

Sabarimala reference: Cannot annihilate religion in name of reform, says Apex Court

NEW DELHI: Observing that religion cannot be "hollowed out", the Supreme Court on Wednesday said it cannot annihilate a religion in the name of reform and the matters of belief and conscience cannot be subjected to judicial debate.

A nine-judge constitution bench hearing issues pertaining to discrimination against women across religions in the country remarked that certain things have crystallised and become an essential part of the religion over the years.

The bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant, during its hearing on the tenth day, asked whether it can apply the test of equality in cases of religious freedom in complete negation of an "integral practice" of a religion.

The top court referred to constitutional aspiration on bringing about the Uniform Civil Code in the country keeping it in tune with the social reform and asked if the State fails to legislate, then can the judiciary do it.

Justice BV Nagarathna, also part of the bench, observed that different states have enacted Uniform



Civil Code to regulate marriage and succession rights of citizens and when the society is ready for it, Parliament will enact it.

The bench also comprising justices M M Sundresh, Ahsanuddin Amanullah, Aravind Kumar, Augustine George Masih, Prasanna B Varale, R Mahadevan and Joymalya Bagchi was told by senior advocate Indira Jaising, appearing for two women claiming right to enter Sabarimala temple in Kerala, that every state has made temple entry

laws and if one wants to claim his right, he has to go by the statute.

Justice Bagchi told Jaising that there is no such law in respect of non-Hindu religious institutions and can the court in its zeal for maintaining equality among citizens enforce similar directions for non-Hindu institutions, or should it defer to legislative decision.

He told the senior lawyer that the court would have consistently directed for a Uniform Civil Code. Jaising, who argued for the

whole day submitted that the question of a UCC has been placed in the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) and it is a matter of policy.

"India does not have an all-India Uniform Civil Code. But we do have central statutes like the Hindu Marriage Act, the Hindu Adoption and Guardianship Act, and the Hindu Succession Act. That is a policy decision taken by the State. They are free to change it whenever they want. I am not disputing that. But if a Uniform Civil Code is enacted, then its constitutionality may have to be examined," she submitted. Justice Bagchi said, "Our question is not on what form UCC is brought. The constitutional aspiration of UCC is admitted and the social reforms understood in Article 25 (2) (b) have to be linked with constitutional aspirations of DPSP that it will bring UCC. The question is if the state fails to do it, can the court bring incremental equality clauses when it comes to religious freedoms and can we apply the test of equality to completely negate an integral practice of a religion."

Rajasthan: Fire breaks out at City Mall in Kota; no injuries reported

KOTA: A fire broke out in a plastic items store on the second floor of the City Mall in Kota on Wednesday morning, which was brought under control after a two-hour operation by the firefighters, officials said.

No one was injured in the fire that broke out in the mall on Jhalawar Road within the Vigyan Nagar police station limits, triggering a brief period of panic, they said.

The fire broke out in the plastic items store that is yet to be formally inaugurated around 10:30 am, when business activities in the mall were yet to start, the officials said.

At least 15 fire tenders and 50-60 firefighters were pressed into service to douse the flames, which took about two hours to bring the situation under control, they said. Initial inquiry suggested that a short-circuit triggered the blaze in the store run by a Malaysia-based company,



fire officer Amzad Khan said.

The security guards present on the spot unsuccessfully tried to douse the flames, which soon filled the premises with smoke, Khan said.

The firemen had to break the glass panels of the mall to make way to the store, he said.

The mall and a coaching institute right behind had to be evacuated for safety measures, the officer added. Circle Officer at Vigyan Nagar police station, Mukesh Meena,

said a case has been registered against the management for the mall under the relevant sections of law, and the matter is being probed from all angles.

According to Chief Fire Officer Rakesh Vyas, the building was equipped with mandatory fire-fighting equipment, but as the flames spread rapidly, the staff present on the spot could not control them.

The authorities have shut all business activities in the mall for a week, Vyas said.

