on any subject. He can speak only when the Chair allows," he said.

Birla said the MPs have the freedom of speech in the House, but they have to follow rules and regulations.

He also addressed allegations that microphones of some members are switched off when they want to speak.

"I don't have a switch to turn the mic on or off. The mic is put on when a member is given permission to speak by the Chair," he said.

Responding to claims that Gandhi was disallowed to table a magazine article based on the unpublished memoir of former Army chief M M Naravane on the India-China conflict of 2020, Birla cited rulings by past speakers when members were not allowed to table documents by the Chair.

Soon after his speech, Birla adjourned the House till 2 pm.

ED attaches fresh Rs 581-cr assets in case against Anil Ambani's Reliance Group

NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday said it has attached fresh assets worth more than Rs 581 crore of RHFL and RCFL, companies of Reliance Group Chairman Anil Ambani.

An order was issued on March 11 to attach land parcels in Goa, Kerala, Karnataka, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Delhi, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said in a statement.

The properties worth Rs 581.65 crore belong to Reliance Home Finance Limited (RHFL) and Reliance Commercial Finance Limited (RCFL), the agency said.

"The attachment follows search operations conducted on March 6 in the case against Reliance Power Limited under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA)," it said.

R N Ravi takes oath as 22nd Governor of West Bengal

KOLKATA: Former IPS officer R N Ravi on Thursday took oath as the 22nd governor of West Bengal at a ceremony in the Lok Bhavan here.

He was administered the oath of office by Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court, Sujoy Paul, in the presence of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Assembly Speaker Biman Banerjee, senior minister and Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim and Left Front chairman Biman Bose.

No leader from the opposition BJP camp, however, was present at the programme. Several bureaucrats, including Chief Secretary Nandini Chakravorty and senior police officers, also attended the event. The ceremony began with the singing of the national song and anthem.

Ravi was presented the Guard of Honour at Lok Bhavan, before he was



sworn in at the Sardar Patel Unity Hall. Later, the CM greeted Ravi and his wife and welcomed both by presenting traditional 'uttariyas' (stole).

During her brief interaction with the new governor, Mamata Banerjee described West Bengal as a land of culture, and that Bengali people love those who love the state.

Ravi described Kolkata as the country's cultural

capital and noted that it had served as the capital of India during the British rule, adding that he would keep a close watch on developments.

Ravi was appointed the governor of West Bengal following the resignation of his predecessor C V Ananda Bose on March 5.

He had earlier served as the governor of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Tamil Nadu.

PM Modi asking people not to panic but is himself panicked for various reasons: Rahul

NEW DELHI: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi amid concerns over reported LPG shortage, saying the PM is asking the people not to panic but is himself panicked for "completely different reasons".

Gandhi alleged that the prime minister is panicked because of the Epstein files issue and the Adani Case in the US.

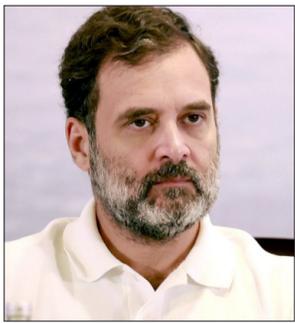
He made the remarks after several opposition MPs, including himself and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, staged a protest in the Parliament House complex over the shortage of commercial LPG cylinders to demand answers from the government over it.

Speaking with reporters after the protest, Gandhi said, "The PM is saying there is no need to panic, but the PM himself has panicked for completely different reasons... he is panicked because of Epstein, he is panicked because of the Adani case, he is not able to come inside the House."

"You saw yesterday that the prime minister's chair was empty. So, he is telling the country not to panic but has panicked himself," Gandhi added.

Several opposition MPs from the Congress, DMK, TMC and SP, among others, staged a protest near Parliament's Makar Dwar, raising slogans such as 'Naam Narendar, Kaam Surrender' and 'Modi ji, LPG'.

The women opposition MPs, including Priyanka Gandhi, sat down



with a mock brick cooking stove and raised slogans against the government.

In a post on X in Hindi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said, "When the country is grappling with a severe crisis, Prime Minister Modi ji is engrossed in election tours."

"There is a severe shortage of LPG across the country, and people are standing in queues. Countless small and large industries are being forced to bear the consequences of the BJP's failure. But the government has no answers. Only false claims," he said.

The failure of diplomacy is a serious issue, and the result of the mismanagement of energy is being borne today by the 1.4 billion people of the country, he claimed.

"Narendra Modi ji, bahut hui 'Mann ki Baat, zara sansad mein aa kar kariye

'mudde ki baat' (Enough of 'Mann Ki Baat', come to Parliament and talk on real issues)," the Congress chief said.

