

Enforcing the law

Lesson for officials in Bihar

The glaring case of the Patna district magistrate having to eat humble pie over the defacement of public property by the ruling party in the state is typical of the plight of IAS officers who are normally seen to bend over backwards to please their political masters. Gautam Goswami may have had no choice but bow to the wishes of Lalu Prasad but he was so hassled that he was prompted to seek leave in order to go on lien to a private firm. It seems clear that he was in no position to exert his authority to prevent Lalu Prasad from defacing government property with banners and hoardings prior to a rally in Patna.

The Patna district magistrate couldn't have done anything to stop the Union railway minister from using trains passing through Patna for his rally and bring more people to it and he can only feel relieved that the rally has now been cancelled under pressure from the Election Commission. But he certainly was in a position to put his foot down as far as the use of government property was concerned. The fact that the Election Commission has now come down heavily on Lalu for clear violations of the model code of conduct is a healthy sign and should show how IAS officers ought to attach some value to their position.

Gautam Goswami tried and failed and has now to give up the idea of going on lien because the Election Commission has ordered him to remain in his position at least till the election process is over. But his desire to quit the administrative service altogether was revealing. Quite different is the case of the Muzaffarpur district magistrate who recorded his presence at an encounter between George Fernandes and a poor Dalit with a 500-rupee note in the hand.

How he came to time his visit so brilliantly is a mystery. But suspicions arise as to whether he was present when Fernandes is alleged to be offering cash. He doesn't know. There were no television cameras to tell the real story as in Lalu's case. Perhaps this ambivalence is now being used to play political games in which the district magistrate becomes a willing tool.

It is impossible to imagine that miracles take place and such distasteful exhibition of political power will cease. This is especially in a state like Bihar where a district official was once slapped by a minister of the state because he wanted lunch for his entire retinue — obviously out of public coffers. But the Election Commission has clearly shown that IAS officers should be firm in upholding the law.

28 DEC 2004 . THE STATESMAN

Patna DM mulls quitting IAS

Press Trust of India

PATNA, Dec. 24. — Patna's high profile district magistrate, Mr Gautam Goswami, today proceeded on leave following the state government's lack of response to grant permission to him to go on lien to the Sahara group of companies as senior vice-president. Mr Goswami said he proceeded on leave as his request was yet to be responded to by the government. "I am even in a mood to quit the IAS," he said and



added that he would be going to Lucknow in the first week of January to hold discussions with the Sahara management.

Asked whether he decided to proceed on leave in the wake of the controversy over the alleged violation of the model code of conduct by the ruling RJD and the Election Commission taking a tough stand on that, Mr

Goswami replied in the negative.

"It was the Election Commission which rewarded me with the important posting as the district magistrate of Patna during the last Lok Sabha polls, in recognition of the services I rendered... speculation about pressure on me from any quarters is incorrect," he said.

Meanwhile, more than 30 FIRs have so far been registered with different police stations for violation of the model code of conduct, officials said today.

No code violation: Lalu, pg 4

25 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

HD-1
22/12

No violation of code: Lalu Prasad

9/8/04
Delhi

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, DEC. 24. The Railway Minister and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) president, Lalu Prasad, today emphatically denied that he or his party had violated the model code of conduct by distributing Rs. 100 each to his partymen in Patna after the announcement of the election schedule for Bihar.

Taking a serious view of Mr. Prasad distributing money to some Dalits in Patna on December 17, the Commission lodged a First Information Report against him for an offence under Section 171-b of the Indian Penal Code relating to bribery in the conduct of elections. A show-cause notice was also issued to the RJD on why action should not be initiated for de-recognising the party under the Election Symbols Order, 1968.

Responding to the notice, Mr.

Prasad submitted to the Chief Election Commissioner, T.S. Krishnamurthy, in writing today that at no point of time had he violated the model code of conduct.

Talking to reporters, he said, he had "explained to the CEC the truth" and that the charges levelled against him were baseless. He blamed the National Democratic Alliance for "misleading" the Commission.

'People are with me'

On the cancellation of the RJD rally slated for last Thursday in Patna, he said: "People are with me and, like Mao's Great March, were on their way to Patna from different parts of the State to attend the RJD rally. But I was against embarrassing anyone, so we decided to cancel the rally."

On the proposed three-phase elections in Bihar, Mr. Prasad

said he had no problem presenting the Railway budget even if the elections were held in three phases.

"The third phase of polling ends on February 23, I will have enough time to present the Railway budget even after that," he said.

Adviser submits report

The Adviser to the Election Commission, K.J. Rao, who was sent to Patna to probe alleged violations of the model code of conduct by RJD partymen and the Bihar Government for the rally (since cancelled), today submitted his report to the CEC.

He is said to have presented his observations on the "arrangements made by the State Government for the rally." Sources said the full Commission would consider the report and take a decision shortly.

বিধিভঙ্গের ৩৬টি এফ আই আর, লালুকে বাঁচাতে সক্রিয় প্রশাসন

সূত্রত বসু • পটনা

২৩ ডিসেম্বর: বঙ্গ আঁটুনি ফস্কা গোরোর এমন নজির কমই দেখা যায়। নির্বাচনের কমিশনের বিশেষ পর্যবেক্ষক যে সব জায়গায় ঘুরেছিলেন, পটনা এবং হাজিপুরের শুধুমাত্র সেই সব জায়গাতেই নির্বাচন বিধি ভঙ্গের জন্য মোট ৩৬টি এফআইআর দায়ের করল রাজ্য প্রশাসন। লালুপ্রসাদের গায়ে যাতে বেশি আঁচ না লাগে তার জন্য গোটা বিহারের বাকি ৩৬টি জেলায় নির্বাচন বিধি ভঙ্গের অসংখ্য ঘটনায় প্রশাসন চোখ বুজে রইল। শুধু তাই নয়, নির্বাচন বিধি ভঙ্গের অভিযোগ নিয়ে যখন নির্বাচন কমিশন তদন্ত চালাচ্ছে, তখন আরজেডি-র জাতীয় কর্মসমিতির বৈঠকে রীতিমতো লালবাতি লাগানো সরকারি গাড়ি নিয়ে এলেন কয়েকজন মন্ত্রী। তাঁদের বিরুদ্ধেও কোনও ব্যবস্থা নেননি রাজ্য প্রশাসনের কর্তারা।

রাজ্য প্রশাসনের এক পদস্থ অফিসার বলেছেন, “সব অফিসারই এখন লালুপ্রসাদ যাদবকে বাঁচাতে

উঠেপড়ে লেগেছেন। তাই পটনা এবং হাজিপুরে আরজেডি ছাড়াও রামবিলাস পাসোয়ানের লোকজনশক্তি পার্টি, সমাজবাদী পার্টি এবং বিজেপি-র হোর্ডিংয়ের উপরেও এফআইআর দায়ের করা হয়েছে।”

রাজ্য প্রশাসনের কর্তারা লালুপ্রসাদকে বাঁচাতে প্রাণপণ চেষ্টা চালালেও নির্বাচন কমিশনের বিশেষ পর্যবেক্ষক কে জে রাও আজ দিল্লি থেকে ফোন করে রাজ্য প্রশাসনের কর্তাদের কাছে নির্বাচন বিধি ভঙ্গের আরও তথ্য চেয়ে পাঠিয়েছেন। মহার্যালার প্রস্তুতির সময়ে দিন তিনেক ধরে পটনার গাধী ময়দানের ভিতরে এবং চারধারে অসংখ্য টিউবলাইট জ্বালানো হয়েছিল। কে জে রাও পটনা আসার আগে অবশ্য রাতারাতি এই আলোগুলি খুলে ফেলা হয়। কে জে রাও আজ রাজ্য সরকারের কাছে জানতে চেয়েছেন, এই আলোগুলির জন্য বিদ্যুৎ সংযোগ নেওয়ার সময়ে নিয়ম মেনে অনুমতি নেওয়া হয়েছিল কি না? এই বিদ্যুৎ ব্যবহারে জন্য পটনা বিদ্যুৎ সরবরাহ দফতর কোনও মিটার

ব্যবহার করেছে কি না, তা-ও তিনি জানতে চান।

গতকাল সারাদিন ধরে পটনা এবং বৈশালী জেলার হাজিপুর শহর ঘুরেছিলেন নির্বাচন কমিশনের বিশেষ পর্যবেক্ষক কে জে রাও। পটনা এবং হাজিপুর স্টেশনের ভিতরে ঢুকে আরজেডি দলের হোর্ডিং-পোস্টার-ব্যানার দেখেও তিনি রাজ্য প্রশাসনকে এর বিরুদ্ধে এফআইআর দায়ের করার নির্দেশ দিয়েছিলেন। আজ রাজ্য পুলিশের ডিআইজি (রেল) গুপ্তেশ্বর পাণ্ডে বলেন, “পটনা স্টেশনে ২টি এবং হাজিপুর স্টেশনে ১টি এফআইআর দায়ের করা হয়েছে।” অর্থাৎ কে জে রাও যে দু’টি স্টেশনে ঘুরে স্বচক্ষে অনিয়ম দেখে গিয়েছেন, নিজেদের পিঠ বাঁচাতে শুধুমাত্র সেই দু’টি স্টেশনই এফআইআর দায়ের করেছেন প্রশাসনের কর্তারা। গোটা বিহারের প্রায় সব ক’টি বড় স্টেশনের ভিতরে বাইরে লাগানো হয়েছে অসংখ্য হোর্ডিং ও পোস্টার। ভাগলপুর, সমস্তিপুর, মুজফ্ফরপুর স্টেশনে এখনও ঝুলছে সেই সব হোর্ডিং ও

পোস্টার। কিন্তু রেল পুলিশ লালুপ্রসাদের দলের নেতাদের বিপদ আর বাড়তে চাননি।

একই ভাবে কে জি রাও পটনা এবং বৈশালী জেলার হাজিপুর শহরের যেখানে যেখানে ঘুরে ভিডিও ছবি তুলেছেন, স্রেফ সেখানেই হোর্ডিং-পোস্টার নিয়ে এফআইআর দায়ের করা হয়েছে। বৈশালী পুলিশ সুপার এইচ এন দেব বলেছেন, “হাজিপুরে মাত্র ৪টি ক্ষেত্রে এই ধরনের অনিয়ম পাওয়া গিয়েছে। এই সব জায়গায় এফআইআর দায়ের করা হয়েছে।” এই চারটি এফআইআরই করা হয়েছে হাজিপুর শহরে। বৈশালী জেলার অন্য কোথাও নাকি এই ধরনের বিধি ভঙ্গির ঘটনা ঘটেনি। পটনার সিনিয়র পুলিশ সুপার এন এইচ খানও বলেছেন, “এখানে মোট ২৪টি এফআইআর করা হয়েছে।” তিনটি এফআইআর করা হয়েছে মহার্যালার জন্য লাগানো মাইক নিয়ে। এই দু’টি জেলা ছাড়া বিহারের অন্য কোনও জেলায় এই ধরনের নির্বাচন বিধি ভঙ্গের কোনও মামলা দায়ের হয়নি।

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA
24 DEC 2004
ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Cases filed against RJD activists

H0-1
23/12

By Our Special Correspondent

PATNA, DEC. 22. Twenty cases have been filed against Rashtriya Janata Dal activists for putting up illegal hoarding and banners in Patna, the District Magistrate, Goutam Goswami, said today. Cases have been filed in Vaishali district also.