Man dies in police custody, villagers attack police station in Nabarangpur

KORAPUT: The death of a man in police custody in Odisha's Nabarangpur district on Wednesday triggered protests by villagers who threw stones at the police station.

The deceased was identified as Purna Kalar, a resident of Anchala village under the Dabugaon police station limits. He was arrested in connection with the alleged abduction of a minor girl. He was found dead inside the toilet of the lock-up at Dabugaon Police Station in Nabarangpur district.

Police sources said that the man was nabbed on Monday and sent for medical examination on Tuesday. His body was found in the toilet of Dabugaon police station on Wednesday morning, before his scheduled production at the court.

While police said that the accused hanged himself in the toilet, the family members claimed that he was beaten to death by cops. Preliminary reports, however, suggest that he allegedly used a strip of cloth torn from a bedsheet and tied it to the ventilation structure for hanging.

The incident sparked protests by family members and villagers of the deceased, who gathered outside the police station and questioned how the death occurred in police custody. They also staged a road blockade demanding justice.

Angry over the incident, the villagers staged a protest outside the police station, blocked the Umerkote-Nabarangpur road and pelted stones at the police establishment. One home guard was injured in the stone pelting by the mob, police said.

Senior officers from Nabarangpur and Papadhandi police stations rushed to the spot to control the situation. The administration deployed two platoons (60 personnel) of police and additional officers around Dabugaon station to prevent escalation.

The body was shifted to the Nabarangpur District Headquarters Hospital for post-mortem examination, which will be conducted in the presence of a magistrate. Heavy police deployment has been made at the hospital, police said.

Superintendent of Police, Nabarangpur, Madkar Sandeep Sampat said the matter would be thoroughly investigated to ascertain the circumstances under which the alleged suicide took place inside the police station.

NCC setting up drone training centres in Nagpur, Pune: Maj Gen Vivek Tyagi

NAGPUR: Major General Vivek Tyagi, Additional Director General of the Maharashtra National Cadet Corps Directorate, on Wednesday said the NCC was setting up drone training centres in Nagpur and Pune.



He also described the Agnipath scheme, a short-term military recruitment programme, as a gamechanger for the NCC cadets and for the youth from humble backgrounds.

Addressing a press conference in Nagpur Group NCC headquarters during his two-day visit to the city, Maj Gen Tyagi said the strength of NCC cadets in Maharashtra is about 1.5 lakh.

"The NCC is skilling its cadets and preparing them with technology and everything that is contemporary, to be ready for the future. Accordingly, the NCC Maharashtra is starting a drone training centre in that direction and Nagpur is becoming a major hub for training the NCC cadets," he said.

One more training centre will come up in Pune along with Nagpur, he added.

Tyagi also said that the NCC, along with Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) and others, is also planning to start cyber awareness training for its cadets soon.

"It will not just be a basic training programme, but will be a very forward-looking course to be launched by the NCC," he said.

Tyagi said he has written a letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, and will soon meet him to secure assets for starting a centre of excellence (NCC Academy) in Nagpur for the Vidarbha region.

When asked about the response of NCC cadets to the Agnipath scheme, Tyagi said the recruitment programme has taken off very well.

BJP's Parvesh Wahi elected as MCD Mayor, Monika Pant as Deputy: Emphasis to be on sanitation & waste management

NEW DELHI: Bharatiya Janata Party candidates for MCD Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and the standing committee members were elected on Wednesday following the voting, with the corporation getting Parvesh Wahi as its new Mayor.

BJP's councillor Monika Pant from Anand Vihar was elected as the Deputy Mayor, as both candidates secured 156 votes.

On the other hand, the Congress party's mayoral candidate Haji Zarif, received nine votes.

However, the Aam Aadmi Party did not field any candidate this time for the mayoral polls.

After the victory, the newly elected Mayor Parvesh Wahi expressed confidence that the pending works will soon be taken up, with the immediate priorities being the work to upgrade and fix sanitation and



waste management issues.

