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GENERAL STUDIES COMPREHENSIVE COURSE

GENERAL STUDIES



R G KAR RAPE-MURDER

TMC's Sircar to quit RS, flags **Bengal's 'faulty** handling', graft

Govt action too little, late... can't accept corrupt officers, doctors getting top posts: Prasar Bharati ex-CEO to Mamata



A protest against the August 9 rape and murder of a junior doctor, in Kolkata on Sunday evening. Partha Pau

ATRI MITRA

KOLKATA, SEPTEMBER 8

BATTLING PUBLIC protests and Opposition attacks over the R G Kar junior doctor's rape and murder last month, the Mamata Banerjee government in West Bengal came under fire from within on Sunday, as the party's Rajya Sabha member and former Prasar Bharati CEO, Jawhar Sircar, announced his decision to resign, citing the "faulty handling of the most spontaneous public movement".

In his letter to Banerjee, which he posted on X, Sircar also flagged the issue of corruption and the "increasing strong-arm tactics of a section of leaders" in the Trinamool Congress. He said he had "decided to resign from Parliament and also from politics altogether".



'NOBODY WAS LISTENING ... HAD ADVISED CM TO TAKE SOME STEPS' **IAWHAR SIRCAR**

TMC RAJYA SABHA ME

Saying that "the present spontaneous outpouring of public anger" is against the "unchecked overbearing attitude of the favoured few and the corrupt", Sircar wrote: "In all my **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

2 Goa Ministers, local BJP, Cong leaders — look who benefits from tweak in state land use law that threatens 'green zones'

- EXPRESS INVESTIGATION



A paddy field in Tiswadi taluka that has received approval for 'correction' to settlement land.

Records show Town and Country Planning Minister and Environment Minister, key to regulation and approval process, among the beneficiaries; both Ministers say all changes as per law; Union Minister Shripad Naik also got land use changed

PAVNEET SINGH CHADHA & DHEERAJ MISHRA

PANAJI, NEW DELHI, SEPT 8

RAISING QUESTIONS of conflict of interest and political influence on policy, at least two state ministers, a clutch of politicians cutting across party lines and several real-estate companies in Goa are alleged beneficiaries of a controversial change in land use law, records investigated by The Indian Express show.

In all these cases, it is the state's Town and Country Planning (TCP) department that approved change in land use over the past 18 months, converting "green zones" into "settlements" — allowing construction activity for both residential and commercial purposes, pushing up the land's value manifold.

Records show that one beneficiary is a firm that has TCP Minister Vishwajit Rane and his spouse as directors; Environment Minister Aleixo Sequeira is himself a beneficiary. Significantly, Rane also holds the Forest



Everything has been strictly done as per the guidelines and under the ambit of law.

VISHWAJIT RANE. TOWN & COUNTRY incorrectly zoned as an orchard. It was a mistake, so we got it corrected.

LAW, THE PROCESS RAISE

RED FLAGS PAGE 9

(The property) was

PLANNING MINISTER

AVERTANO ALEIXO SEQUEIRA, FURTADO, **ENVIRONMENT** CONGRESS LEADER.

FORMER MLA WHY CHANGING GOA LAND USE

government does

(in purview of law),

Ministry and Sequeira the Law portfolio, departments that are

key to regulating the changes. An investigation of TCP records shared with the Goa Assembly last month shows that approval was received to change officially called "correct" – the land use of a total expanse of at least 20 lakh sq m. This area is of green zones, including paddy fields, orchard land and no-development zones, and will now be "settlements"

Such changes were allowed after a March 2023 amendment [section 17 (2)] to the Goa Town and Country Planning (TCP) Act

1974, which allows conversion of plots without public consultation if the owner approaches the department with a request to "correctinadvertent errors" or "rectify inconsistent/incoherent zoning' in Goa's Regional Plan 2021.

The absence of public scrutiny and who decides what is "inadvertent error" form the nub of the controversy.