The cases were filed on the directives of the Election Commission Adviser, K.J. Rao, who toured the two districts to probe violations of the model code of conduct.

Mr. Rao assessed the role, if any, of the State Government machinery and that of the Railways in the preparation for a rally, which the RJD called off yesterday. Mr. Rao pulled up several officials for not imposing the rules in matters relating to putting up hoardings in public and prohibited places such as government buildings.

Mr. Rao, who started his inspection at 9 a.m., travelled on all main roads in Patna and Hajipur and visited the Commercial Taxes office, the bus stand, the railway station, the airport and the MLA colony here. He also went to areas near the Chief Minister's residence and the Raj Bhavan.

Officials pulled up

It was almost the same scene everywhere and officials, including the two District Magistrates, were pulled up. The Deputy Superintendent of Police replied in the negative when Mr. Rao asked him if he had filed a case against those who had written party slogans on the walls of the Kotwali police station. "I've just joined duty," was the DSP's excuse. The officials admitted that hoardings had been put up at various government buildings and also named them.

"Were taxes paid on the hoardings put in the State capital," Mr. Rao asked the officials at the airport before leaving for New Delhi. The officials replied in the negative.

Mr. Goswami told Mr. Rao that permission had been granted to put up 189 hoardings in Sadar Patna and that he did not have the information for other parts of the capital. Displaying a

copy of the Bihar Prevention of Defacement of Property Act, 1985, Mr. Rao said, "It is under this Act that the hoardings are to be put up." Earlier, he asked labourers if they knew who was paying them for removing the hoardings. "The Government," they said. He sought to know why the district administration was paying for it when the work should have been paid for by the RJD. Mr. Goswami said he would send the bill to the RJD.

A visit to the Patna and Hajipur railway stations revealed how the premises had been "misused" and the trains either painted or pasted with RJD posters. "What could I do," was the reply of a railway official, when Mr. Rao asked him why he allowed the posters and banners. It was the same story at the bus stand.

Mr. Rao enquired about the tents put up in the MLAs' colony to accommodate the rallyists. "A marriage is being celebrated," said the officials. To this, Mr. Rao retorted: "You mean to say that marriages are being held at almost all the official residences of the MLAs and Ministers!"

Mr. Rao told *The Hindu* that he would submit a report to the EC either tomorrow or latest by Friday. He, however, declined to comment on his assessment, saying, "You people had seen it when I went about my job."

Mr. Rao is carrying with him notes on the case filed against the Chief Election Commissioner, T.S. Krishnamurthy, by some persons before the Chief Judicial Magistrate. The complainants, who include some Dalit women, said they were offended by the case filed against the RJD chief, Lalu Prasad, for distributing money to party workers. The petition charged that the case "amounted to the humiliation of the Dalits."

Meanwhile, four women who received money from Mr. Prasad registered their statements before a magistrate under Section 164. They said that Mr. Prasad had merely obliged them when they had demanded money for buying sweets on his becoming the Railway Minister.

I will not quit, says
Lalu: Page 11

Lalu rallies support, cancels rally

Statesman News Service

PATNA, Dec. 21. — In a surprise move, the RJD chief and Union railway minister Mr Lalu Prasad today announced the postponement of 'Kisan-Mazdoor Maharaila' scheduled for 23 December in Patna, to what he called "save the Election Commission from any embarrassment".

The RJD supremo announced that he will celebrate a massive "Vijay Diwas" (Victory Day) after the Assembly polls results are declared on 28 February. The counting of votes here is scheduled for 27 February.

The RJD chief said he had spoken to CEC Mr TS Krish-

Sack him, says Vajpayee

NEW DELHI, Dec. 21. — Reminding Dr Manmohan Singh, of the collective responsibility of the Cabinet (though the PM was not present in the House), Mr AB Vajpayee asked the government to sack Mr Prasad. "Is it not the collective responsibility of the government and the Prime Minister to remove Mr Prasad... there are charges against him," Mr Vajpayee told the Lok Sabha today during the Zero Hour. Mr Vajpayee reacted after Mr Pranab Mukherjee, the leader of the House, made a statement in the Lok Sabha in the absence of the Prime Minister that it was a matter between Mr Prasad and the EC, the latter being a constitutional body. The Opposition was not satisfied and staged a walkout. In the Rajya Sabha too the Opposition walked out in protest. — SNS

namurthy conveying the decision and requested for a one-day poll with deployment of central para-military forces.

As regards the EC notice to him asking why his party be not de-recognised, Mr Prasad said he would send his reply within the stipulated time

which expires at 3 p.m. on 24 December. He also blamed the media saying, "Hamare saath hamesha media trial hota aaya hai". The RJD national executive will meet here tomorrow.

Meanwhile, probe began today with recording of the

statements of four Dalit women who had allegedly received money from Mr Prasad. Investigating officer Mr AK Rajak, recorded in camera, the statements of the women in the court of first class judicial magistrate in Danapur. Earlier, Mr Prasad said that the Dalit women just wanted to celebrate his becoming a minister. And this (giving money) is something which he has "done before".

In Delhi, Congress spokesman Mr Anand Sharma reminded the BJP of the sari tragedy in Mr AB Vajpayee's Lucknow constituency ahead of the last LS polls in which 25 women were killed.

Another report on page 4

22 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

Chastened Lalu calls off rally

HTC and Agencies
Patna/New Delhi, December 21

HIS HANDS tied by the Election Commission's tough decisions, Railway minister and RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav today called off the massive election rally the party had scheduled in Patna for Thursday.

He put a brave face on the move, saying: "The rally has been called off as I do not want any embarrassment to a constitutional authority like the EC." He declared the rally would now be held on February 28 — that is, after the elections — as a "victory rally".

A day earlier, the commission had got an FIR filed against Yadav on the charge of bribing voters by distributing notes to Dalit women, and had asked the Railway Board not to run special trains for the rally.

The issue rocked Parliament again today, with the BJP-led NDA walking out of both Houses. Demanding Yadav's dismissal from the Cabinet, the Opposition said he had not only violated the model code of conduct but also brought disrepute to Parliament. It said Yadav had violated the law both as a minister and as a Lok Sabha member.

Bribery probe

The probe into the poll panel's charge of bribery against Yadav began today. The investigating officer, A.K. Rajak, took four Dalit women from Ramtari village, who had received money from Yadav at a rally on Friday, to the court of the first-class judicial magistrate, Danapur, before whom their statements were recorded.

Commission adviser K.J. Rao reached Patna late tonight to ascertain whether the state government machinery was being misused to boost the RJD's poll chances. The commission will also send a special observer, Sayan Chatterjee, to Patna tomorrow.

House row

Responding to the discussion marked by heated exchanges between RJD and BJP/JD(U) members in the Lok Sabha, defence minister and leader of the House Pranab Mukherjee maintained that since the poll panel knew about the matter, the House must await its decision.

Rejecting the Opposition demand for an explanation by the Prime Minister, Mukherjee said neither Manmohan Singh nor anyone else had

anything to explain. Parliamentary affairs minister Ghulam Nabi Azad's defence in the Rajya Sabha ran on similar lines. In a reference to the show-cause notice issued by the commission, Azad said the RJD president had been given time till December 24 afternoon to send his reply. "The government will not be able to say anything in the House ahead of Lalu Prasad's response to the commission notice," he said.

Former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, who did not join in the BJP walkout, said the distribution of hundred-rupee notes by Yadav was not meant to lift the recipients out of their poverty but to influence the poll verdict. "What is the use of the code of conduct when it is not observed?" Vajpayee asked.

■ See also Page 4

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

রাতভর বৈঠক, 'মহারাজালা' বাতিল করলেন লালু

সূত্রত বসু • পটনা

২১ ডিসেম্বর: নির্বাচন কমিশনের 'চাপে' পড়ে ২৩ ডিসেম্বরের 'কিবান-মজদুর মহারাজালা' বাতিল করলেন লালুপ্রসাদ যাদব।

গরিব বাস্তবতায় দিয়ে টাকা বিলি করা নিয়ে লালুপ্রসাদের বিরুদ্ধে গতকালই এফআইআর দায়ের করেছিল নির্বাচন কমিশন। এর পাশাপাশি 'মহারাজালা'র দিন যাতে রেল, পরিবহণ এবং সরকারি পরিকাঠামোর কোনও অপব্যবহার না করা হয়, তা দেখার জন্যও দিল্লি থেকে বিশেষ পর্যবেক্ষক পাঠানোর সিদ্ধান্ত নেয় নির্বাচন কমিশন। 'মহারাজালা'র সময়ে নির্বাচন বিধি কোনও ভাবে ভঙ্গ করা হলে তাঁর দলের অনুমোদন যে বাতিল হয়ে যেতে পারে, সেই আশঙ্কাতে গতকাল আইনজীবী এবং দলের নেতাদের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করে শেষপর্যন্ত এই সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন লালুপ্রসাদ।

আজ সকালে আরজেডি অফিসে সাংবাদিকদের তেতকে 'মহারাজালা' বাতিলের সিদ্ধান্ত জানিয়ে দেন লালুপ্রসাদ। এই জনসভা

বাতিলের কারণ হিসাবে তিনি অবশ্য জানিয়েছেন, "বিজেপি-সহ সাম্প্রদায়িক দলগুলি নির্বাচন কমিশনের কাছে এই সমাবেশ নিয়ে মিথ্যা অভিযোগ দায়ের করে চলেছে। আমি নির্বাচন কমিশনকে কোনও অপ্রস্তুত অবস্থায় ফেলতে চাই না।" নির্বাচন কমিশনের চাপে পড়ে এই জনসভা বাতিল করা হল— এ কথা অবশ্য লালুপ্রসাদ মানতে চাননি। তাঁর বক্তব্য, "নির্বাচন কমিশন তো আমাকে এই জনসভা করতে নিষেধ করেনি। আমি নিজেই এই সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছি।"

