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Insider, outsider debate in Tripura BJP sends shockwaves to Delhi

Former CM Biplab Deb triggers debate by saying outsiders is calling shots in party unit

AGARTALA, MAY 23

Without naming former chief minister of Tripura Biplab Kumar Deb who triggered a debate stating that 'outsiders' are ruining Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Tripura, the chief minister Dr Manik Saha during his tete-a-tete with the press after attending the state executive committee meeting in Agartala said, "The BJP is united in Tripura and nobody can deny this basic truth."

Saha sounded philosophical as he said, "In every family there are hiccups. These are transient and the guardians take care of it."

However, Saha's tart reply clearly indicated that under any circumstances he will not 'buy' the argument of any leader. Deb created a political storm by asserting that in today's scenario the real BJP members are being sidelined by the outsiders.

"Some outsiders are calling the shots in Tripura. I have apprised the central leadership of my concerns. These outsiders are now meddling in the affairs of our party's organization. We will run the party according to the vision of Narendra Modi and our national president is J P Nadda who is at the helm of affairs now," Deb said.

Following his statement Deb was summoned by the party top brass in Delhi and he could not attend the state executive committee meeting.

"Everything is in order at our party unit. I will talk to Biplab Deb. Both Biplab Den and Manik



Tripura CM Dr Manik Saha lights the lamp of the crucial state executive committee meeting held in Agartala.

Saha are our leaders. If there are any issues, we will sort it out. It is not at all a big issue," said Tripura BJP president Rajib Bhattacharjee.

Meanwhile, the chief minister said the state executive meeting discussed the ensuing Lok Sabha elections and the anniversary of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nine years in office.

"The BJP holds such meetings every year to

discuss organisational matters and the political situation. This time, the subject was Lok Sabha elections, and PM Modi's nine years in office. We have drawn up a plan on how best we could observe the occasion," he said.

An elaborate discussion took place on how to strengthen the party's organisation in the 3,328 booths in the state, Saha said.

Students earn laurels for Dima Hasao in this year's HSLC

ANUP BISWAS

HAFLONG: Students from Dima Hasao have earned laurels by registering a spectacular performance in the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) examination-the results of which were declared on Monday.

This year Dima Hasao bettered its previous record by registering a pass percentage of 88.12 per cent compared to last year's 81.31 per cent. Of the 3,216 candidates 1095 passed in first division 1,427 passed in second division and 312 passed in third divisions respectively. About 2,834 candidates passed the HSLC examination in 2023. Haflong Boys HS School maintained its reputation and the principal congratulated both the students and his colleagues for this feat. "Our students worked very hard and above all the teachers too played a very vital role," said the principal of Haflong Boys HS School. However, the CEM of NCHAC Debol Gorlosa also congratulated the students on their grand success. "The students have made us proud again. I wish them all the luck for their future endeavours," Gorlosa said. Meanwhile, Assam power minister Nandita Gorlosa also congratulated all the three top performing districts-Chirang, Sivasagar and Dima Hasao for scripting a new success story in HSLC. "This is just the beginning. You all will have to scale many more heights in your life. Those who have not been successful don't lose heart. Just carry on. Success will surely be yours. Tomorrow will be your day," Nandita said.

Tripura govt decides to launch 'Mission Life'

AGARTALA: The state government has decided to launch 'Mission Life' with all earnestness to create awareness among the people about the prevention of the bad effects of environmental changes.

A high-level meeting headed by Chief Secretary J K Sinha held in the secretariat has finalized a detailed program. K S Setty, Secretary to the Department of Science and Technology, and other officials also were present in the meeting.

The main aim of 'Mission Life' is to make the drive to prevent environmental degradation into a mass movement. It is believed that the bad effects of environmental degradation can be prevented mostly through behavioral changes. Animesh Das, Director of Science, Technology, and Environment gave a PowerPoint presentation detailing the steps needed to prevent the bad effects of environmental degradation.

Admin suspends teacher for criticising Karnataka CM

BENGALURU, MAY 23

A government school teacher from Hosadurga area of Chitradurga district has been suspended for a Facebook post critical of Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah's policies.

The teacher, Shanthamurthy MG, had written an FB post on the Congress' announcement of freebies before state elections and the promise to fulfill the five guarantees in the first state cabinet meeting.

The teacher said the state's debt rose when Siddaramaiah became CM because of his freebies policies. "Debt during the tenures of former CM SM Krishna was Rs 3590 crore, Dharam Singh Rs 15, 356 cr; HD Kumaraswamy Rs 3545 cr; BS Yediyurappa Rs 25, 653 cr; DV Sadanand Gowda Rs 9464 cr; Jagadish Shettar Rs 13, 464 cr and Siddaramaiah Rs 2, 42, 000 cr," said the post. Upon posting the remarks on Facebook, the teacher received suspension notice for violation of state civil services conduct rules and a departmental enquiry was ordered.