Who got approval

An investigation of records shows the following public figures and corporates among the beneficiaries:

■ The Forest, Town and Country Planning Minister and **spouse:** Karapur Estates Private Ltd, which lists TCP Minister Vishwajit Rane and his wife Deviya Rane as directors, got clearance to convert 11,580 sq m of land in Bicholim taluka's village Sarvona. Records show approval was received for "correction" of the zone to "settlement", which was earlier earmarked as "partly paddy field with CADA"

in the 2021 regional plan. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 9**

Your spirit flows on Remembering Dr Kurien on his 12th death anniversary

ALL-PARTY DELEGATION'S J&K VISIT IN 2016

Sent Opposition MPs to speak to Hurriyat, convey we are ready to talk peace: Rajnath

Did everything to restore peace but separatists did not respond: Minister

ARUN SHARMA

JAMMU, SEPTEMBER 8

THE FOUR Opposition MPs, on whom separatist Hurriyat Conference leaders had shut their doors in September 2016, had visited them as part of Centre's outreach for peace talks, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said Sunday.

"I was the Home Minister of India and the PDP government was here in Jammu and Kashmir. I used to tell Mehbooba Mufti (the then Chief Minister) that the situation shall be normal and even a delegation of MPs led by me as

here," said Singh, addressing a poll rally in Ramban district.

"There were senior leaders

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at a poll rally in Ramban district, Sunday. AN



egation)," he said. "I told them that we are from the BJP and the Hurriyat people do not like us and they get irritated on seeing us. You Union Home Minister came talk to them and tell them that we are ready to talk, but there

shall be peace in Kashmir.' **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

In Rudraprayag, 'non-Hindu' warning by local outfits triggers fear & unease

AVANEESH MISHRA RUDRAPRAYAG, SEPTEMBER 8

THE OMINOUS signboards are gone but the tension remains, seeping into conversations in village squares over 'chai' and inside homes

For years, the villages of Rudraprayag, a key stop along the Kedarnath Yatra, saw communities working together peacefully, their livelihoods tied to the pilgrimage season in Uttarakhand. But a marked shift over the past few months has left



One of the now-removed boards at Shersi village in Rudraprayag, Uttarakhand



Reason: Boards set up, mainly by local pro-Hindutva outfits such as Bhairav Sena, which read: "Warning: Non-Hindus/ Rohingya Muslims and hawkers are prohibited from roaming in the village and doing business. If caught anywhere in the village, punitive and legal action will be taken."

"This campaign has been going on for the past year," said CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



BIREN CALLS ON CENTRE TO PROTECT STATE'S INTEGRITY P8

1984 ANTI-SIKH RIOTS

How one woman's search for another led to murder charge against Tytler

NIRBHAY THAKUR

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 8 WHEN THE Central Bureau of

Investigation (CBI) in 2007 filed a closure report against Congress leader Jagdish Tytler, 80, in connection with his alleged role in the deaths of three Sikh men at Delhi's Gurdwara Pul Bangash during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, multiple persons moved protest petitions. However, the trial court said it would only accept a

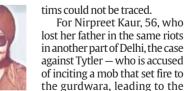




plea from one of the victims' family members. In 2007, the families of two of the three vic-



Singh was killed in the riots



against Tytler - who is accused of inciting a mob that set fire to the gurdwara, leading to the three deaths - being closed without going to trial was unacceptable. Nirpreet, who has been helping senior advocate H S Phoolka track down other vic-

tims like her since 2006, took it upon herself to look for CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



where flashpoints could lead to catastrophic conflict' **PHILIP GREEN**

'We have a region

PAGE 13

'Had seen fall in Tokyo... So I was not really scared of the (Paris) outcome'

PAGE 1 ANCHOR

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI. SEPTEMBER 8 SHE BECAME India's first athlete to win two medals at the Olympics in Paris but Manu Bhaker very nearly gave up the sport three years ago after the heartbreak she endured in Tokyo. It was the restlessness within

that put her back in the hunt. The twin bronze medal winner made this revelation at the Express Adda on Saturday, where she was the guest along

with Tokyo Olympics bronze medallist Lovlina Borgohain. They were in conversation with Mihir Vasavda, Deputy Associate Editor, The Indian Express.