মুখে যা-ই বলুন না কেন, নির্বাচন কমিশনের 'কড়া সিদ্ধান্ত' যে লালুপ্রসাদকে ভাবিয়ে তুলেছে, গতকাল সারা রাত ধরে আইনজীবী, পদস্থ আমলা এবং দলের প্রবীণ নেতাদের নিয়ে দফায় দফায় আলোচনা থেকেই তা স্পষ্ট হয়ে গিয়েছে। গতকাল রাতেই আইনজীবীরা লালুপ্রসাদকে বলেন, সমাবেশের বিশাল খরচ নিয়ে নির্বাচন কমিশনের বিশেষ পর্যবেক্ষক রিপোর্ট দিলে বিপাকে পড়তে হতে পারে লালুপ্রসাদকে। তাঁরা জানান, এই জনসভার খরচ নিয়ে 'ডিসেসমেন্ট

অর্থ প্রপারটি' আইনে মামলা করার আশঙ্কাও রয়েছে।

সকালে লালুপ্রসাদ র্যালি বাতিল করার সিদ্ধান্ত ঘোষণা করার সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই 'অস্বাভাবিক ক্ষিপ্ততায়' হোর্ডিং, পোস্টার এবং তোরণ খুলতে শুরু করে সেয় আরজেডি কর্মীরা। চুনের আঁচড় বোলানো হয় সরকারি ভবনের দেওয়াল লিখনের উপরেও। আইন বাঁচাতে বড় বড় বেশ কয়েকটি তোরণের উপরে 'লালু-রাবজী জিন্দাবাদ' লেখা খুলে ফেলে সেখানে লেখা হয়, 'মেরি কিসমাস' এবং 'হিন্দু-মুসলমান শিখ-ইসাই, আপস মে সব ভাই ভাই।' মন্ত্রী এবং বিধায়কদের সরকারি বাংলোর সামনে এবং পিছনে বাঁধা প্যাভেলনও খোলা হতে থাকে।

লালুপ্রসাদ 'মহারাজালা' হঠাৎ বাতিল করে বসায় আজ বিরোধীরাও কিছুটা হতচকিত হয়ে পড়েন। বিরোধীরা ভেবেছিলেন, নির্বাচন কমিশনকে এই বিপুল আয়োজন দেখিয়ে বিপাকে ফেলা যাবে লালুপ্রসাদ এবং আরজেডিকে। কিন্তু লালুপ্রসাদ 'মহারাজালা' বাতিল করে সরকারি

জনগণের কাছে দিয়ে প্রচার করার কথা ঘোষণা করায় তাঁরাও বুঝে যান, এবার এই নিয়ে জনগণের 'সহানুভূতি' কাড়ার চেষ্টা চালাবেন রাজনীতির 'খিলাড়ি' নম্বর ওয়ান' লালুপ্রসাদ। এ ব্যবে লালুপ্রসাদকে রুখতে তাই বিরোধীরা তাই এখন থেকে পাল্টা আক্রমণ করতে শুরু করে দেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন। জেডিইউ নেতা নীতীশ কুমার বলেন, "সরকারি পরিকাঠামোর অপব্যবহার না করে যে লালুপ্রসাদের পক্ষে জনসভা করা সম্ভব নয়, তা এই ঘটনা থেকেই প্রমাণ হয়ে গেছে।" অন্য দিকে, বিজেপি-র পরিষদীয় দলের নেতা অশ্বিনী চৌবে বলেন, "এই র্যালির জন্য জোর জবরদস্তি করে ২৫০ কোটি টাকা তোলা হয়েছে। এই কারণেই নির্বাচন কমিশনের ভয়ে র্যালি বাতিল করেছেন লালুপ্রসাদ।"

মহারাজালা বাতিল করায় অবশ্য সবচেয়ে খুশি হয়েছেন লালুপ্রসাদের দলেরই নেতাদের একাংশ। চাঁদা হিসাবে যে টাকা তোলা হয়েছে, তা আর কাউকে ফেরত দিতে হবে না ভেবে আড়ালে নির্বাচন কমিশনকেই ধনাবাদ দিচ্ছেন তাঁরা।

Election panel deals bribery blow to Lalu

FIR filed against RJD chief

HT Correspondents
New Delhi/Patna, December 20

RAILWAY MINISTER Lalu Prasad Yadav today received a jolt ahead of the Assembly elections when an FIR was filed against him at the Election Commission's behest on the charge of attempting to bribe voters. The commission also threatened Yadav's party, the RJD, with derecognition over Yadav's act of distributing money to some people near Patna on Saturday.

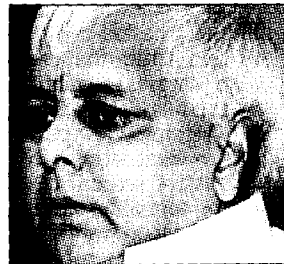
The commission also directed the Railway Board not to run special trains or divert any trains for the RJD's December 23 rally in Patna. It assigned a special observer, Sayan Chatterjee, for the rally and will send its adviser, K.J. Rao, tomorrow to Patna to monitor the situation.

As a defiant Yadav justified his action, the three-member commission took suo motu notice of media reports of the "serious" violation of the model code of conduct by the minister and discussed the subject for over an hour.

It later directed the Bihar chief electoral officer, K.C. Saha, to file an FIR under Section 171(B) of the IPC relating to bribery. The CEO immediately filed a complaint with Patna's Bihta police station.

The commission also issued a notice to Lalu, who is the RJD president, asking him to explain by 3 pm on December 24 why his party should not be derecognised.

Lalu had earlier ridiculed the BJP for levelling "false and frivolous charges" of violation of the model code. He said he had indeed distributed money to Dalits in Bihta as shown by a private television channel, but it did not amount to a violation of the model code.



Dates may be changed

THERE SEEMS to be a broad political consensus on getting the poll schedule changed for Bihar and Jharkhand. The Election Commission has announced three-phase polls in the two states, on February 3, 15 and 23. Government sources said this is probably the first time that the elections will cut into the budget session, which is tentatively scheduled to start from February 18. The railway budget is to be presented on February 23, the day of the last phase of polls in the two states. If railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav is busy electioneering in Bihar, that is likely to affect the exercise for the railway budget.

HTC, New Delhi

"I am used to giving money to the poor Dalits, not only during election time but for receiving blessings from aged Dalit women," Yadav said.

The issue also figured in the Lok Sabha where BJP members walked out demanding a statement from the Prime Minister on the subject.

21 DEC 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

FIR against Lalu for 'cashing' popularity

5-11 24/12 9-8- Belen
 EC NOTICE TO RJD ■ NO SPECIAL TRAINS FOR 23 DECEMBER PATNA RALLY

PATNA/NEW DELHI, Dec. 20. — In a major pre-poll setback to the ruling RJD in Bihar, the state chief electoral officer, Mr KC Saha, has lodged an FIR against the party president and Union railway minister, Mr Lalu Prasad, for distributing hard cash among the rural masses.

The Election Commission in a message faxed to Mr Saha asked him to file the FIR against Mr Prasad after a full meeting of the commission in Delhi chaired by chief election commissioner, Mr TS Krishnamurthy. Late tonight, the EC tightened the screws further when it issued a notice to RJD, asking why it should not be de-recognised as its chief had distributed money in violation of the model code.

The EC also directed the Railway Board chairman not to provide special trains for the RJD's proposed

rally in Patna on 23 December. Two special observers will be deputed on the rally day to ensure that the model code is strictly adhered to.

Observing in its notice to Mr Prasad that the print and electronic media showed "you clearly on the video" distributing money to several people, the Commission said "such action of distributing money to people amounted to violation of the model code of conduct." "The Commission is of the opinion that you, as president of RJD, have violated the model code by distributing money to the electorate of Bihar as reported in the media," the notice said.

Briefing reporters on the Commission meeting, EC spokesman, Mr AN Jha, said the Commission has also directed the state government not to misuse public transport, government machinery or build-

ings for the political activities associated with the rally. No meeting should be called by the ministers in which election-related officers were involved or government machinery was used, he said.

An EC spokesman confirmed registration of the case at the Bihara police station under Section 171 (B) of the Indian Penal Code relating to bribery. It was in the Bihara police station area that the railway minister was caught on Saturday distributing cash (amounting to giving bribe) among the villagers.

The state CEO has also directed all the district election officers (DEOs) to look into complaints of putting up banners, posters, other publicity material in private and government offices and take immediate steps for their removal. The DEOs have been asked to send their compliance

reports by 22 December. The RJD is to hold its much-trumpeted 'Kisan-Mazdoor Maharalla' at the Gandhi Maidan in Patna on 23 December.

The DM, Mr Gautam Goswami, confirmed tonight that the administration had started removing the hoardings. The move follows strong protests by the NDA with the EC over the issue. Agitated NDA leaders also staged a walkout in the Lok Sabha.

A news channel on Sunday showed Mr Prasad liberally distributing hard cash among poor villagers during the latter's road show near a Dalit hamlet in Bihara on Saturday.

As per reports, Mr Prasad was also to unveil a statue of Army/jawan Ganesh Yadav who attained martyrdom during the Kargil operations but could not do so because the model code has come into force. — SNS

More reports on page 4

can't offer sweets, will give money

PATNA, Dec. 20. — Mr Lalu Prasad has denied the Election Commission's allegation that he had violated poll guidelines. The RJD leader claimed that the distribution of money was not intended to lure voters.



"The villagers had demanded sweets from me as I had made it to the Union Cabinet. But since I wasn't carrying sweets, I gave them money to buy sweets," he told the media.

Ham ghoos nahin na le rahe the (at least I was not accepting bribe). Nor did he deem it improper to give financial aid to "humanity in crisis". — SNS

Court sends cops to raid Bihar jails

HT Correspondent
Patna, December 8

HT 1
9/12 ✓
9-8 - Bihar ✓

THE BIHAR military police raided 29 jails in the state on Wednesday, including the high-security Beur Jail. The raids were conducted immediately after the Patna High Court ordered a thorough search of various jails in the state, including offices of prison officials. The court also directed that district police and jail security staff should not be involved in the search.

Five central jails — Beur, Muzaffarpur, two in Bhagalpur and Buxar — and 24 district jails were raided. Six cellphones, VCDs, liquor, narcotics and incriminating articles were recovered. Four cellphones were seized from Beur, including one from the jailed Madhepura MP, Pappu Yadav.

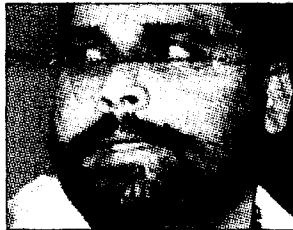
Last week Yadav was found holding a darbar with the backing of the jail superintendent during a surprise visit by the Inspector-General (IG), Prisons.

The military police also frisked the jail staff. This was done at the directive of the IG, who was tipped off that influential prisoners pass on their cellphones to prison staff during raids.