The BJP was quick to question the Congress government in Karnataka for "muzzling dissent." "A teacher of a state run lower primary school in Karnataka has been suspended for his FB posts criticising CM Siddaramaiah for his policies. He merely pointed out that the latter could promise so many freebies because the state's debt always rose when he helmed the Government. Truth hurts?" BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya said.

Assam Guv on maiden visit to Barak Valley reviews govt projects

SILCHAR, MAY 23

Assam Governor Gulab Chand Kataria who is on his maiden visit to Barak Valley reached Silchar on Monday and took stock of all the prevailing flagship schemes of both the state and Central governments.

Kataria will be touring Barak Valley for three days, official sources said.

Interacting with the media following his meeting with the officials of various departments at the conference hall of Cachar deputy commissioner Kataria said, "The infrastructure of railway and roads in Assam has improved a lot in Assam. There has been a significant improvement in law and order as well."

The Governor reportedly reviewed the progress of various schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi among others in Cachar district.

"In the next six months I will try to other districts of Assam to review the progress of the ongoing projects" Kataria said.



Later Kataria accompanied by Silchar MP Dr Rajdeep Roy and Cachar deputy commissioner Rohan Kumar Jha visited National Institute of Technology (NIT) and Assam University and interacted with both the students and their faculty members over there.

Rockstar NaMo rocks at an event in Australia

SYDNEY, MAY 23

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Tuesday that his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi gets a "rock star reception" wherever he goes, as he welcomed his "dear friend" at an event here and compared him to American singer Bruce Springsteen.

Albanese pitched for greater cooperation between India and Australia as he welcomed Modi to a roaring 21,000-strong crowd at the Qudos Bank Arena here, one of the city's biggest indoor stadiums. He gave Modi a bear hug when the Indian prime minister arrived at the venue to address the audience before

introducing him as someone who "gets a rock star reception wherever he goes".

"The last time I saw someone on this stage was Bruce Springsteen and he did not get the welcome that Prime Minister Modi has got. Prime Minister Modi is the boss," Albanese said at the event.

He thanked his "dear friend" Modi for "bringing the spirit of the world's biggest democracy to Australia", saying he had helped "make our democracy stronger and more inclusive." He described the cheering audience, made up mainly of members of the Australian-Indian community, as friends and said he was proud they had made Australia

their home. "You make our nation and our shared communities better. You make Australia stronger," he said.

Playing up India and Australia's connections, Albanese said he wanted to see the relationship between the two countries continue to grow, including in the business and education sectors.

"We want to see more connections. More Australian and Indian students living and studying in each other's countries, and bringing those experiences home," he said. "More business leaders and artists and families sharing your experiences and your knowledge and your ideas," he added.



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WALK THE TALK

Karnataka govt suspends one teacher for scripting a critical post against the ruling regime's policy of 'doles' on his facebook page

The new Karnataka government headed by Siddaramaiah that rode to power with a thumping majority displayed its trust with 'dissent' by suspending a school teacher for daring to criticise the new government's policies of doles through a post on his facebook.

Congress has been accusing the Centre of muzzling dissent and opposite views. Now, it seems the Congress party is also following the same policy.

What is the basic difference left between the Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)? This is the question that every sane Indian would like to ask. Congress needs to walk the talk. By giving bytes on press freedom in front cameras will not serve anything. It will be considered as mere 'lip service.'

Rahul Gandhi has been trying to play the victim card following his disqualification from the Lok Sabha. Charity begins at home. If at all he considers himself to be a victim for disseminating opposite views, he should ask the leaders of his party to walk on a different path. Doles are always being considered as the easiest option to woo voters. All parties follow this tried and tested technique. In fact the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has mastered this concept.

If we claim India to be a vibrant democracy, certainly there should be room airing dissent. Each and every leader of all political parties should have the courage to accept dissenting voices.

Democracy teaches us to be plural thinkers. Debate and dissent are the soul of democracy. It will keep the democracy in a functional mode. Else it will turn our nation into autocracy.

Hopefully these observations will ring a bell.

China opposes Taiwan's invitation by WHO

GENEVA: Taiwan failed on Monday in its efforts to gain an invitation to the World Health Organisation's annual assembly despite the island's assertion that support was growing for its participation. The annual assembly in Geneva decided not to extend Taiwan an invitation to the event, which runs from May 21-30. China and Pakistan had urged members to reject Taiwan's inclusion, while eSwatini and the Marshall Islands spoke in favour.