Manu, who won an individual bronze in 10m air pistol and followed it up with a mixed team podium finish along with Sarabjot Singh, said she faced many "hardships" after the Tokyo debacle, "doubted" her choices and even "thought of opting for a different career". "I had hardships also after that,

I was really doubting my choices. I was actually thinking of opting for a different career path. But destiny is something...," she said. Asked what would have



Olympians Manu Bhaker and Lovlina Borgohain at the Express Adda in New Delhi on Saturday. Tashi Tobgyal



something. I didn't think about what exactly.' Manu added that it was during a family vacation in Kerala's

been an alternate option, she

said: "Maybe something in the

education field. Maybe MBA or

Cherai that the fire within her to return to the shooting range rekindled. At the time, she was on a break from the sport. "I tried to take a break from shooting but what happened in Tokyo, I was so restless. I was like, I have to change this somehow. I was so confident." the 22-year-old said.

However, the build-up to the Paris Olympics, she said, was far from ideal. "I lost a lot of competitions before heading to Paris. I was really doubtful because so many events I had participated in but results were the same fourth, fifth, sixth place in each one of them," she said. "Sometimes I got third place as

well but I wasn't able to win any competition before I was heading to Paris. But still I was very positive about it."

"I was like, I'll try my best and let's see what will happen because I had seen the fall in Tokyo and what happened after that So I was not really scared of the outcome," she said. Manu and Lovlina — whose

Olympic fortunes have contrasted so far, Manu could not win a medal in Tokyo, where Lovlina won a bronze: Manu finished on podium this time while Lovlina couldn't — have been two of the faces of the rising power of Indian women at the Olympics. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**







Hydration Partner — Wellness Partner



Hospitality Partner



2 Goa Ministers, local BJP, Cong leaders — look who benefits from tweak in state land use law that threatens 'green zones'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The company, engaged in agriculture, forestry, fishing and production of crops, also got approval for "correction" of 515 sq m from cultivable land to settlement for another plot in Karapur.

tion were received on December 15,2023. They were corrected and subsequently notified in the Official Gazette on February 15,

Asked about this, Vishwajit Rane told The Indian Express: "It was related to the access road to the property. The main property was converted 25 years ago. But I will have to verify it. The bottom line is that everything has been strictly done as per the guidelines and under the ambit of law."

Asked about concerns that the land use changes could lead to unbalanced development and would facilitate entry of real estate lobbies from outside the state, he said, "Whatever has been done is within the framework of the laws and as per the guidelines. As a minister, it is my job to see that all the rules and regulations are followed. There have been no violations. Before me (my tenure as TCP Minister), under section 16 B amendment, over 7,500 applications for land zone changes were received and over 1,000 were approved. Under the previous regional plan, over 1.5 crore sq m land was sought to be converted in one taluka. Some applications are sub-judice... people have invested in Goa. We cannot stop people from coming here. Goa is a progressive state. The whole idea is to put planning in perspective and we have on-boarded experts and consultants. For big projects, the green certification nod, as per the norms of Indian Green Building Council, will be required. Not a single inch of private forest has been touched."

Vishwajit Rane, son of veteran Congress leader and former chief minister Pratapsingh Rane, quit the Congress and joined the BIP in 2017. He is the BJP MLA from Valpoi and currently holds the portfolios of Forest, TCP, Public Health, Urban Development, and Women and Child Development. It was under his tenure as TCP Minister that the TCP Act was amended. His wife Deviva Rane is the BJP MLA from Poriem.