Earlier, the Patna High court took exception to the extortion racket being run from behind bars and blasted the state government for the deteriorating law and order situation. The court took cognisance of a PIL filed by the Indian Medical Association (IMA), which alleged that jailed gangsters were intimidating doctors and professionals by making ransom calls from cellphones.

Expressing dissatisfaction at the reply of state officials on rising crime, the court said: "It appears the administrative machinery in the state has failed."

High-profile jailbirds



- Pappu Yadav, RJD MP, in Beur jail on murder charge
- Shahabuddin, RJD MP, in Siwan jail on kidnapping, murder charge
- Rajan Tiwari, LJP MLA, in Beur jail for murder of two legislators
- Rama Singh, LJP legislator, in Hajipur jail on kidnapping, extortion and murder charges
- Nityanand Rai, BJP MLA, in Hajipur jail on murder charge
- Sanjay Singh, Cong MLA, in Munger jail on murder charge

While demanding a report from the government on Monday, the court also directed it to expedite deployment of CISF personnel in the five central jails.

Two months back, intensive raids were carried out at different jails in Patna, following a high court directive. Investigations carried out by the police had revealed that Bhagalpur jail superintendent S.K. Ambastha had helped notorious gangster Bindu Singh to run his extortion racket from the prison. Bindu had allegedly masterminded the killing of noted surgeon N.K. Agrawal on November 12. Subsequently, the Patna police obtained an arrest warrant against Ambastha, who is evading arrest.

09 DEC 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Pappu's progress

55-8
AM ✓ And it can only get worse ✓

If Pappu Yadav mocked the law and spread a climate of terror, it is because he enjoys the confidence of Lalu Prasad who nominated him for the Madhepura parliamentary seat and made it clear he liked the company of proclaimed gang leaders. One incident after another has demonstrated that Pappu is a law unto himself with resistance coming only from the courts. The latest shock was reserved for the IG (prisons) when he dropped in for a surprise check at the Beur jail only to find him holding a durbar with his supporters in a high-security zone where visitors are not allowed. In this case, Pappu's brigade hadn't even bothered to record their presence. Clearly he was in cahoots with the jail superintendent who was transferred a month ago but has not relinquished charge. Apparently, all this is not of any interest to Lalu who is busy digging up the past against LK Advani and Ram Vilas Paswan. The Prime Minister, seems to have left him to his own devices. So there is no one to tell Lalu that Pappu is an ordinary criminal charged with the murder of a CPI-M MLA.

The Supreme Court has intervened more than once to deal with the Pappu phenomenon. It had to order the cancellation of a bail he had secured from Patna High Court by questionable means. There are ways and means of subverting the law, first by intimidating witnesses and then through a conniving administration. Lalu, on his part, has every reason to seek an escape route for his notorious protege. He needs Pappu's army during assembly elections. It is impossible to reform leaders besotted with power. It is equally impossible to think of jail reforms in Bihar. But surely there is some way in which the likes of Pappu can be compelled to observe the law. The latest scandal at Beur is a matter of public safety and a brazen excess that is part of the lawlessness that has gripped Bihar. It can only get worse.

06 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

2,000 farmers died since YSR took over: TDP

Ashok Das
Hyderabad, November 22

RUBBISHING THE Y.S. Reddy government's claims of easing farmers' woes in Andhra Pradesh, the main Opposition TDP on Monday said that over 2,000 farmers have died during the six months of Congress rule. The state government is awaiting the Jayati Ghosh committee report on the measures to end suicides by farmers.

The TDP brought out a list of 1,825 farmers who committed suicide and another 177 people, including handloom weavers, who perished in starvation since May 14 (when Congress came to power), to substantiate its charges.

"It proves that all the pro-farmer and pro-poor policies of the government and special measures taken to prevent suicides have failed," TDP senior leader N Janardhan Reddy said.

"The farmers have no confidence that the chief minister can solve their problems. Some farmers even carried pesticide bottles when they came to meet the CM at his camp office at Lake View guest house," the TDP document says.

"No other state has recorded so many farmers' suicides in the last six months. It proves the colossal callousness and inefficiency of the Congress government in tackling the problem," it said.

Deriding the 'helplines' for the farmers, Reddy said these "helplines" in the collectorates have become "hopeless lines". He claimed that only one farmer (Narapa Reddy from Pulivendula constituency) benefited after 70,000 dis-

FROM THE RECORD

■ The TDP has brought out a list of 1,825 farmers who, it alleges, committed suicide since YSR Reddy became CM

■ The list gives out district-wise details of farmers' names, age, address and the date of suicide

■ The report derided the helplines set up by the state as 'hopeless lines'

■ The state dismissed the report as 'politically motivated'

tressed farmers registered their names.

The list compiled by the TDP workers runs into 55 pages and gives out district-wise details of the farmers including name, age, address, mode and date of suicide. It also includes cases for which the government has not announced relief measures.

Karimnagar topped the list with 210 deaths, followed by Prakasam with 171, Mahbubnagar 150, Medak 142, Nalgonda 126, Nizamabad 120, Kurnool 117, Antapur 111 and Guntur 110. In other districts, deaths numbered less than 100.

The government, however, has dismissed the report as "grossly exaggerated" and "politically motivated". Agriculture Minister N. Raghuvveera Reddy asserted that only 400 suicides in the last six months were farm-related. "We set up a committee to verify the claims and based on its report, we are paying compensation," he added.

PM launches food-for-work project in AP

Ashok Das
Hyderabad, November 14

PRIME MINISTER Manmohan Singh launched the National Food-for-Work Programme (NFWP) in Andhra Pradesh's Ranga Reddy district on Sunday.

Initially, the scheme will cover 150 of the country's most-backward districts and provide additional supplementary wage employment. It will also provide food security to the rural poor and ensure strengthening of infrastructure.

Speaking at a public meeting after the launch, Singh vowed to liberate the country from poverty, unemployment and starvation.

He said the NFWP was the first of several programmes of the UPA government to tackle rural unemployment. "In due course, we'll give a fillip to NFWP and convert it into an employment guarantee scheme so men and women from rural areas do not have to venture outside their villages for work", he said.

Work relating to water conservation, drought pro-

ofing (afforestation and tree plantation), land development, flood control/protection (drainage in waterlogged areas) and rural connectivity will also be taken up under this project.

"Through the new initiative, we hope not only to ensure community development, but also to improve farm productivity. Development of agriculture, irrigation, roads and infrastructure will be priorities", Singh added.

Under NFWP — a 100 per cent Centrally sponsored scheme — five kg of foodgrain will be provided at below-poverty-line rates for each manday to beneficiaries. The states will bear transportation cost, handling charges and grain tax.

Singh also laid emphasis on the need for closer coordination between the Panchayati Raj institutions and local administration.

"We'll earnestly strive to realise Mahatma Gandhi's dream of Gram Swaraj. It's not an easy task. But, if the people of Andhra Pradesh and India lend their support, we can move forward", the Prime Minister said.

15 NOV 2004 THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Fourth crop failure sparks suicide spate

G.S. RADHAKRISHNA

Karimnagar, Oct. 31: A farmer couple in Andhra Pradesh killed themselves last night after the fourth failure of their crop.

Chanda Swamy, 55, and his wife Shankamma, 50, had ventured to raise cotton and maize this *kharif* season (June-October), encouraged by the free power provided by the new Congress government.

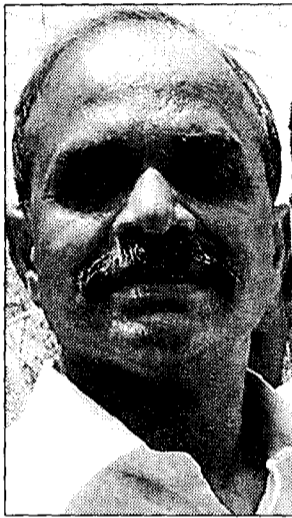
After the crop failed — following the fourth successive drought — the couple consumed pesticide in a hut on their farm 2 km from Raghavpur village in Peddapalli mandal of Karimnagar district.

They had lost their last piece of property — family jewellery worth Rs 75,000 mortgaged for a fresh crop loan of Rs 30,000.

"We had no alternative. We failed to finance our son Prabhu's studies and our plan to celebrate the wedding of our second daughter. We had placed all hopes on the *kharif* crop of cotton and maize. Both failed us again," their suicide note read.

The same day in the same district, farmers M. Lingachari, 25, A. Rajaiah, 55, and K. Mallareddy, 52, of Vemulawada and Mustabad mandals committed suicide.

Nearly 24 farmers have killed themselves in Peddapalli alone since the new government took charge in May, the revenue official



Reddy: Crushing burden

Harkishan Rao said.

The suicides have put chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy in a spot.

Over 100 farmers, including 46 weavers who also run farms, have committed suicide in Karimnagar since June, the district administration said.

The official state toll is 504 since May. Unofficially, the figure touches 1,100.

"Almost every farmer had high expectations in view of the free power and moratorium on loans. They took loans liberally during the year, confident of making ends meet," Rao said.

Mallaiah, the sarpanch of Raghavpur, about 170 km from Hyderabad, said: "Their land

was already mortgaged to banks. The fourth failure of crops in a row broke their hearts."

The Chandas apparently had an agricultural debt of Rs 1.7 lakh — excluding the Rs 30,000 — and risked digging a fourth borewell on their 23 acres as the others had become defunct.

Clustered in their small, five-room mud house where 13 members live, Swamy's elder son, 38-year-old Gopalakrishna, and his wife Kalpana were speechless.

Prabhu, the third son who rushed back from Hyderabad, was wracked by guilt.

"I could have given up studies and worked with them had I known it," he said, referring to the Rs 7,000 he needed for hostel fee as he had bagged a "free" computer science seat in a city college in the backward-class quota.

He had completed his intermediate exam with scholarship.

"Swamy used to console others and distance them from such dire acts. He must have lost the last hope to do this," said his 58-year-old friend Nagbhusan Rao, the local schoolteacher.

Almost 2.35 lakh hectares were cultivated during the *kharif* season. But the crop failed in over 1.5 lakh hectares, driving the indebted farmers to further despair, said Rajeswar Rao, the secretary of Karimnagar Farmers' Association.

PASWAN DARES RIVAL TO START CBI INVESTIGATION

Lalu, Paswan continue verbal duel before polls

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 29 NOVEMBER

THE war of words between two senior ministers of the Manmohan Singh government—Lalu Prasad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan—escalated on Monday with Mr Paswan throwing a direct challenge to his rival to get the government to institute a CBI probe into the corruption charges against him. With the Prime Minister simply unable to rein them in, the verbal duel between the two Bihar stalwarts can only get worse as they gear up to face the Assembly polls to be held in the state by next February. The feud between them can only reinforce the image of the UPA as a disjointed and divided lot.