China claims sovereignty over Taiwan and says the island is not a separate country but part of "one China" governed by Beijing. China's insistence that Taiwan is not a country means that the island is excluded from many international organisations. The office of the President of Taiwan condemned the WHO decision, saying it was "contemptible" of China to block its participation in global bodies and that Beijing had no right to speak for the island. "Only Taiwan's democratically elected government can represent Taiwan's 23 million people in the WHO and other international organisations and protect the health and human rights of the Taiwanese people," its foreign ministry said. China welcomed the decision. "This fully shows that the one-China principle is the aspiration of the people and the trend of the times in the international community and cannot be challenged in any way," the Chinese foreign ministry said in a statement. "China also urges certain countries not to pretend to be confused, stop politicising the health issue, stop interfering in China's internal affairs and stop the erroneous practice of using 'Taiwan to control China'," Beijing said.

Quote of the day

The higher we are placed, more humbly we should walk.

~ Cicero, Roman statesman

RISING POPULATION GROWTH: GAINFULLY UTILISE YOUTH



DHURJATI MUKHERJEE

India has an opportunity to benefit from the demographic dividend though there are differences of opinion on the subject given the resources at the command of the government and the huge developmental needs. It is significant to note that 68 percent of India's population is in the 15-64 age group out of which close to 50 per cent of the population are around the age of 25 years. This should be seen in the backdrop of the UNFPA pegging India's mid-year population at 142.86 crore and China's at 142.57 crore, thereby becoming the most populous nation of the world, according to the State of the World Population Report 2023, released last month. Given that India has in recent years been adding 1.6 to 1.7 crore annually to its population and, with a few weeks to go for June-end, it could mean that the country has already crept ahead.

India's young are considered an asset. The qualified young generation have accomplished a list even with meagre opportunities at their command. With 26 percent of the population below the age of 25, the onus has to be taken by the government to make them properly educated and impart the necessary technical training. Also, development programmes are equally important though the government is woefully lacking in healthcare, nutrition as also education for the masses.

Health experts are of the opinion that India's new position comes amid lingering concerns about an unmet need for contraception and the persistence of child marriage. A 2019-21 nation-wide health survey found that 9.4 percent unmet need for contraception, implying that even when couples want to adopt a contraceptive method, it is not available to them. The UNFPA suggested that "population anxieties have seeped into large portions of the general public. Yet, population numbers should not trigger anxiety or create alarm. Instead, they should be seen as a symbol of progress, development and aspirations if individual rights are upheld".

Facing the demographic challenge for the country is indeed an enormous task. There is a need for far more resources to develop the country and meet its massive infrastructural needs. These relate both to physical and social infrastructure development though in recent years, the private sector has come forward in a big way. The living standards of the people have to improve for which there is need for enough opportunities in various sectors, specially in the rural areas, which unfortunately are still stagnating.

To start with, it may be said that

more jobs must be created so that there is reallocation of labour in productive sectors. In 2021-22, while the average value added per person engaged as a worker was Rs 3.9 lakh, it was Rs 1.6 lakh for agriculture and allied sectors and Rs 1.5 lakh for persons engaged in hotels and restaurants. Despite the emphasis on manufacturing and infrastructure, the increase in employment in these sectors has been negligible.

Employment growth in manufacturing during 2011-12 to 2021-22 was a low 0.55 percent against the overall employment growth of 1.42 percent. Start-Up India, Productivity Linked Incentive (PLI) and 'Make in India' schemes have only touched the periphery of the problem. As regards self-employment where India has the highest number, thanks to agriculture and trade and crafts, over 55 percent of the workers are counted as self-employed though about a third are helpers in household enterprise.

The self-employed being the most significant component of the workforce, it goes without saying that special measures are needed for them. It includes use of technology, marketing strategies, availability of capital and credit, soft skills etc. In fact, each self-employed person will need an innovative approach. Another important area is training and skill development which has been started by the government, but it needs to reach all corners of the country. The ministry of skill development estimated an additional requirement of 10.3 million persons in different sectors for training. Nearly 50 percent of these persons were in the category of manufacturing, logistics and ITs. However, it needs to be stated that more specialised training and skill development needs to be imparted.