■ Environment Minister Aleixo Sequeira: On August 29, 2023, an application by Sequeira seeking approval for rezoning of 3,817 sq m of a property to a settlement in Salcete's Nuvem – he is the Nuvem MLA – received approval. This property was marked in the Regional Plan 2021 as an orchard with no development slope. It was corrected and notified in the Official Gazette on January 11, 2024. Another application received by the TCP department on May 29, 2023, from real estate firm Tonia Estates and Resorts Pvt Ltd,

THE CHRONOLOGY

■Goa's first regional plan, which lays down a decadal road map for land use and demarcates zones for agriculture, forests, hills, orchards, industry, settlements, was notified in 1986 and had a horizon

■ After 1988, section 17 of the **Town and Country Planning** (TCP) Act empowered the government to direct the TCP department to undertake ad-hoc revisions of the regional plan. This meant that people could apply for a zone change and get the land converted from natural cover to settlement and start construction on their

development and

period till 2001.

property.

■ From 1988 to 2005, over 2,241 zone changes took place and a majority of changes involved conversion of agricultural land and natural cover. Such piecemeal revisions led to concerns of "chaotic development", with the then Secretary, Town and Country Planning, Jayshree Raghuram, observing in an office note in March 2005 that "conscious effort needs to be made to curb this practice of allowing ad-hoc changes", which has led to "haphazard development"

which lists Sequeira as a manag-

ing director, received approval on

October 19, 2023, for correction of

1,575 sq m of orchard land to set-

Sequeira, who also holds the port-

folio of Legislative Affairs and

Captain of Ports, said: "In the orig-

inal regional plan, these were un-

der settlements, these were all set-

tlement zones. And in the last

regional plan (2021)... there it was

incorrectly zoned as an orchard. It

was a mistake, so we got it cor-

rected." Sequeira was among the

eight MLAs who switched to the

BJP from the Congress in

■ Union Minister Shripad

Naik: On July 25, 2023, an applica-

tion by Naik, six-time BIPMP from

North Goa and Union Minister of

State for Power and New and

Renewable Energy, was received

for rezoning of 14,225 sq m of or-

chard and natural cover to settle-

ment in Panelim village in Tiswadi

taluka. The application was cor-

rected and notified in the Official

Gazette on February 15, 2024.

Despite several attempts, Naik was

not available for comment. Said his

son Siddesh Naik: "I am not fully

aware of this land correction. I wil

September 2022.

Asked about these approvals,

tlement in Colva.

and "mushrooming of concrete structures with scant regard to planning and land use norms"

"The crux of the problem in this department has been frequent change of land use in individual cases ranging from small plots to thousands of square metres of land, on the advice of the **Town and Country Planning** Board and with the approval of the government," the note

■The then Chief Secretary Kiran Dhingra also noted that "relaxations under section 17 of the TCP Act are not well founded in law as they make changes in the regional plan without following provisions of the Act for amendment to the regional plan".

■ Following this, the practice of ad-hoc changes on requests from private individuals came to an end during the President's Rule in Goa in 2005, when the state government passed an order to stop entertaining any applications for change in

■In 2011, a revised regional plan 2011 was published, which came under criticism due to the proposed land use

changes which sought to bring vast areas under settlements. A mass public agitation led to scrapping of the regional plan 2011. Subsequently, the government appointed a task force headed by renowned architect Charles Correa to draft the regional plan 2021. This draft was later notified in segments and has been in force.

— EXPRESS INVESTIGATION

■ In 2018, the Goa assembly passed another amendment to the TCP Act - section 16 B which allowed people to request the chief town planner for change of zone in the regional plan on a caseby-case basis.

■ In 2022, the government announced that all recommendations under section 16 B would be scrapped and earlier this year, the cabinet decided to repeal the provision.

■ In March 2023, the government amended the Goa Town and Country Planning (TCP) Act 1974. The amendment allows conversion of privately owned plots if the owner approaches the department with "inadvertent errors" that need to be "corrected" in Goa's Regional Plan 2021, without public consultation.

have to talk to my father, then I will be able to say anything on this."

■ Former Navelim MLA, Congress's Avertano Furtado: On September 7,2023, Furtado got approval for "rectification" of 8,650 sqm from paddy field with irrigation command area to settlement in Navelim. The application was put up on May 22, 2023. After winning as an independent candidate from Navelim in 2012, he had supported the BJP government and held several portfolios in the Manohar Parrikar-led cabinet from 2012 to 2017. He joined the Congress in 2021.