The irrepressible railway minister started it all by fielding his trusted lieutenant Raghuvansh Prasad Singh to label Mr Paswan as “dacaition ka sardar” (the leader of dacoits). The Lok Janshakti leader retaliated by calling Mr Yadav “chara chor” (fodder thief), a direct reference to his alleged involvement in the multi-crore fodder scam.

Unnerved by Mr Paswan’s attempts to rake up the fodder scam issue on the eve of the Assembly polls in the state, the RJD president sought to tar his adversary with the corruption brush by charging him with committing financial irregularities during his tenure as the railway minister in the United Front government.

Mr Yadav followed it up by terming the Lok Janshakti, which is a component of the UPA at the Centre, as “a gathering of mafia elements”. Rattled by the fusillade of charges let loose against him by the RJD chief, Mr Paswan held a press

conference here on Monday afternoon. Throwing back the gauntlet at his opponent, the Lok Janshakti leader made it clear he was not going to take things lying down. “Now the stage of confrontation has come. Let Lalu order any probe, even if it is by CBI,” he said. “Forget Rs 800 crore. If any irregularity worth even Rs 8 is detected, I

will quit politics,” Mr Paswan countered, even as he blamed the RJD strongman for mixing state and Central-level politics.

Trying to give his own spin to Mr Yadav’s verbal barrage, Mr Paswan claimed the RJD president had become uneasy with his growing popularity across the state, as evidenced by the huge turnout at the Lok Janshakti rally in Patna on Saturday. He also rejected outright Mr Yadav’s allegation that he was leading a gang of criminals. “So long as Pappu Yadav was in the Lok Janshakti, the RJD used to describe him as a criminal. But now that he has joined the RJD, he has become a saint,” he said.

A former Lok Janshakti general secretary, Pappu Yadav, or Rajesh Ranjan, is currently lodged in jail on the orders of the Supreme Court. He was allegedly involved in several criminal cases. He lost the Lok Sabha polls from Purnea to the BJP. He subsequently joined the RJD, and was promptly rewarded with a ticket for the by-election to the Madhepura Lok Sabha seat.

The Lok Janshakti leader maintained it was not his nature to use foul language against anybody. “My decency should not be considered as a sign of weakness. But when anyone hurls charges against me, I cannot take it lying down as my silence will be construed as an acceptance of the allegations,” Mr Paswan said.



LALU, PASWAN:
DAGGERS DRAWN

Lalu's rub for anarchy in Bihar: tantra

Manoj Chaurasia in Patna

Nov. 24. — A "secular" RJD supremo may have repeatedly mocked the Hindutva brigade over Ayodhya. But he has proved to be no exception either.

The more the state is receding into anarchy, Mr Lalu Prasad is turning more to the Almighty — presumably seeking "peace of mind" and a peaceful return to power for his party for the fourth consecutive term. And surprisingly, his "search" for God has landed him in the constituency of his bete noire Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, whose Lok Janshakti Party, has of late become the prime target of attacks by the ruling RJD!

The Union railway minister has

visited the area twice during the past week, fueling speculation that his *devi* (read Mrs Rabri Devi) is not well placed in the state as against his repeated claims that "Goddess is firmly installed".

The issue would not have caught the fancy of the political pundits had Mr Prasad not visited the temples seeking blessings more frequently in the past week.

Those acquainted with the antics of the RJD supremo say the developments may be the outcome of some serious development that saw the Indian Medical Association members taking to the streets over the killing of renowned surgeon NK Agrawal and

God, presumably apprehending the sealing of his party's fate in the given situation when everyone appears too scared.

So, the masses felt really surprised when Mr Prasad paid a surprise visit to Hariharnath Temple at Sonapur, near Hajipur, on Monday evening to offer prayers and later performed *tantrik* rituals in the Gaurishankar Temple, a *sidha peeth*, located nearby.

A renowned *tantrik* of Rajasadan apparently helped Mr Prasad complete the required rituals. This was the first time during the last several years that Mr Prasad paid a visit at the Gaurishankar Temple, it was learnt.



Exactly a week ago on 16 November, Mr Prasad had visited Hajipur to offer prayers at Baba Basawan Bhuiyan Temple. Significantly, the very ceremony nicknamed *dugdhabhishek* (offering of milk at the sanctum sanctorum) was organised by some party leaders seeking "God's blessing for the RJD's return to power". "Mrs Rabri Devi is like 'goddess' who has been firmly installed in Bihar... the Opposition can't dare to remove her," Mr Prasad had said at that time.

However, it's not that Mr Lalu Prasad remembers gods only in times of crises. After taking time off from his otherwise busy schedule, Mr Prasad even proceeded on a week-long pilgrimage to South India in the middle of September.

5/8
19/11

Bad to worse

Centre must have a solution for Bihar

The NDA is far from convincing in its criticism of RJD-Congress rule in Bihar following the killings of a surgeon and a teacher by looters and extortionists. Lawlessness in the state is an old curse even when the NDA was in power. To plead for drastic steps now means placing the ball in the UPA's court. To expect Manmohan Singh to recommend to the President that firm action be taken against the Rabri Devi government is to day-dream. What did the NDA do when it had the chance? Action against Lalu then may have turned him into a martyr; which is the excuse why nothing was done. The NDA's anti-Lalu noises now are worse than useless. This is the most opportune moment. For while there is a Lalu shouting brigade (now fortified with lathis as instruments of terror), there are increasing numbers of ordinary citizens who have borne lawlessness and will lend support to protests planned in Bihar and elsewhere.

What is worse is the RJD government's cynical refusal to recognise the alarming reality of kidnappings, extortions and killings to which there is absolutely no answer. The doctor and teacher killed by extortionists represent professionals who are soft targets for criminal gangs operating with political patronage. The helplessness of the police suggests connivance while Lalu's silence is revealing. The RJD chief is inclined to shrug off these incidents as of little importance — even when a series of robberies and assaults took place on running trains in Patna. What he has not been able to do is to deal with criminal gangs who have made life unsafe for common citizens. The unflattering suggestion is that their protectors are more interested in remaining in positions of power under any circumstances than in safeguarding people.

Kidnapped doc flees, strike ends in Bihar

PATNA, Nov. 17. — The striking doctors of Bihar today eased their five-day-old stir, resolving to restore emergency services in government hospitals, as kidnapped surgeon Nageendra Prasad escaped from his abductors after 20 days in captivity.

"We have decided to restore emergency services in government hospitals with immediate effect," Dr Sahajanand Singh, general secretary of the IMA's Bihar chapter said. The decision was taken after a stormy meeting of the association where a doctor reportedly brandished a gun demanding immediate withdrawal of the strike.

However, private practitioners will stay away from work. A meeting of the IMA will be held tomorrow. Dr Prasad escaped last night. He was kidnapped from Samastipur district in October. Earlier, Army doctors were called upon to man major hospitals in the state as an emergency measure. — PTI

After murder, extortion threat

Press Trust of India

PATNA, Nov. 17. — Not content with killing the eminent surgeon of Patna, Dr NK Agrawal, on Diwali night, the extortionist gang are now harassing the surgeon's family members by demanding a reimbursement for the "cost of the killing".

The phone at the slain surgeon's home here kept ringing with the demand of Rs five lakh as the "cost of killing". Already frightened to the bone, the family-members were at a loss what to do.

Maar diya, par paisa kahan mila hai... Kam se kam panch lakh jo maarme mein kharch hua hai, uma to de do (We have killed him. Give at least five lakh which we spent on it)," a voice kept saying, a family member said.

Earlier, before the killing of the surgeon, the phone rang with a demand for Rs 50 lakh as ransom. When contacted, the Indian Medical Association (Bihar chapter) general secretary, Dr Sahajanand Singh, admitted that the IMA had been



informed by the slain doctor's family about the ransom demand.

Several doctors in Patna, including the noted orthopaedic surgeon, RN Singh, and cardiologist, AK Thakur, too were reported to have received telephone calls demanding hefty sums as ransom.

The state Director-General of Police, Mr Narayan Mishra, said the police were looking into the matter.

The DGP said priority had been accorded to providing armed bodyguards to medical practitioners under threat from extortionists. He said the increase in such incidents smacked of a pre-planned conspiracy to sully the image of the state police and the state government on the eve of the Assembly elections in Bihar.

18 NOV 2004

THE STATESMAN

Doctor's death bares malaise

ASHISH SINHA

Patna, Nov. 16: The Rabri Devi government continues to focus on the symptoms that have pushed Bihar into social anarchy while the disease of criminalisation of the state is far from being addressed.

But even the treatment of the symptoms is selective. At least, that is what the man on the street thinks.

He openly alleges a nexus between powerful politicians, police and the flourishing syndicates of extortionists and kidnappers all over the state.

"If this is not anarchy, then what is? Life is not safe for anyone on the streets of Patna. Even the confines of an individual's home is no longer safe because the criminals, active outside or from behind bars,

easily obtain telephone numbers of their prey.

"In the case of N.K. Agrawal (the doctor who was murdered), the media have been shouting aloud about the suspects but no action has been taken so far. I think the legal requirement of having witnesses and evidence should be waived for the special case of Bihar and there should be a ruthless crackdown," said Om Prakash Agrawal, brother of the murdered doctor.

Agrawal's father-in-law V.M. Mohanka said all indications of Bihar being a civil society have fast evaporated over the past few years.

"Is the situation hidden from anyone? We have been in Patna since 1954. It was an excellent place to live in but no longer. My daughter is devas-

tated. What did we do to deserve this?" he asked.

Agrawal's murder, the indefinite strike called by the doctors and the hue and cry being raised has not stopped the syndicates from operating. A renowned doctor of the city said he received an extortion call even today.

"The police often take our phone numbers on the pretext of providing us security. But it is strange how the private numbers of all prominent doctors reach the criminals. Many doctors think a hundred times before responding to a call coming from an unknown number," the doctor said.

Security agencies that provide armed guards to those who can afford them have mushroomed in the city.

Even during the proces-

sion taken out by the local chapter of the Indian Medical Association, some doctors moved with armed guards.

"Is there an option? The police are busy providing security to politicians who do not probably need it. The common man has to fend for himself and if in the process, he is murdered, it is highly 'usual' for the authorities," another doctor said.

Teachers who coach students for entry to engineering and medical students are also frequently targeted by the criminals. One of them has hired nearly a dozen security guards.

"I feel bad when I have to take classes with armed men around me. But the other option is to risk my life because I have received threat calls," the teacher said.

NOV 2004

THE TELEGRAPH

BJP backs JD(U) effort for anti-RJD front

Central Leadership Meets State Level Leaders To Galvanise Cadres In Bihar

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 16 NOVEMBER

A day after NDA urged all anti-RJD forces to come together to oust the Rabri Devi government in Bihar, BJP endorsed the call, indicating that it was not averse to JD(U)'s attempts to wean Lok Janshakti away from UPA.