If the country's youth can be gainfully utilised in the development process, then only the demographic challenge would be to India's advantage. But for that there is a need for a significant shift in strategy by providing them not just skilled training but also ensuring better opportunities for them. Obviously, the need for employment generation should be the first on the priority list, whether it is in the government or private sector. Moreover, informal sector jobs have to be made more rewarding. In this connection, there is a need for transforming the rural sector to make it vibrant through better infrastructure facilities. But how can this be done? Obviously through generation of more resources to boost up manufacturing and infrastructural development.

It needs to be pointed out here that unfortunately Prime Minister Modi has been reportedly pamper-

ing the rich in the hope that private investment would flow to the country. But this has not happened. The fortune of India's 100 billionaires has steadily increased over the last 4-5 years with around 70-75 percent of the wealth generated going to the coffers of the richest 1 percent while 67-70 million Indians, who comprise the poorest half of the population saw only a 1 percent increase in their wealth.

Besides making the rich richer, the tax policies have also deprived the poor of the income support they desperately need to overcome the loss of earnings caused by the pandemic. The government has not provided any substantial direct financial relief, such as cash transfers to the poor as it is generally believed that equal distribution of wealth is not on the government's agenda. The reduction in corporate tax has witnessed a steady decline in collections in the last three years while there is no inheritance tax on the super-rich which is not the case with most countries where it is around 20 percent on an average.

India is producing, on an average, 70 millionaires every day even as over 20 percent of Indians live on less than \$1.25 a day. Added to this is the deplorable condition of the country's children who suffer from underweight and stunting due to undernourishment. Unless policies are geared in the right direction of generating resources, these cannot be ploughed back into manufacturing and infrastructural development - areas which are key to utilising the young population and creating employment opportunities.

There is no dearth of talent in the country, but its utilisation leaves much to be desired. As rightly pointed out by economists, along with the services sector, more emphasis has to be given to specialised manufacturing to absorb the labour force. But such manufacturing should result in import substitution and also expand the scope of the export market. Engineers and diploma holders can play a vital role in this regard and, if necessary, be given advanced skill training. Likewise doctors and nurses can play a significant role in improving and expanding the healthcare system of the countryside. An overall strategy rather than piecemeal planning is what the Centre must work towards. ---INFA

(The author is Sr. Consultant & Guest Faculty of Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kolkata; an avowed writer and speaker on issues such as social and economic development, environment, Gandhian thought and peace studies.)

Manipur Govt is not silent, taking up all measures to restore peace: CM

BISWADEEP GUPTA
IMPHAL, MAY 23

Chief Minister N. Biren Singh maintained that the Government had been taking up all measures to restore peace and harmony in the State. The Government would try to ensure the safety of all communities and also to live together as before.

The Chief Minister was briefing the media at the Chief Minister's Secretariat on Monday.

He continued that the situation in the State is returning to normal. Other than some small incidents happening at different places, timely intervention by security forces and cooperation from the public had made it possible for the State to return to normalcy gradually, he added. Stating that the Government had been putting all efforts to secure the safety of the people, he appreciated all the security forces deployed in the State



Manipur CM N Biren Singh briefs the press about his government's initiatives taken so far to restore peace and tranquility in the state.

for their contribution to restoring peace and tranquility.

Stating that security personnel had

been deployed in different parts of the State to prevent any untoward incident, he informed that the Government had

decided to propose the Central Government for sending in 20 more companies of security forces.

He narrated the firing incident that happened at Moidangpok village on Sunday, which had led to the injury of three villagers and informed that security personnel conducted a search operation the whole night. One person had been arrested along with a shotgun, he informed.

Regarding the incident that happened on Monday at New Lambulane, he informed that 3 persons had been arrested along with two licensed guns.

N. Biren appealed to the public to refrain from mob violence, adding that action would be initiated, as per law, against all those persons who instigated or caused violent activities, regardless of the community they belong to. He also urged the public to inform the concerned authority, if they saw any wrong

activities being carried out so that swift action could be taken up to control it.

The Chief Minister further appealed to the public to have faith in the Government and sought the cooperation of all in bringing the State towards normalcy. Urging the public to refrain from spreading unverified and unfounded information, he appealed not to carry out any activity which would hurt the sentiment of other communities and instigate violence among different communities. Let us forget and forgive those things which had already happened and make restoration of peace the priority, he said.

Works Minister Govindas Konthoujam, Water Resources Minister Awangbow Newmai, IPR Minister Dr. Sapam Ranjan, Education Minister Th. Basanta Kumar, MLA of Wangkhei AC Th. Arunkumar and MLA of Moirang Th. Shanti was also present during the press briefing.

AFSPA may be withdrawn by 2023, indicates Himanta



Assam CM Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma chairs the conference of commands on Monday held at Lachit Barphukan Police Training Academy, Dergaon.