"If you don't cultivate (paddy fields), it's barren land. I have put a petrol pump there. Whatever the government does (in purview of law), it stands," he said. Furtado said he was still associated with the Congress, but not in an active

■ BIP MLA from Pernem, **Pravin Arlekar:** On February 8. 2024, two applications in his name were approved in Guirim in Bardez taluka regarding "correction" of 8,775 sq m and 2,625 sq m of paddy field with irrigation command area to settlement. Both applications were filed on December

14,2023. When contacted, Arlekar did not comment on his application but applauded the amendment to the TCP Act. 'This is a good step by the government. There are a lot of people in the region who want to repair their old houses or build new ones and convert them into settlements. This amendment will help them. I spoke about this in the Assembly.

Expert committee member Ralph de Sousa: On June 15, 2023, an application from a real estate firm M/s De Souza Estate Holdings Private Ltd was approved for correction of 2,750 sq m of natural cover into "settlement" in Sangolda village in Bardez taluka. The firm's director is Ralph de Sousa, a member of the expert committee that scrutinises and verifies proposals for change in land use under Section 17(2). The application was filed on May 3, 2023. When contacted, De Sousa, former president of the Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said: "The regional plan 2001 showed the plot as a settlement area with a small portion as an orchard... In the draft plan (2021), our plot was shown as a settlement and a small portion as an orchard. We decided to develop

was incorrectly published as natural cover in the notified master plan. We filed an objection with the department in November 2011 and were pursuing this matter for 12 years. A sub-committee to examine such cases under section 17(2) was formed on May 25, 2023. As this was an appropriate body, we presented our matter to the committee. The matter was examined and found fit to be recommended for rectification and the rectification was published on June 15, 2023... We have not done any conversion. I am not an in-

the plot and were surprised that it

vestor. This is our old property." On whether his being on the expert committee that scrutinises applications was a potential conflict of interest, he said he had recused himself from the meeting due to protocol, "I was not in the meeting that day (when the application was brought for scrutiny). This application was put up much before this committee was formed," he said.

■ Chairman, Dempo Group: On September 26, 2023, two applications were received from industrialist Shrinivas Dempo, chairman of the Dempo Group of Companies, and Vasudeva Dempo Family Private Trust respectively, for "correction" of 925 sq m of natural cover with no development slope to settlement in Socorro, and 4.935 sq m of orchard to settlement in Ella. The applications were corrected and notified on February 28, 2024. Shrinivas's wife Pallavi Dempo contested the recent South Goa Lok Sabha polls on a BIP ticket. Despite several messages, Shrinivas Dempo was not available for comment.

■Telugu film star, Telangana **businessman:** Among the first applications filed and later approved under the amendment, for a change of zoning from orchard to settlement for 7,823 sq m of land for two survey numbers in Morjim, was by Telugu star and RRR actor Konidela Ram Charan. The applications were filed on March 27, 2023, shortly after the Act was amended. The same day, Preetham Reddy Nalla, a prominent businessman from Telangana, sought a "correction" of 57,562 sq m of orchard land to settlement in adjoining areas in Morjim in four survey numbers. All these applications were corrected and notified on April 20,

■Sanatan Sanstha and its affiliate Hindu Janajagruti Samiti: On October 27, 2023, Sanatan Sanstha's application concerning changing the zone of 9.691 sq m. which was previously earmarked partly settlement and partly orchard with no development slope, was approved to "institutional". On September 7, 2023, Hindu Janajagruti Samiti's application for "correction" of 6,751 sq m settlement land was approved to insti-

When contacted, Ramesh Shinde, national spokesperson, Hindu Janaiagruti Samiti, said: "An institution for instilling teachings and values of the Hindu faith is supposed to be set up there. This application was filed by our trust in 2019. Since the rule was changed by the government, we reapplied... Changing zone from settlement to institutional, like the case here, has no benefit since only an institution can use this land henceforth." Said Chetan Rajhans, national

spokesperson of Sanatan Sanstha: There is a spiritual research centre here. In 2019, we put up an application to classify the land as 'institutional' from the viewpoint that people are able to access educational benefits or for research and training purposes in the future. However, in 2023, the law was changed so we were told to re-apply. In 2024, we applied and our application was assessed and changed to institutional."