Speaking on the victory of the party's candidates, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva expressed confidence that the corporation, in coordination

with the BJP-led Delhi government, will further work to make Delhi's situation better and improve the overall development works.

Commenting on the AAP,

he said that they were already aware they were far from victory, while he also expressed joy that all the allies have won.

Sachdeva stated that whenever the party has been in power in the civic body, the work has been transparent and the corporation has gained strength.

He alleged that during the previous times, when the civic body was under the AAP rule, there were different irregularities, including a lack of funds.

The BJP leader stated that the goal is simple: to run the MCD with utmost honesty and transparency so that the people of the city get all the facilities.

Meanwhile, as per the configuration, the winner required 137 votes, with the electoral college consisting of 273 votes, which include 249 councillors, 14 nominated MLAs, seven Lok

Sabha MPs, and three RSMs.

After the election, Sachdeva visited the Civic Centre and facilitated the newly elected Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Leader of the House, and Standing Committee members, and offered them sweets.

The Delhi BJP chief stated that this time the party has given equal opportunity to both experience and youthful energy within its municipal team.

He said that while experienced leaders like Wahi and Jai Bhagwan Yadav have been chosen, young leaders like Dr Monika Pant and Manish Chaddha, too, have been allowed to learn and serve.

Sachdeva expressed confidence that the experience of the newly elected Mayor will contribute to further improving the upkeep of Delhi.

Delhi Health Minister inaugurates advanced 3D dental imaging facility

NEW DELHI: Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh on Wednesday inaugurated a state-of-the-art 3D dental imaging facility at the Maulana Azad Institute of Dental Sciences, saying the technology will significantly improve diagnostic precision and patient care in the national capital.

According to a statement, a Cone Beam Computed Tomography (CBCT) machine has been installed at the institute as part of efforts to strengthen advanced healthcare infrastructure in Delhi.

The minister said the CBCT technology offers significantly lower radiation exposure, up to 10 times less than conventional CT scans, along with highly precise diagnostic capabilities, particularly for surgeons and dental specialists.

He added that the system will enable clinicians to clearly assess critical an-

atomical structures, including nerves, and plan surgical procedures with greater accuracy. The CBCT system provides high-resolution 3D imaging with faster scan times, typically completed within seconds in a single rotation, while also improving patient comfort by allowing imaging in seated or standing positions.

Singh appreciated the efforts of the institute's medical superintendent and staff for introducing the advanced facility, noting that such initiatives will help improve clinical outcomes and overall patient care.

The facility is also expected to strengthen academic training and research at the institute, allowing students and practitioners to gain hands-on experience with advanced diagnostic tools across specialties such as oral surgery, orthodontics and implantology.

Delhi to boost homoeopathy, integrate AYUSH with mainstream healthcare: Min

NEW DELHI: The Delhi government is working to strengthen homoeopathy services and integrate AYUSH systems with mainstream healthcare, Health Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh said on Wednesday.

According to a statement, the government marked World Homoeopathy Day 2026 with a scientific seminar at the NDMC Convention Centre on the 271st birth anniversary of Samuel Hahnemann.

The seminar, themed "Homoeopathy in the Era of Integrative Medicine: Bridging Traditions, Advancing Health", was jointly organised by the Delhi State AYUSH Society and the Directorate of AYUSH, marking the first such collaboration between the two.

"Homoeopathy has immense potential in addressing today's healthcare challenges, especially in stress management and chronic conditions. The Delhi Government is committed to strengthening AYUSH infrastructure and ensuring its effective integration with mainstream healthcare," Singh said, according to the state-



ment.

He said over 120 homoeopathic dispensaries across Delhi are providing free consultation and medicines, catering to nearly 19 lakh patients annually, reflecting growing public trust in the system.

The minister added that the government is working to open new polyclinics, address staff shortages and expand services, particularly in underserved areas.