The BJP central leadership, on Tuesday, held a meeting with state-level party leaders as part of an attempt to galvanise cadres in a state ruled by the husband-wife duo of Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi for the last 14 years.

The leaders admitted that the task of a regime change in the state could not be achieved without rallying the anti-RJD forces together.

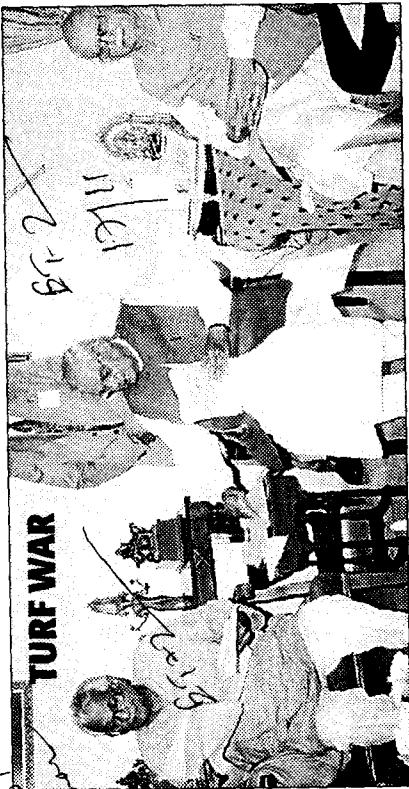
"It is our belief that a large section wants a change in Bihar and that anti-RJD votes outnumber pro-RJD votes," BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley, who's in charge of the party's affairs in the state,

told newsmen after the meeting.

"It'll be our endeavour to transform NDA into a nucleus of anti-RJD votes. We'll try to ensure that these votes are not split." It is evident that BJP has decided against putting any roadblocks in the way of senior JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar's efforts to build bridges with Union minister Ram Vilas Paswan.

"Even otherwise, the ball is in Mr Paswan's court as it is he who has consistently taken a strident anti-BJP line. Having taken such a posture, it is for him to rationalise his moves," a senior Bihar BJP leader told ET. Mr Jaitley said the party's top-most priority was to ensure that the anti-Lalu votes were not split, dropping a clear hint that BJP was keen to take Lok Janshakti on board.

It remains to be seen how Mr Paswan, who is a senior member of the Manmohan Singh government, gives shape to his plans to corner his friend-turned-foe Lalu Prasad Yadav.



TURF WAR

Lok Janshakti has decided to go in for a trial of strength in Patna on November 28. The rally's turnout may well decide the course of his future plans.

Meanwhile BJP, on Tuesday, decided to undertake a series of programmes to tone up its party machinery in the run-up to the polls, which are scheduled to be held by February. It will hold its own state-level rally in Patna on December 2, which is expected to be addressed by former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and party

president L.K. Advani.

The rally is likely to be followed soon by a Panvartan Yatra, which will travel through all the districts of the state.

"Many senior leaders from Bihar are expected to participate in the various legs of the yatra," Mr Jaitley announced. "The state has witnessed a steady deterioration in the 14 years of RJD rule. If we can get our act together, we can capitalise on the prevailing anti-establishment mood in the state," the BJP spokesman said.

UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR KILLED ■ IMA THREATENS NATIONWIDE BANDH

Bihar situation deteriorates

Statesman News Service

PATNA, Nov. 15. — In yet another blow to the alarming law and order situation in Bihar, criminals shot dead a university professor here last night, even as the Indian Medical Association today threatened to call a nationwide bandh of medical institutions on 25 November if the Bihar government failed to arrest the killers of eminent surgeon Dr NK Agarwal and secure the release of Dr Nagendra Prashad who was kidnapped on 28 October.

The Bihar branch of the IMA is on an indefinite strike since Saturday to protest the killing of Dr NK Agarwal on Diwali.

In Delhi, secretary-general of IMA, Dr Vinay Agarwal, said today: "We will be

organising protest rallies and dharmas from 21 to 24 November in support of the agitating Bihar doctors all over the country. But if the issue is not solved to the satisfaction of the medical community, we will be forced to call for a nationwide bandh on 25 November."

The Bihar branch of the IMA that met here today decided to continue its indefinite stir. It also decided to take out a massive protest rally tomorrow.

Police sources said, Mr Basudeo Prasad, a professor of CM Science College under Lalit Narayan Mithila University of Darbhanga was on his way to Sultanganj in Patna to meet his relatives when criminals waylaid and shot him. He was instantly rushed to the Patna Medical College and Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries late last night.

The incident has generated a fear psychosis among common residents of Patna. An FIR has been lodged with the Sultanganj Police Station in connection with the murder.

State IMA members met today to chalk out their future course of action post the ghastly killing of Dr Agarwal. Dr Agarwal, along with his compounder, was shot dead as he failed to pay extortion money to a gang. Though IMA members were not available to divulge the details of their future plans, Dr Jagdish Prasad Mohanka, president of Bihar State Agarwal Sammelan, who attended the IMA meet, said that it was decided at the meeting that a joint protest rally will be taken out in Patna tomorrow to protest the killing and turned down the government's appeal to withdraw the stir.

Dr Mohanka, a close relative of slain Dr Agarwal, said hundreds of doctors will participate in the rally that will begin from the Dak Bungalow roundabout. The rally will cover 9 km of distance before getting terminated at the same spot. "We will reply to Lalu's appeal (for withdrawing the agitation) by continuing our stir," Dr Mohanka said and added that no one was safe under the present regime.

To give further impetus to the doctors' stir, the Joint Struggle Committee, a conglomeration of 25 trading organisations, has lent their full support to the agitation.

Health services across Bihar remained paralysed for the third day today with nearly 20,000 private and government doctors staying away from work protesting the killing of Dr Agarwal and his assistant Arvind.

16 NOV 2004

THE PATNA

বিহারে 'চোরাই' সঞ্চয়পত্র নিয়ে তদন্তের নির্দেশ

পটনা, ২৫ অক্টোবর: পশুখাদ্যা, বিটুমিনের পরে এ বার সঞ্চয়পত্র-কেলেঙ্কারি নিয়ে বিহারের রাবড়ী দেবীর সরকার বেকায়দায় পড়েছে।

সরকারের কয়েকটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ বিভাগের ঠিকা-কাজ পেতে ন্যাশনাল সেভিংস সার্টিফিকেট, ইন্দিরা বিকাশ পত্রের মতো প্রায় ৩০০ কোটি টাকার 'চোরাই' সঞ্চয়পত্র জমা দেওয়ার অভিযোগ ওঠায় সিবিআই তদন্তের নির্দেশ দিয়েছে বিহার সরকার। রাজ্যের মুখ্য সচিব কে এ এইচ সুরেশচন্দ্র জানান, সঞ্চয়পত্র-কেলেঙ্কারির গুরুত্ব বিবেচনা করে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী রাবড়ী দেবীর নির্দেশেই এর তদন্তের দায়িত্ব সিবিআই-এর হাতে তুলে দেওয়া হয়েছে।

লালু-রাবড়ী দেবীর রাজত্বে এই নিয়ে তৃতীয়বার বড়সড় কেলেঙ্কারির ঘটনা ঘটায় রীতিমতো ফাঁপরে পড়েছে সরকার। সরকারের এক মুখপাত্র জানান, রাজ্যের জনস্বাস্থ্য কারিগরি, সড়ক নির্মাণ এবং সেচ বিভাগের ঠিকা-কাজ পেতেই কোটি কোটি টাকার 'চোরাই' সঞ্চয়পত্র কোষাগারে জমা দেওয়া হয় 'সিকিউরিটি ডিপোজিট' হিসাবে। পুলিশের প্রাথমিক তদন্তে জানা গিয়েছে, মজুত সঞ্চয়পত্রগুলি ১৯৮৮-২০০০ সালের মধ্যে চুরি হয়েছে সংশ্লিষ্ট দফতরের পটনা অফিস থেকে। সঞ্চয়পত্র-কেলেঙ্কারির কথা এখন গোটা বিহার জুড়ে দাবানলের মতো ছড়িয়ে পড়লেও এর সূত্রপাত বর্তমান ঝাড়খণ্ডে। পটনায় সরকারি সূত্রের খবর, পাশের রাজ্যের পলামু জেলায় এমনই এক ঘটনায় গুপ্তেশ্বর সিংহ নামে জনৈক ঠিকাদারকে গ্রেফতার করার পরেই জেলার পুলিশ সুপার বিহার পুলিশের ডি.জি.কে এ ব্যাপারে সতর্ক করেন।

Govt to issue ordinance to
clarify target group

Andhra set for quibble on quotas

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, July 26: The Andhra Pradesh government is set to correct the perception created by its policy decision to give 5 per cent reservation to Muslims in educational institutions and government jobs through an ordinance this week, highly-placed sources in the Congress said.

Andhra Pradesh High Court has stayed the decision on the ground that the Constitution does not permit religious quotas. The ordinance, the sources said, would be reworded to state that reservation is being extended to the socially and educationally backward castes among Muslims. This, they said, was in keeping with the Constitution and the Congress manifesto.

The document, in its section on minorities, states: "The Congress also pledges to extend reservations for the economically deprived persons belonging to communities that are at present not entitled to such reservations."

The sources said it is being ascertained if the 5 per cent quota earmarked by the Andhra government exceeded the 50 per cent ceiling on reservations imposed by the Supreme Court after the Mandal Commission recommendations for Other Backward Classes were adopted by the government.

A section in the Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy administration feels the Andhra government could go ahead as reservations in Tamil Nadu had touched 70 per cent and in Karnataka 69 per cent. However, the dominant view is that the government should adhere to the limits set by the apex court and

not risk a confrontation. The government's next step would be to set up a commission, on the patterns of Karnataka, to identify new castes among Muslims to be included in the ambit of reservations.

In 1994, when the Veerappa Moily government decided to give 4 per cent reservation to socially and educationally backward castes among the minorities, a commission was set up under K. Rahman Khan, the then chairperson of the legislative council. Khan, now the Rajya Sabha deputy chairperson, had recommended that all Muslims would fall in that category.

There is a debate within the Congress on what criteria should be followed while giving reservations, on whether the right should be extended to second-generation beneficiaries, on whether castes that formed

the creamy layer of the backward and scheduled castes should avail of it interminably and on how to restructure the policy to encompass social groupings that are unaware of such reservations.

The sources said a comprehensive social-justice model would help extend reservations to the private sector. They said leaders will start a dialogue with the Confederation of Indian Industry and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, but are more likely to use the socially acceptable phrase "affirmative action" instead of the word "reservations".

The corporate sector will be told that "affirmative action" will be voluntary, it can take any shape and that it would be incentive-driven.



Reddy

Andhra HC stays Muslim quotas

State mulls law to beat roadblock

HT Correspondents
Hyderabad/New Delhi, July 22

THE ANDHRA Pradesh High Court on Thursday suspended the state government's order providing five per cent reservation for Muslims.