The list also includes at least 65 people or firms associated with real estate, housing, construction, hospitality and hotels, including many from outside Goa. In fact, over 60 per cent of the land where permission was granted belongs to 20 individuals and companies.

Data shows that since the amendment in March 2023, the TCP department received 1.075 applications for "correction" of zoning out of which 260 have been approved. Of these, at least a third of the area "corrected" is in the coastal villages in Pernem taluka. Other major corrections took place in Bardez, Tiswadi and Salcete

Legal dispute

In June last year, The Goa Foundation, The Khazan Society of Goa (NGO) and Goa Bachao Abhiyan (NGO), filed a PIL in the High Court of Bombay at Goa for an order to quash and set aside Section 17 (2) of the TCP Act, challenging the constitutional validity of the provision.

The petitioners submitted that the amendment vested "arbitrary, uncanalised and untrammeled powers" in the government to effect changes in the zoning of plots within the statutory Regional Plan 2021, on the basis of individual requests from private parties claiming to be victims of errors in the planning.

The petition listed the state of Goa (through chief secretary Goa, who is also the secretary in charge of Town and Country Planning), TCPdepartment(chieftown planner, planning), and several private parties for the first few applications that were approved under the amendment as respondents. The final hearing in the petition started last week. Puneet Kumar Goel, the Goa Chief Secretary, did not respond to calls and messages seeking a comment.

PAVNEET SINGH CHADHA

PANAJI, SEPTEMBER 8

LAND IN Goa has always been at the centre of political and legal contests given the often competing imperatives of "development" - tourism, real estate and mining – and "environmental" regulation of its forest and coastal zones. This forms the backdrop to the latest controversy around amendment of the TCP Act by introducing Section 17 (2) that eases the process of "correction" of "green zones" marked in the Regional Plan 2021 into "settlements," opening the gates to construction.

What's the process for "correction" under 17(2)?

A written form along with a fee (Rs 500 to Rs 50,000, depending on the area) and documents (survey plan, ownership document, site plan, report of a professional, etc) are submitted by an applicant to the Chief Town Planner (CTP) planning for "rectification."

The CTP scrutinises the proposal and submits a report with

analysis, including a report from a registered professional. The CTP may consult agencies such as PWD, District Collector, agriculture or forest department, depending

on the property. The TCP department also conducts a site inspec-The proposal and the CTP

scrutiny report are sent to a ninemember expert committee, headed by the CTP for scrutiny, verification and recommenda-

The expert committee gives its recommendations. The procision to the Secretary, TCP department and TCP minister. After the government's approval, a fee is levied for correction. Finally, the modification is notified in the Official Gazette and land zoning is changed to reflect the new zone.

Why do people want to change land use from 'green zone' to 'settlement'?

Once land is classified as a 'settlement", both residential and commercial construction activity can be carried out, enabling the owner to build a house, residential complex, villas or hotels. Paddy land cannot be used for construction activity: it has to be used only for farming or agricultural purposes. On orchard land, only a farmhouse of a specified area can be built, and on the remaining patch, no construction can take

As a result, when a plot is re-

zoned to a settlement, its value appreciates. In Anjuna, for instance, a 1.900 sq m plot earmarked as an orchard under the Regional Plan 2021 was purchased for Rs 74 lakh in December 2022. Once it was converted to settlement, in June 2023, the plot was sold for Rs 6.8 crore to a builder.

Why changing Goa

land use law, the

process raise red flags

What are the concerns being flagged?