GUWAHATI, MAY 23

Addressing the media on Monday at Dergaon where he visited to attend a conference of commandants Assam chief minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the government has decided to withdraw Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) completely from the state by 2023.

Sarma also said that the government intends to rope in retired military personnel to train the police force of Assam.

"The situation is improving in Assam. So, the government is of the opinion that at an opportune time AFSA can be withdrawn from the state completely," Sarma said.

On the role of Assam police battalions, Sarma said that they can replace Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) in those areas where CAPF's services are no

longer required. "The CAPF can be deployed in other parts as per the need of the hour. Regarding the aspect of law and order situation I am of the opinion that we will have to empower Assam police. They should be trained in this area. Without using lethal weapons how can they control an unruly mob will have to be seen and for this to happen a proper mechanism should be in place. Rather a proper training is required," Sarma opined. Meanwhile, it also needs to be stated here that the chief minister attended the conference of Assam police battalion at Dergaon and it was held for the first time.

"We have started a new journey today. This conference will continue. We shall meet again after six months," said the chief minister.

Under fire youth Congress chief appears before Assam police

GUWAHATI, MAY 23

Finally, Youth Congress president Srinivas BV appeared before Assam police in Guwahati on Monday regarding the case filed by expelled youth Congress leader Angkita Dutta who alleged that she had to face mental and sexual harassment from him for quite a long period of time. Srinivas was questioned at Panbazar women police station. He was accompanied by Rakibul Hussain and Rekiuddin Ahmed.

Srinivas was questioned for around one and a half hours. Later he marched towards the office of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) as a separate notice was also served from there as well.

"We don't have anything to hide. Above all Congress believes in the rule of law and has full faith in the judiciary. I will not say anything about my defence because the matter is subjudice," Srinivas said. "Congress is a law abiding party. Srinivas BV has been asked by the court to cooperate with the investigating agencies and he is just doing that. We are not interested to do any sort of politics with this matter. Let there be a thorough investigation and everything will come out," said leader of the opposition in Assam Assembly Debabrata Saikia. "It is really unfortunate that many

of our youth Congress members wanted to meet Srinivas. But they were barred by the local police. They were warned of dire consequences and so they could not come here," he added further. It

needs to be mentioned here that Angkita filed the FIR with Dispur police station on April 20 alleging that Srinivas was harassing her continuously for the past six months. Angkita also shared her harrowing experiences in Congress on twitter stating that the top brass chose to turn a blind eye to her complaints.

In fact Angkita also alleged that at the plenary session of Congress in Raipur Srinivas allegedly heckled her physically



Opposition leader in Assam Assembly Debabrata Saikia (3rd from left) welcomes Youth Congress president Srinivas BV (4th from left) at his office in Guwahati on Monday where he visited to appear before police in a case filed against him by expelled Youth Congress leader Angkita Dutta.

and asked to 'keep quiet'. Following her police complaint a 5-member team of Assam police was dispatched to Bengaluru for the purpose of questioning Srinivas. He was not available at his residence. On seeing this Assam police pasted a notice on the door of his residence asking him to appear before them by May 2. Congress retaliated by suspending Angkita for 6 years and Srinivas served a legal notice calling for an 'unconditional' apology.

Security forces nab 4 suspects for trying to create ruckus

IMPHAL, MAY 23

It seems that peace is still continuing to play hide and seek game with Manipur as fresh violence erupted on Monday last. Assam Rifles sources said that they detained four persons who allegedly tried to disturb peace and tranquility in the state.

According to sources, one person was apprehended along with an illegal single barrel 12 bore shotgun and seven cartridges from New Keithelmanbi Village, Imphal West, after receiving inputs of him being involved in a firing incident in Village

Moidangpok which resulted in three villagers sustaining injuries and getting evacuated to RIMS Hospital. The individual has been identified as Chungkhomang Kipgen and has been handed over to Manipur Police. From the sources, Assam Rifles got the lead that few suspected militant groups are trying to create ruckus at New Checkon area. They were warning the local shopkeepers there. Both the Army and Assam Rifles stepped in and apprehended three suspects and recovered two single barrel 12 bore guns and later handed them over to Manipur police.

Manipur press bodies accuse security forces of 'assaulting' journos on duty

IMPHAL: On way to covering the violence at New Checkon area in Imphal three journalists were allegedly assaulted by the men in uniform-this has triggered a fresh storm in violence-hit Manipur where the press bodies warned of boycotting all press releases and press conferences of both the central paramilitary forces and Army if they fail to bring the culprits to book.

Quest!