The state government, however, is considering a law to support the quotas. "We are contemplating to bring in a legislation, if need be, on the subject," Chief Minister Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy told reporters in New Delhi. Reddy said the High Court had stayed the scheme till next Tuesday, but had also asked educational institutions not to fill up five per cent of the seats.

In Hyderabad, A division bench comprising Chief Justice Devender Gupta and Justice C.V. Ramulu, dealing with four writ petitions, pointed out that prima facie, the government order on quotas was contrary to a Supreme Court ruling that total reservation should not exceed 50 per cent.

The bench also mentioned that the ongoing admissions to medical and engineering cours-

es in the state would affect over 3,000 students. "Therefore, it is necessary to suspend the operation of the impugned government order (GO)." It referred the cases to a larger Bench for hearing on July 27.

The BJP and various Sangh Parivar outfits, who had opposed the "religion-based" reservation scheme, welcomed the move. The BJP's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, V.K. Malhotra, said: "The Congress government's move would lead to a further division of the country if it were implemented."

He said reservation based on religion was against the nation and the Constitution. Echoing Malhotra, VHP leader Praveen Togadia suggested that the reservation benefit should instead be given to farmers or tribals who were not included in the reservation quota so far.

The reservation promise was part of the Congress's election manifesto and the government had planned to bring a Bill in the Assembly to give statutory backing to the order.

Reddy said the proposed five per cent reservation in civil service jobs for Muslims will apply to the socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged and not to the creamy layer in the community.

"We can always say that whatever reservations are there, are not for the creamy layers among the minorities," Reddy told BBC World's *Hardtalk India* programme. Asked specifically whether the upper elite of the Muslim community will be excluded from the reservations, Reddy said "Ya. Our intention is that — to exclude the elitist, or people whose incomes are substantial, from this reservation Bill."



Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy
Unfazed

Teachers fled leaving kids to burn

HT Correspondent & PTI
Kumbakonam, July 17



Paid firefight course for city schools

Sandip Chowdhury
Kolkata, July 17

ARE STATE schools less fire-prone than the ones in Tamil Nadu? Our fire service department seems to think so.

Singed by yesterday's school-building fire in which 89 children were roasted alive at Kumbakonam, the Salem district administration today ordered 86 "unsafe" private schools closed.

The Bengal government isn't going that far. For now, it will conduct a survey of all city schools to find out if they are following fire service norms and consider punitive measures against non-compliant institutions. It will also gladly train school staff in firefighting techniques for a fee.

"The Tamil Nadu incident has come to us as a wake-up call. We will check the fire safety norms at all city schools. But it won't be an overnight job. It will take time to identify which schools are safe and which are not," Fire Services Minister Pratim Chatterjee said.

For a start, his department will identify the schools whose kitchens and laboratories are an obvious fire risk. But the present legal provisions contained very limited scope for punitive measures, the minister added. "The department does have the power to issue notices and charge penalties, but strong legal action is difficult."

WHERE DID all the teachers go when tragedy struck Sri Krishna School? The unanimous view of parents and students is that the teachers were among the first to flee the scene without caring to rescue the students as the fire spread.

"I can only recall the teachers shouting 'fire, run' before bolting," recalled Radhika, a Class X student of the school. "If only the teachers of class III and IV, which had thatched classrooms, had let the students out the moment they saw the fire in the kitchen, our children would be alive today," wailed P. Marimuthu, who lost his only son Mohankumar (8) in the accident.

On Friday, 18 teachers and three other staff members were present in the premises, but did little to pull the kids to safety. Jayaram, a vegetable vendor who has a stall near the school, recalled that most teachers were on the street when the classroom on first floor caught fire. "Many of us among the public ran into the school to try and pull out the kids. But the teachers just refused to venture inside."

This is borne out by the fact that not a single staff member suffered even a minor burn.

Praveen, like all other kids, loved chocolates. His father gives him one for his final journey, at a burial ground in Kumbakonam on Saturday.

leave alone fall prey to the leaping flames. Their culpability is further strengthened by the fact that most of them have gone into hiding. The police have launched a search for the missing teachers. They detained one of them, Maria Angeli, for interrogation. She proclaimed innocence, saying she did try to move them to safety.

"Everyone's role in this tragedy — management and teachers — will be investigated and responsibility fixed," said district collector Radhakrishnan.

Toll touches 89
The death toll in the school fire tragedy touched 89 on Saturday, with two more boys succumbing to their wounds. While 75 had died on the spot at the school, the others died in hospital. The condition of four kids is still critical.

Five people — the founder of the school, two of his family members and two staffers of the noon meal kitchen — have been arrested for criminal negligence.

Among those who visited the school and the injured in the hospital today were Union ministers Dayanidhi Maran, Mani Shankar Aiyar and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi.

Centre to prod states
Maran said he has requested Manmohan Singh to write to all Chief Ministers to mobilise their governments to take all safety measures in schools.

More reports on Page 2

REUTERS

18 JUL 2001

Bihar flood situation worsens

Assam remains cut off: Barpeta district worst-hit

Patna: The flood situation in Bihar aggravated further on Monday with swollen rivers inundating fresh areas in the state, hitting about 60 lakh people in 11 districts as 25 people were reported to have lost their lives so far, official source said.

Darbhanga, Sitamarhi and Sheohar were cut off from the rest of the state with menacingly rising rivers submerging fresh areas in these three districts and also Muzaffarpur and East and West Champaran districts, official sources said.

Train services on Samastipur-Darbhanga, Samastipur-Jhanjharpur, Samastipur-Narkatiaganj, Saharsa-Forbesganj, Jhanjharpur and Nirmali remained paralysed, divisional railway manager (Samastipur) V K Bahmami said.

A Darbhanga report said flood water had entered almost all the wards of the north Bihar town which were under knee to waist-deep water. The airstrip of the Indian Air Force was also submerged.

The army continued to assist the local administration in providing relief and evacuating those marooned. Three army choppers have been pressed into service and two more were expected to join in relief and

rescue efforts on Monday.

The flood-hit districts are Sitamarhi, Sheohar, East Champaran, West Champaran, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Araria, Katihar, Khagaria, Supaul and Banka.

Meanwhile, the Assam flood situation turned devastating on Monday with vast tracks of human habitation and cropland getting submerged as the state continued to remain cut off with the government estimating Rs 1,000 crore loss of public assets and infrastructure.

Lower Assam areas, particularly in Barpeta and Nalbari districts, continued to be worst-affected as lakhs of flood victims, including infants and women were forced to stay on the elevated stretch of national highways under the open skies.

With the government unable to reach relief materials due to overtopping of national highways by more than five feet of water, the situation has turned worse for the 25 lakh people affected by the flood. Agencies



A jawan carries two children to safety in Rangia village of Assam on Monday

Ten killed in Bihar gang war

9-5 48
Nawada: In a gang war, ten members of a backward caste were shot dead late on Friday night by Akhilesh Singh gang in a village in this district of Bihar.

In an apparent retaliation to the killing of two children allegedly by Ashok Mahto gang earlier in the day, Akhilesh group members raided Chakwai village around 10 pm and shot dead eight persons on-the-spot and injured three, police said on Saturday.



A woman, who lost her family members in the attack, is consoled by a relative

While one of the injured succumbed at Nawada Sadar Hospital early on Saturday morning, another died on the way to Patna Medical College Hospital.

Agitated villagers did not allow police to lift the bodies for post mortem, demanding that RJD chief and railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav visit the spot and an ex-gratia of Rs 1 lakh and government jobs to the next of kin of those dead. Agencies

Mobile phone is at hand, food is not

A new government has taken over in Andhra, but farmers continue to kill themselves. Why?

SUJAN DUTTA

Nizamabad, June 6: Meet Ms Andhra Pradesh, Rena. Eighteen years old, she doesn't have to control her diet; when she is hungry, she just goes to sleep.

But she is a survivor. When Bomallaboyi Gangayya, about 40, unmarried farmer, died four years ago, his sister — that was all there was to the family — was just 14. Today, here in this village of Potaram in Nizamabad district's Machareddy block, Rena lives — survives — all alone in a hut she rents for Rs 50 a month.

Rena is hungry all the time but scarcely knows it. She has killed hunger for so long that she can now forget to eat. But Rena does not look like she is starving. She does not look like she is an image from the Bengal famine or from Somalia or Ethiopia. India's poor women can conceal poverty under the layers of a saree, under a nose stud and in a coy smile.

Rena could have eaten well, slept better, put on flesh and learnt to laugh if the mobile telephone network could distribute food and water and fertiliser through the airwaves. Three cellular service providers make Machareddy accessible from anywhere in the world — Reliance, Tata and BSNL.

The same Machareddy mandal has reported the highest number of farmer suicides for any block in the country — 55 in about five years. Bomallaboyi, Rena's brother, was one of the first. There have been seven suicides by farmers in Potaram

alone. The 55th suicide — the first by a woman — was just over a week ago.