Urban planners and activists argue that in the garb of "rectifying errors," an unprecedented expanse has been cleared for construction. This means de struction of hill slopes, fields and natural cover in favour of real estate lobbies and a speculative housing market for "second homes" for the urban elite. Says activist Claude Alvares:

"How demarcation of a hill slope which is based on Survey of India topography sheets – can be considered an 'error' is simply beyond imagination." "It has led to unbalanced de

velopment by destruction of hill slopes, fields and natural cover to favour real estate lobbies. says Alvares, director, The Goa

Foundation, an enviworking since 1986. "Through changes to the land use map, the protection accorded in the regional plan to (orchards, forests, no-develop-

ment slopes, natural cover) is be ing undone.'

"Zoning has become a racket," says Solano da Silva, faculty at BITS Pilani, Goa campus, and author of The Great Goa Land Grab. "The government is sacrificing the state's life suppor systems, its natural cover, agrarian spaces, paddy fields, orchards. All this is being compromised for a fee."

Architect and urban planner Tahir Noronha says the rationale of the government is "discrepancies" in the 2021 plan obviate the need for public feedback "People are building illegal constructions and roads and applying for 'corrections' claiming tha a road existed before the 2011 plan and the planners simply missed it. Hills, water bodies, paddy fields have been sacri-

Why is the Who's Who list important?

Because the process involves the TCP Department for approvals, scrutiny and final clearances, the fact that the TCP min ister, a member of the expert committee, and other politicians. including Environment Minister, are those who applied for correction. raises issues of conflict of interest

CBI CHARGESHEET IN MADHYA PRADESH NURSING COLLEGE SCAM

'Achaar', 'Mata ka prasad': Code words for 'bribes' in case against CBI officers

ANAND MOHANJ BHOPAL, SEPTEMBER 8

"ACHAAR", "MATA ka prasad", "gulkand" — these food references of code words used to disguise communication regarding the alleged bribing of CBI personnel in exchange for helping nursing colleges pass inspections in Madhya according to a chargesheet filed by the CBI as it

investigates its own officers. The alleged bribery took place after the CBI was tasked with looking into claims raised in a PIL filed by advocate Vishal Baghel in 2022. The PIL had alleged that dozens of nursing colleges set up in the state in 2020-2021 were "being run fraudulently without essential infrastructure"

In February this year, the CBI gave a clean chit to 169 nursing colleges in the state. However, on May 18, the CBI filed an FIR against 23 people, including four of its own officers as well as nursing college officials from at least four districts. In the FIR, it was alleged that

the accused persons were involved in the exchange of bribes for facilitating 'suitability reports' to ineligible colleges. On July 15, the CBI filed a

chargesheet before a special CBI judge against 14 individuals, including former CBI inspector

Rahul Raj, and Sushil Kumar Majoka, a Madhya Pradesh police officer attached with the CBI, as well as directors and other employees of nursing colleges.

The chargesheet was filed charges as well as several sec-Corruption Act, 1988. Sanction awaited. The two CBI personnel were entrusted with inspecting

The CBI chargesheet alleged tioning of these colleges.

After the inspection schedule was shared, the owners or employees of these nursing colleges would allegedly arrange faculty from "their own or other nursing colleges" and set up labs and other infrastructure to meet the eligibility criteria. In some cases, this was done just two-three days prior to

under criminal conspiracy tions of the Prevention of to prosecute Raj and Majoka is a total of 27 nursing colleges.

that Raj was apprehended while "demanding/accepting illegal gratification of Rs 10 lakh" and that there were "several other incidents wherein the accused obtained bribes" in exchange for sharing with college authorities the schedule of inspection by the CBI team that was looking into alleged irregularities in the func-

the inspection, or even on the date

of inspection, the CBI alleged. The chargesheet also alleged that Raj and his co-conspirators had developed code words for bribe amounts, inspection re-

ports, and even names of cities "in order to evade detection" of bribe transactions and "surveillance mechanisms". According to the chargesheet, the CBI is relying on the transcripts of 658 intercepted phone calls that contain the

voices of the accused persons. On May 7 this year, one of the accused, a community health officer named Radha Raman Sharma, travelled from Ratlam to Jaipur with large sums of money that was given the code name "achar", the CBI alleged.