MONTHS THAT BEGIN ON A SUNDAY WILL ALWAYS HAVE A 'FRIDAY THE 13TH'!

'Aaranyak' hosts awareness campaign on Rhinos



An Aaranyak volunteer addresses the students who turned up in large numbers at the Rhino Goes to School' campaign hosted by wild life conservation organization Aaranyak.

GUWAHATI, MAY 23

With a view to generating awareness amongst the students the need to promote Rhino conservation in Assam,

Aaranyak a research conservation-oriented organisation, and supported by UK based David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation (DSWF) organised a campaign

organised this campaign today," said the volunteers of Aaranyak. Apparently the organisers used audio-visual interactive storytelling techniques to teach the chil-

'Rhino Goes to School' (RGTS) that witnessed the participation of more than 1000 students. Assam is famous one-horned Rhino. "We feel that there is a necessity to apprise our young minds of the resources that Assam has in its kitty. Assam is not only famous tea but is also famous one-horned Rhino. Our young minds need to know this and so we

dren about the characteristics, food habits, suitable habitats, and ecosystem of Rhinos among others. The event was held at Sorabahi High School where 560 students attended. Educational presentations about rhinos, open quiz, and discussions were held on the day. Aaranyak official, Arif Hussain coordinated the event. Paguram Pegu, Headmaster of the School, Babuli Hazarika, ex-honorary wildlife warden, Khirud Saikia, member of Aaranyak and teaching staff of the school were present during the event.

On May 9, 350 students participated in the third RGTS programme which was held at Kolongpur High School, Gohpur. According to Aaranyak, the overwhelming participation of students in the conservation held in May, implied involvement and enthusiasm of the future generation for the conservation of the one-horned Indian rhinoceros. Conservation experts at Aaranyak believed that the student participation indicates that the public, especially the youth, can play a key role in wildlife conservation efforts.

Exchange for Rs 2000: Process starts today

MUMBAI, MAY 23

A day before the Reserve Bank of India opens the window for exchange of Rs 2,000 denomination currency notes, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday dismissed rumours of a new Rs 1,000 currency note being in the works. "There's no such proposal right now," he told reporters here on Monday in his first media interac-



tion after the decision to withdraw the highest denomination note from circulation last Friday.

As the window for customers to

exchange Rs 2,000 notes in their possession will start on Tuesday, Das said there is no need to panic. Urging the public not to rush to banks, he said enough time has been given to exchange the notes. He reiterated the notes will remain legal tender (valid for transaction).

The RBI governor's comments came after reports said people and businesses have stopped accepting Rs 2,000 notes as a mode of pay-

ment. "Let me clarify and re-emphasise that it is a part of the currency management operations of the Reserve Bank. For a long time, the Reserve Bank has been following a clean note policy," he said, adding: "From time to time, RBI withdraws notes of a particular series and issues fresh notes. We are withdrawing the Rs 2,000 notes from circulation but they continue as legal tender."

Jailed Delhi minister Satyendar Jain taken to Safdarjung hospital

DELHI: Jailed former Delhi minister Satyendar Jain was Monday examined at the Safdarjung Hospital for a spine problem, according to officials, as pictures of a "frail and weak" looking AAP leader prompted a sharp reaction from the party which accused the BJP of "wanting to kill" him. Jain, who has been lodged at Tihar Jail since his arrest in connection with a money laundering case last year, was taken to the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Hospital on Saturday, but he wanted a second opinion and was hence taken to the Safdarjung Hospital, a senior jail official said. "Jain visited the neurosurgery OPD in the morning and after being examined by the doctors there, he left. He was accompanied by police," said a spokesperson of the Safdarjung Hospital.

Jain was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on May 30 last year in connection with a money laundering case. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal shared a photo on Twitter that purportedly showed an emaciated and frail-looking Jain sitting in a chair at the hospital and two police personnel standing there. "I pray to god for his better health. The people of Delhi are watching the arrogance and atrocities of the BJP. Even god will not forgive these oppressors. In this struggle, the people are with us and god is by our side. We are followers of Bhagat Singh and our fight against oppression, injustice and dictatorship will continue," he tweeted in Hindi. The party said in a statement, "The images captured at the Safdarjung Hospital this morning present a heartbreaking sight, as he appears as nothing more than a living skeleton, frail and weak, struggling to even walk." AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh also targeted the BJP and accused them of "wanting to kill" Jain. "Clap and celebrate BJP! But remember he (Jain) is the same man who tested Covid positive, lost his father, yet didn't hold back in serving the people of Delhi. The BJP wants to kill Satyendar Jain. This level of cruelty is not acceptable, Modi ji!" he said in a tweet in Hindi.