With the House being adjourned shortly after meeting at 11 am amid sloganeering by the opposition demanding a discussion on the West Asia situation, Gandhi sat with suspended opposition MPs on the steps of the Makar Dwar and had tea with them.

The opposition has been demanding a full-fledged discussion on the West Asia situation and its impact on India.

Prime Minister Modi on Wednesday appealed to people not to panic and assured them that public interest will be protected. He expressed confidence in tackling the LPG crisis, where the short supply of commercial LPG has crippled the country's hotel sector.

From induction cooktops and microwaves to firewood and solar options, restaurants, street food vendors, and catering businesses across the country are scrambling for alternatives as a shortage of commercial LPG cylinders begins to disrupt kitchens amid the widening conflict in West Asia.

With the government prioritising domestic cooking gas supply to households as the war disrupts global fuel lifelines, businesses dependent on commercial LPG -- from small eateries to high-end restaurants -- are watching the situation anxiously, with some even staring at possible closure in the days to come.

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a plea filed by the grand nephew of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, seeking directions to bring back to India the ashes believed to be those of Bose from Tokyo's Renkoji temple. After a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi showed its disinclination to entertain the plea, senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for petitioner Ashis Ray, sought permission to withdraw it.

The bench permitted him to withdraw the petition.

"I am appearing for the family members who want

to give a decent quietus to the ashes," Singhvi told the bench at the outset.

The CJJ asked how many times this issue would come up before the apex court.

The bench said last year itself, the top court had dismissed one petition.

Singhvi said this was not the issue that had come up before the court earlier.

"First of all, where are the ashes? What is that proof?" the CJJ said, adding that Bose was one of the greatest leaders of our nation, and we all bow down to his sacrifice.

Singhvi said it is recorded that every head of state from India has paid obeisance at the Renkoji temple in Japan.



He said the matter which the apex court had dealt with earlier was concerning declaring whether Bose had died or not.

"That is inference. Until

and unless he dies, there can't be ashes," the bench observed. "First, we would like to know how many family members are supporting this," the bench asked.

Rahul Gandhi's soul will be at peace if China, US and Russia attack India: MP Dubey

NEW DELHI: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's soul will be at peace when China, Russia and the US attack India, BJP MP Nishikant Dubey said on Thursday while accusing the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha of being involved in a conspiracy to "break" India.

"He seems to want the prime minister to abuse Donald Trump in the morning, abuse Vladimir Putin in the afternoon and in the evening abuse Xi Jinping. If the prime minister insults all three, then Rahul Gandhi's soul

will find peace," Dubey told reporters inside the Parliament House complex.

"When Russia, America and China together boycott India, or even attack India, then his heart will feel satisfied because George Soros' agenda of breaking India would have succeeded," he said. "I always say this -- there is a conspiracy to break India and Rahul Gandhi is involved in that conspiracy," he added.

Dubey, the MP from Godda in Jharkhand, also criticised former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi's deci-

sion to send the Indian Peace Keeping Force to Sri Lanka during the island nation's civil war.

"When a civil war was going on in Sri Lanka, Rajiv Gandhi forcibly sent the Indian Army there. The result was that, for the first time abroad, the prime minister of our country was attacked by soldiers of that very country," he said.

Hitting out at the opposition, Dubey said the country has never seen "such a low, undisciplined and reckless opposition".

Women in agri-food sector should get greater role in policy formation: Prez

NEW DELHI: President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said women engaged in agriculture and agri-food sectors should get a greater role in policy formation, decision-making and leadership positions, and called for collective action to close gender gaps across the value chain.

Addressing the three-day Global Conference on Women in Agri-Food Systems, the President said success case studies on women in agriculture should be published widely to ensure more people were aware of their contributions.

Emphasising India's strategic choice of women-led development, Murmu said women in the agriculture sector must be given a greater role in policy formulation, decision-making, and leadership positions.

"Larger participation of women at all levels in the sector will promote gender-inclusive agricultural growth," she said.

She called for targeted support for women farmers on issues of land titles, access to technical knowledge, and institutional finance.

On the role of technology, Murmu highlighted 'Sarlaben' -- an AI-powered initiative inspired by the government's livestock care vision -- as an example of how artificial intelligence is opening new



possibilities for women farmers.

Noting that the government had conferred Padma Shri awards on women farmers from Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Bihar, Murmu said the next generation should draw inspiration from these trailblazers to contribute meaningfully to the farm sector.