Highlighting a key initiative, Singh spoke about the Integrated AYUSH Stress Management Public

Health Programme under the 'Manas Swasthya' vision, aimed at addressing psychosomatic disorders through a combined approach of Ayurveda, Yoga and Homoeopathy.

He also emphasised the need for integrating AYUSH systems with allopathic care through a co-location model, allowing patients to access multiple treatment systems under one roof. The event was attended by senior officials, policymakers and experts from organisations such as the Central Government Health Scheme, New Delhi Municipal Council, Municipal Corporation of Delhi and the Central Council for Research in Homoeopathy. The programme also saw the release of IEC material on the role of homoeopathy in musculoskeletal disorders and the felicitation of practitioners, including Padma Shri awardees V K Gupta, Anil Kumari Malhotra and Kalyan Banerjee.

The government will continue to focus on strengthening infrastructure, expanding access and promoting research in AYUSH systems, the statement said.

EC to order repoll if EVM tampering allegations proved true in Bengal, says CEO

KOLKATA: West Bengal's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Manoj Agarwal on Wednesday said the Election Commission will order repoll in booths where allegations of EVM tampering using tapes or ink are found to be true, asserting that the poll panel has a "zero tolerance" policy against such offences.

The CEO said that a repoll will be ordered only after the authorities examine reports from the district election officer or election observers on allegations of tampering with EVMs using tapes or blot of ink.

Agarwal's statement came following allegations by the BJP that the party's symbols on EVMs were covered with tapes or ink in certain booths during the second and final phase of polling, which is under-

way. BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya shared a video on X, claiming that white tape had been placed on the party's symbol in booth numbers 144 and 189 in the Falta assembly seat, and demanded a repoll.

"Whenever we got tapes (on EVMs) or any form of tampering with the EVMs, we will conduct a repoll. We will follow a zero-tolerance policy," Agarwal told reporters.

He said that preliminary checks have not indicated any tampering during the handling of machines by polling officials, including mock polls.

"If a large number of booths in any assembly constituency report such instances, we will conduct a repoll in the entire constituency. I do not have the exact number (where allegations were raised),"

he said. According to standard operating procedures, the EVMs are the responsibility of the central paramilitary forces, the CEO said. Agarwal said that the alleged acts might have occurred during voting.

"It seems that when people are going to cast the votes, they are pasting these tapes on the machines. It is not that we will not be able to find it out. We will check how much time people spent while casting votes," he said.

Those found guilty will face the strictest possible punishment as per the law, the CEO said.

The Commission has not yet confirmed the authenticity of the video shared by Malviya, but said that ground reports are being examined.

Responding to the al-

legation by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee about "excessive activism" by police and central forces in parts of her Bahabani constituency, Agarwal said security personnel acted as per their assessment.

"We cannot say what the police are doing. It is the police's job to assess the situation and decide where to go to prevent unrest. They must have had some input, which is why they moved. The responsibility of conducting a free and fair election also lies with the police," he said.

The Election Commission said it has received 2,196 complaints of various types so far from the 142 assembly constituencies where polls were held on Wednesday.

In the first phase, voting was held in 152 seats on April 23. Results will be announced on May 4.

Gurugram police demolish illegal property of criminal



GURUGRAM: Gurugram police on Wednesday demolished the illegal property of criminal Ravindra alias Sarkar, who was involved in more than a dozen serious crimes.

The police carried out the operation in Taj Nagar village in the Farrukhnagar area in the presence of a large police force, police said.

According to police, the accused Ravindra has been involved in serious criminal activities, including murder,

attempted murder, robbery, extortion, and Arms Act violations, with 15 cases registered against him.

The investigation revealed that Ravindra, a property dealer, had illegally constructed a seven-room, two-storey house on 350 square yards worth crores of rupees and rented out the building, police said.

"This operation was carried out by the Crime Branch, Farrukhnagar in coordination with the district administration.