Smriti Irani takes pot shot at Rahul Gandhi

THIRUVANTHAPURAM, MAY 23

Union Minister Smriti Irani on Monday took a dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi stating that if he remains in Wayanad, it would suffer the same fate as Amethi in Uttar Pradesh when he was the MP from there.

Gandhi was the MP from Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency before his conviction and sentencing for two years by a Gujarat court in a criminal defamation case.

After inaugurating the state-level Women Labour Convention organised by Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) Kerala here, the Union minister said she had the "good fortune" of being the one who "sent away" Gandhi from Amethi.

"The reason for that was that while he was an MP from Amethi, 80 per cent of the people there did not have electricity connections, there was no District Collector's office, no fire station, no medical college, no Kendriya Vidyalaya or Sainik School and the district hospital had no dialysis centre or X-ray machine. Once he left, all these facilities and infrastructure was made possible there. Therefore, if he remains in Wayanad, it too shall suffer the same fate as Amethi. So, you (people) have to ensure he does not remain here," the Union Minister for Women and Child Development said.

She further said that wherever she is, be it in Delhi or Amethi, she worries a lot about Wayanad and therefore, decided to convert 250 anganwadis there into 'saksham' (capable) anganwadis.

A saksham anganwadi is a centrally sponsored scheme under which anganwadis in states and Union Territories provide a package of six services -- supplementary nutrition, pre-school non-formal education, nutrition and health education, immunisation, health check-up and referral services -- to all eligible beneficiaries.

Irani also spoke about the various central government schemes, initiatives or policies implemented in Kerala for women safety, financial security of the people and social welfare of the citizens of the state.

On the issue of the alleged lack of



Union minister Smriti Irani attends women's convention on Monday at Thiruvanthapuram organised by Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh.

women's safety in the state, the minister referred to the recent killing of a young doctor -- Vandana Das -- in a taluk hospital in the state and said it was surprising such an incident occurred despite the presence of police officers there.

She questioned why despite various central government initiatives, like training personnel to help victims of cybercrime, distributing forensic kits and facilitating setting up of more fast-track courts, and the financial support being provided to strengthen the law and order system in Kerala, there was a "lack of intention" on the part of the administration to ensure women safety.

"So when one hears of crimes against women in the state, one is forced to ask why despite all this central help, including financial support, to strengthen the systems, there is a lack of intention on the part of the state governments to ensure women

safety," the minister said.

Union Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan, who also spoke at the event, expressed a similar view on the issue of women safety, especially in their workplaces.

He said that having 'night walks' where women in large numbers take to the streets does not indicate or ensure their safety as in reality they often have to return home late from work all alone.

Irani, in her speech, also contended that while the ruling Left front in the state makes claims of working for the welfare of the poor, it was the Centre which was trying to ensure economic justice and financial security to the people of Kerala.

"The Left only makes claims," she alleged.

She further alleged that the Left front was only known for strikes and worked for their own political development.

Howrah-Puri Vande Bharat derailed in thunderstorm

BHUBANESWAR

Services of the Howrah-Puri Vande Bharat Express were to be canceled on Monday as a new rake of 'ICF' and the pantograph were damaged while the windshield cracked during a thunderstorm on Sunday evening near Baitarani Road railway station in Odisha's Jajpur district.

The Railway Board has decided to review the safety standards for train operations in inclement weather after the Puri-Howrah Vande Bharat Express derailed on Sunday due to a storm, rain, and lightning so that accidents on passenger trains could be avoided in the future due to cyclones, heavy rain, and hailstorm.

Due to this, the operation of the Puri-Howrah Vande Bharat Express has been canceled on Monday. Railway experts say that the norms for train operation in monsoon and bad weather are clear.

According to railway rules, the driver will reduce the speed of the train in case of strong wind, heavy rain, reduction in visibility, and hailstorm. For this, he does not need to take approval from any authority.

Apart from this, windows and doors (engine doors) are opened after the train is brought to a standstill in case of a cyclone or strong storm. Due to this, there is minimum damage to the train due to wind speed.

Train driver, assistant driver, guard, TTE and coach assistant do this work jointly. But in the Puri-Howrah Vande Bharat accident, the train continued to run at its full speed amid storms and lightning. The driver did not consider it necessary to reduce the speed of the train or to stop the train. At that time there were 250 passengers on Vande Bharat.

However, there is information about no harm to any passenger. In view of this, this issue will be included in the upcoming security meeting chaired by Anil Kumar Lohati, Chairman and Executive Officer (CEO) of the Railway Board. So that safe train operation can be ensured in bad weather.