Radha is the brother of another accused, Jugal Kishore Sharma, a director at Bhaskar Nursing College in Gwalior. The CBI alleged that Jugal Kishore had told a relative that Radha was coming with a "bhari dibba of achar (a heavy box of achar)" and instructed the relative to keep the money at his house, the chargesheet said.

Jugal Kishore also allegedly instructed this relative that if he received a phone call asking "gulakand aa gaya kya (has the gulakand arrived)", then he should hand over the money.

According to the CBI chargesheet, "gulakand" was the code for the "bribe amount that was to be delivered".

On May 10, six coded messages were exchanged between the wife of another CBI inspector and the CEO of a company in Indore regarding turning some of the alleged bribe money into gold bars. "Sir, Khodiyar Mata ka prasad mil gya kya (Have you got Khodiyar Mata's prasad)?" the inspector's wife asked the CEO. according to the CBI, revealing another alleged coded term for bribe money - "Mata ka prasad". The CBI alleged that the businessman converted the bribes into four gold bars weighing 100 grams.

The CBI alleged that on May 12, another accused who owns six nursing colleges, instructed an employee to visit Ujjain with Rs 9 lakh. This employee made contact with Radha, who "asked him to send the saman (cash)". Once this delivery was made, Radhainformed Jugal Kishore that he had received "9 dibba achaar (9 boxes of achaar - Rs 9 lakh in cash)". According to the CBI, this amount was later transferred to Jaipur and received by Dharmapal, also an accused and an associate of the former CBI inspector Raj.

While the legal teams for Raj and other accused refused to comment on the CBI allegations, advocate Deepesh Joshi, who represents Jugal Kishore and Radha, said: "No offence is made out against my clients under the Prevention of Corruption Act. The 2018 amendments to the Act protects people who are compelled to give a bribe. The CBI has built its case on code words like achar and gulkand, which can't be proved in court.'



CEREMONIAL WELCOME

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan being accorded a ceremonial welcome upon his arrival in New Delhi, Sunday. PTI

Bangladesh-India ties should be based on equity, fairness: Yunus

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA DHAKA, SEPTEMBER 8

BANGLADESH INTERIM govern-

Chief Muhammad Yunus Sunday said that the country wants to maintain good relations with India while asserting that it should be based on equity and fairness. Yunus, 84, made the remarks

while responding to a question at a meeting with students who had participated in the studentpeople revolution that ousted

prime minister Sheikh Hasina last month, state-run BSS news agency reported.

'We need to maintain good relations with India. But it should be based on equity and fairness," the chief adviser's special assistant Mahfuj Alam quoted him as saying. Mahfuj, who briefed the media, added that the chief adviser said Bangladesh always gives importance to mutual re-

spect and equity in maintaining relations with neighbours. He stressed reviving the South Asian Association for

Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to enhance regional cooperation.

The interim government headed by Yunus was appointed days after Hasina resigned and fled to India on August 5 following unprecedented anti-government student-led protests over a controversial quota system in government jobs.

Last week, Yunus expressed a desire for good ties with India but insisted that New Delhi must abandon the narrative that only Hasina's leadership ensures the country's stability.

Woman raped for months in abandoned Odisha house, 4 detained: Police

SUJIT BISOYI BHUBANESWAR, SEPT 8

and propriety.

POLICE IN Odisha's Dhenkanal district detained four people or Sunday for allegedly raping a 22year-old woman for months at an abandoned house where she and her "mentally unstable" father had been living for the last a few years, officers said.

According to police sources the woman is now seven months pregnant. Police and local administration rescued her on Saturday, and she is now under the care of a district centre.

The woman's mother died years ago and their financial condition is not good, sources said.

Based on the victim's complaint, police on Sunday regis tered a case and detained four persons. A DSP-rank officer has been assigned to head the investigation in the case, and the SP is directly monitoring the case, po lice sources said.

Expressing concern over the

incident, Deputy Chief Minister Pravati Parida said in a post on X that she had spoken to the Dhenkanal SP and directed that stringent action be taken against the culprits. A senior district administra-

tion official said the victim was being provided with counselling and all necessary medical care