The President welcomed the UN's declaration of 2026 as the International Year of Women Farmers, describing it as a call for "collective action to close gender gaps and promote leadership roles for women across the agri-food value chain". The President cited a series of central government initiatives from the past decade that have sought to economically empower women in agriculture.

The Jan Dhan Yojana, the world's largest financial inclusion programme, now has 570 million bank accounts, of which 56 per cent are held by women. Women also constitute 68 per cent of all Mudra loan beneficiaries, reflecting the reach of India's digital public infrastructure.

Under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana -- National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) -- over 10 crore rural households and 90 lakh self-help groups (SHGs) have been mobilised, making it one of the world's largest women-led community initiatives.

More than 4.6 crore women farmers under this mission have received support for adopting improved farming practices.

The Namu Drone Didi scheme provides drones to women SHGs for precision agriculture. The National Rural Livelihood Mission has set a target of creating 6 crore Lakhpati Didis -- women earning over Rs 1 lakh annually -- of whom more than 3 crore have already achieved that status.

The 2025-26 Union Budget has also introduced SHE Marts (Self-Help Entrepreneur Marts) community-owned retail outlets in every district dedicated to marketing products made by SHGs and rural enterprises -- to provide women in agriculture and allied sectors better

market access.

Closing her address, Murmu invoked the global framework of people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership, urging all stakeholders to make gender a special priority in both thought and action.

"With effective gender inclusion in every sphere of activity, including agriculture, we will not only achieve the SDGs but will also make the planet a much more sensitive and harmonious place," she said.

Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, ICAR Director General M L Jat, Trust for Advancement of Agricultural Sciences (TAAS) founder Chairman R S Paroda, Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Authority (PPVFRA), Chairperson Trilochana Mohapatra among others were present at the event.

The three-day event focuses on sharing inspiring success stories of women leaders and scientists; integrating gender-sensitive approaches into agricultural policies and institutions; examining entrepreneurship, financial models, and market linkages to strengthen women's roles in value chains.

It will also deliberate on digital tools, climate-smart innovations, and women-friendly technologies designed to boost productivity and reduce drudgery.

No girl in Delhi should remain without graduation: CM Rekha

NEW DELHI: Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Thursday said that all the girls in Delhi should attain at least a graduation-level education.

Speaking at the convocation of Indira Gandhi Delhi Technical University for Women, she said her government is working tirelessly to provide opportunities for women.

Highlighting the Lakhpati Bitiya Yojana introduced by her government, Gupta said that under the scheme, each eligible girl will receive Rs 1.25 lakh after graduation.

"I wish no girl in Delhi would remain without graduation. Girls should not only go to schools but also attend colleges and study their favourite courses and subjects," the chief minister said.

Gupta said India is now heading towards women-led development.

She urged the students of Indira Gandhi Delhi Technical University for Women to not only fulfil their dreams and have a career but also to contribute towards the growth of society and the country.

Assassination bid on Farooq Abdullah figures in RS, opposition blames revocation of statehood

NEW DELHI: The assassination bid on former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah figured in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, with opposition parties blaming revocation of statehood for the incident, while the Centre promised a comprehensive investigation.

Leader of the Opposition in the Upper House, Mallikarjun Kharge, raised the issue when the House met for the day, saying the former chief minister's security was at risk.

"His security is under threat because statehood of Jammu and Kashmir was revoked," he said, adding that when local security and police arrangements were previously with the state government, no such incident could occur.

The situation in Jammu and Kashmir today is because the security is with the Union Home Ministry after the revocation of statehood, he alleged. "Law and order has broken down and conspiracy is being hatched to eliminate important leaders."

He said Abdullah was saved by a whisker he was fired at while leading a marriage function at the venue on the outskirts of Jammu on Wednesday night.

"Is it the intention of the

government to kill Farooq Abdullah," the Congress president asked. "If the intention was to safeguard him, he should have had full security cover."

People will be safe when the state gets full statehood, he said. "People of Kashmir are not safe in your hands," he told the Centre.

He went on to allege that there was a conspiracy being hatched to eliminate people who stand for secularism, socialism and keeping the country united.

The accused, identified as Kamal Singh Jamwal, was quickly overpowered and taken into custody.

Responding to the concerns, Leader of the House and Union Minister J P Nadda said the government will take all necessary steps to ensure the security of Abdullah.

He said that "a murderous attack" on Abdullah "is a matter of great concern and a very serious matter".

"The Government of India is taking the matter very seriously," he said, assuring a thorough investigation will be done.

The motive of the alleged assign, who has been arrested, would also be ascertained, he said, adding that appropriate action will be taken to provide security to Abdullah.