Sources said that the local meteorological department informs all zonal railways and division railways about bad weather 24 hours in advance. According to the rules of the Railway Board, Zonal Railways and Divisions are always in touch with the local administration, police, district magistrate, and meteorological department.

Despite the information of strong storms, rain, and hailstorm on Sunday, the safety department of East Coast Railway and Division has not taken vigilance in the operation of trains.

And instructed to run Vande Bharat Express according to the timetable in bad weather. Due to this Vande Bharat became a victim of the accident. Due to this, there was a huge loss to the Vande Bharat train and the safety of the passengers was played with.

After Kejriwal, Nitish's next stoppage at Kharge's residence

NEW DELHI, MAY 23

Efforts to forge unity in the opposition ranks gained momentum on Monday with the Congress asserting that a "vast majority" of non-BJP parties will meet soon, after Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar met its president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior leader Rahul Gandhi.

Congress general secretary (organisation) KC Venugopal told reporters that the venue and date of the expected meeting will be announced in a day or two.

In a tweet, Kharge said, "The country will be united now. The strength of democracy is our message. Rahul Gandhi and myself discussed the current political situation with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar today and took forward the process of giving a new direction to the country." Kumar was accompanied by his Janata Dal (United) president Lalan Singh.

After holding meeting with Kharge last month, Kumar has met leaders of a host of regional parties in his bid to bring them to-



gether on one platform with the Congress to take on the BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

The JD(U) leaders had met AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday at his residence here and extended "complete support" to him in the ongoing face-off with the Centre over the control of administrative services.

Significantly, Bihar Chief Minister Kumar, Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav, Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, Nationalist

Congress Party president Sharad Pawar, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and National Conference president Farooq Abdullah attended the swearing-in ceremony of Siddaramaiah as the Karnataka chief minister on Saturday, in a show of opposition unity.

Some regional leaders, including Kejriwal and Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababhu Naidu, were not invited to the ceremony. Kumar, though, has been trying to bring them on board as well.

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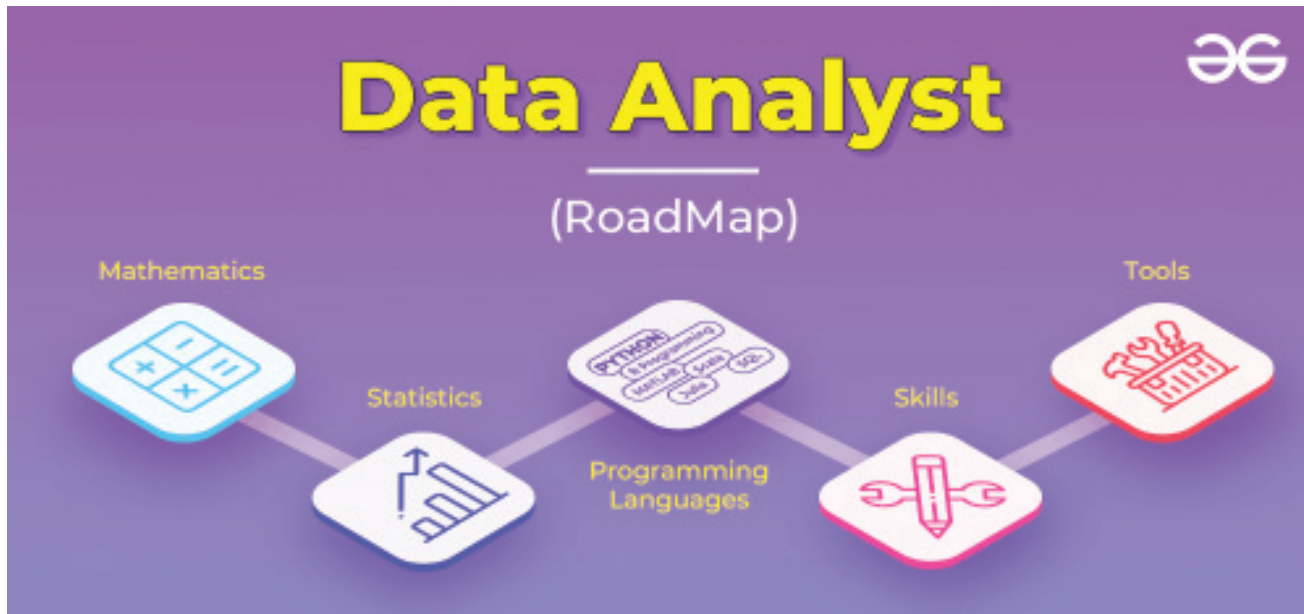
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