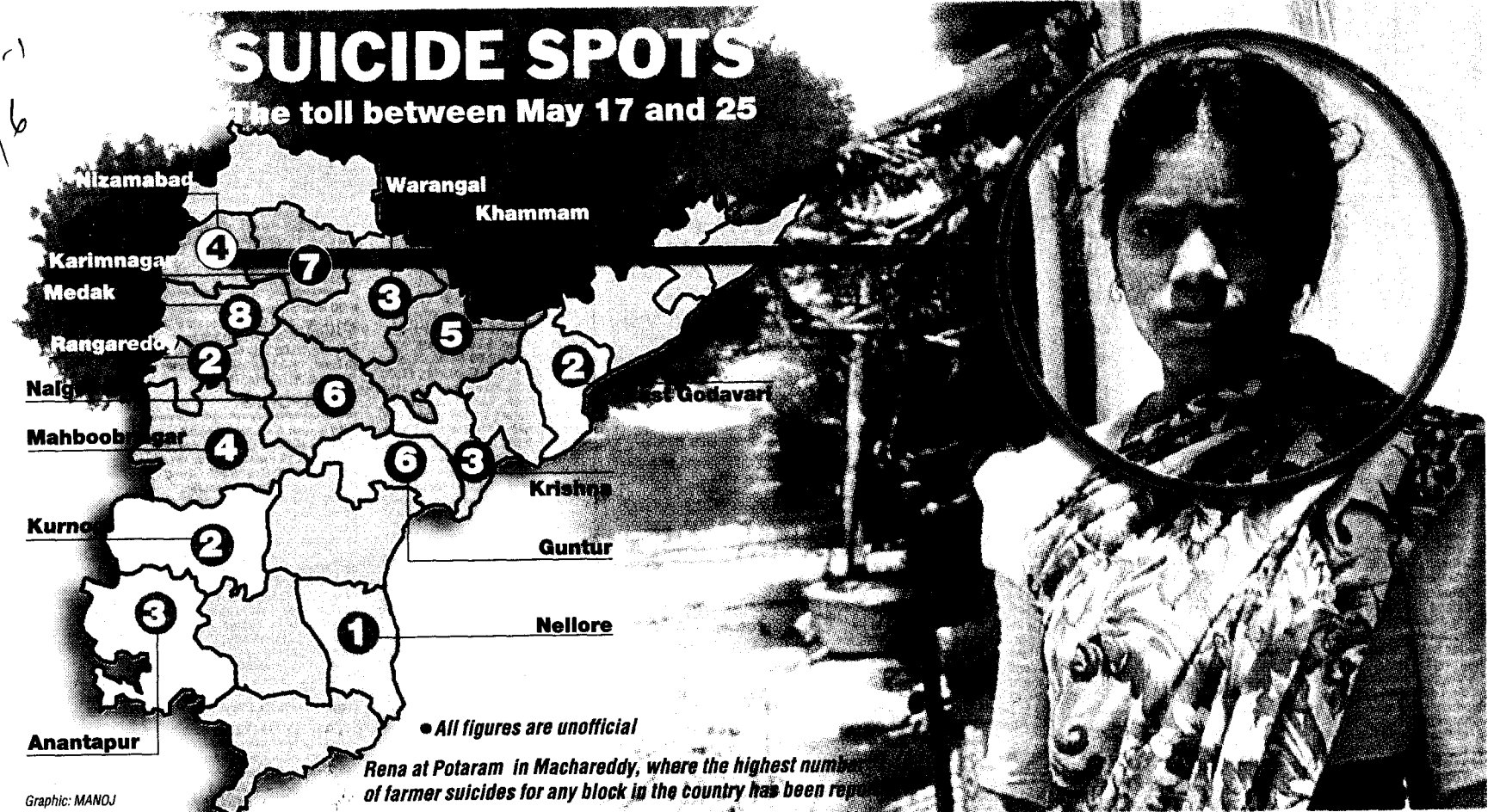
Farmers have mixed the pesticide endosulfan with locally brewed toddy and walked off to dry fields to die, they have hanged themselves from trees and have set their bodies ablaze after dousing clothes in kerosene. But this is not a story about the Andhra farmer. It is the story of what one suicide by one farmer has left in its wake — Rena's story.

Rena's brother tilled their acre of land that could grow sugarcane and maize. The monsoon in Telengana has been erratic; the crop has failed for five successive years. In the years since Bomallaboyi died, Potaram has been put on the telecom map, prohibition has been lifted and Peter Scot whisky is available at "Ruby Wines" just a 20-minute drive away.

Potaram is on the mobile telephone network but outside an irrigation network. There is no canal to bring water to its fields from the Samudrapu Cheruvu tank 5 km away and no canal to take water to the tank from the little river that flows through Reddipet, another 4 km away.

So Rena cannot till the field that could grow sugarcane or maize. Groundwater levels have fallen drastically. Boring a well will mean she will have to take a loan and what can she offer as collateral?

Rena rolls *bidis*, at the rate of Rs 45 per day per thousand. That is at best for six months in a year. Assuming she finds work every day, that would earn her about Rs 1,300 a month. She is entitled



to her BPL (below poverty line) allowance of rice from the public distribution system — 10 kg a month at Rs 5.25 per kg. Moong dal costs Rs 27 per kg.

A standard meal in these parts would include rice, dal, pickle and tamarind soup. But if she were to have two meals daily — the year has 365 days and she finds work for about 140 days — she would not survive.

These days, a teachers' federation and a farmers' assistance group are running a free midday meal camp for a month at the Potaram Upper Primary School. Rena goes for her dal and rice there sometimes. The camp will be on till June 8.

Rena has stopped thinking about it. Many have come to hear her story. There are so many peo-

ple to worry about Rena that she does not need to worry about herself. So she kills her hunger and goes to sleep.

"Everyone comes and asks the same questions, they nod and go away," says Potaram's sarpanch Gyara Sailu.

Rena is not alone. Her world in Potaram, a village of about 200 households, includes seven other families where farmers have committed suicide. There is, for instance, Satyava.

Satyava was widowed by Kumar Mallaya's death. Kumar Mallaya committed suicide. He was about 60 years old. Their daughter Pushpa, 35, died two years ago of a disease. Pushpa's husband, Anjah, died last year. He falls in that strange category of victims the local people de-

scribe as "hunger death".

Their daughter Rani, 15, lives with Satyava. Rani is another Ms Andhra.

Then there is Rajava. Husband Narasapuram Devayya, about 50 years, was also a case of "hunger death". Their son, Balraj, hanged himself last year.

Or, there are Ravi and Raju. Ravi is in his teens. Raju not yet. They live next door to Satyava. Their father, Narasapuram Narsaiyya, a case of "hunger death"; their mother, Lakshmi, died of disease three years ago. There have been five "hunger deaths" in Machareddy since 1999.

And then, in the next village of Singarayapalli, there is the woman who did not survive (Tomorrow).

বিহারে ফের গণহত্যা ইটভাটায় ১২ জন খুন

বিহারশরিফ, ৫ জুন— বিহারে ফের নরসংহার। কাল গভীর রাতে নালন্দার দিনার গ্রামে এক ইটভাটায় অজ্ঞাতপরিচয় আততায়ীরা ১২ জনকে গুলি করে মেরেছে। আহত হয়েছেন ৩ জন। মৃতদের মধ্যে ওই ইটভাটার মালিক ও ১১ জন শ্রমিক রয়েছেন। নিহত শ্রমিকদের অধিকাংশই দলিত। তবে দলিত হত্যার মতো স্পর্শকাতর বিষয় যথাসম্ভব আড়ালে রেখে পুলিশ-প্রশাসন দু'টি ইটভাটার রেমারেটিকেই হত্যাকাণ্ডের কারণ বলছে।

রেলমন্ত্রী লালপ্রসাদ যাদবের বক্তব্যেও একই সুর শোনা গিয়েছে। অপরাধীদের বিরুদ্ধে ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ার কথা বলেছেন লালু। ইতিমধ্যে পাশের অন্য একটি ইটভাটার মালিক-সহ পাঁচ জনকে এ ব্যাপারে গ্রেফতার করা হয়েছে। এত কিছু সত্ত্বেও দলিত-হত্যার প্রদঙ্গ কিন্তু ঘুরে ফিরে সামনে চলে আসছে।

আততায়ীদের হামলায় কোনওক্রমে প্রাণে বেঁচে যাওয়া এক শ্রমিক জানিয়েছেন, রাত সাড়ে এগারোটা-বারোটা নাগাদ প্রায় পনেরো-ষোল জন লোক আচমকা তাঁদের 'পঙ্কজ ইটভাটা'য় আসে। প্রত্যেকের হাতে আগ্নেয়াস্ত্র ছিল। অনেক শ্রমিক ঘুমিয়ে ছিলেন। হামলাকারীরা তাঁদের টেনে-ইঁচড়ে ঘুম থেকে তোলে।

তার পর বন্দুক দেখিয়ে এক সারিতে দাঁড়ানোর হুকুম দেয়। ভয়ে পেয়ে তাঁরা দাঁড়ানো মাত্র চারিদিক থেকে এহলাপাখাড়ি গুলি চালানো শুরু হয়।

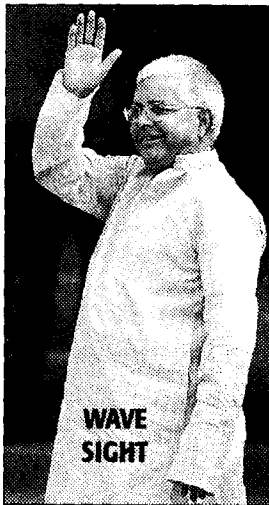
ঘটনাস্থলেই ইটভাটার মালিক কমতাপ্রসাদ ও আট শ্রমিক মারা যান। পহুর হাসপাতাল নিয়ে যাওয়ার পথে আরও ৩ শ্রমিকের মৃত্যু হয়। মৃত শ্রমিকদের নাম যথাক্রমে, কারু ধারি, কৃষ্ণ তাঁতি, রাম সঞ্জীবন, সুরেশ পাশোয়ান, রাজকুমার পাশোয়ান, বসুন্ধর পাশোয়ান, সীতারাম কেওট, সাগর পাশোয়ান, লখন পাশোয়ান, কানহাইয়া ধারি, বিনোদ রবি দাস।

নালন্দার সাংসদ প্রাক্তন রেলমন্ত্রী নীতীশ কুমার। দিনার গ্রামটি এখানকার অস্থায়ী থানার মধ্যে পড়ে। নালন্দার পুলিশ সুপার অমিত লোধা-সহ উচ্চপদস্থ পুলিশ অফিসারেরা ঘটনাস্থলে গিয়েছেন।

আততায়ীদের খোঁজে বিশেষ টাস্ক ফোর্স তল্লাশি শুরু করেছে। পুলিশ সুপারের বক্তব্য, বেশ কিছুদিন ধরেই পাশাপাশি দু'টি ইটভাটায় গোলমাল চলছিল। এক জনের জন্য অন্য জনের ব্যবসা খারাপ হচ্ছে, এই নিয়ে প্রায়ই ঝামেলা লেগে থাকত। কিন্তু তার পরিণতি যে এইরকম হবে, তা পুলিশও আন্দাজ করতে পারেনি। — পি টি আই

Laloo delivers final punch in Chhapra, floors Rudy

Chhapra
JUNE 27
RJD president and railway minister Laloo Prasad Yadav triumphed over BJP rival Rajiv Pratap Rudy on Wednesday by over 65,000 votes — in a repoll ordered following charges of widespread rigging — deliver-



ing the final punch on the battered NDA in the state.

Mr Yadav's victory, which takes RJD's tally of Lok Sabha seats to 24 out of a total of 40, demolished all hopes that the NDA might have had of stalling the RJD-led secular alliance's juggernaut with its tally stuck at 11.

Of the 24 seats in the RJD's kitty, Palamu and Chatra are in Jharkhand. Mr Rudy is the seventh minister in the erstwhile Vajpayee government from Bihar to have lost the 2004 general elections the others being Sharad Yadav, C.P. Thakur, Syed Shahnawaz Hussain, Hukumdeo Narain Yadav, Sanjay Paswan and Digvijay Singh.

With Mr Yadav's win in Chapra, the secular alliance comprising RJD, the Congress and Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Jan Shakti party, shot up to 29. While the Congress won three of the four seats it contested.

—PTI

ভোঁটের আয়না

শিক্ষা, ধন্যবাদ
চন্দ্রবাবুকেও!

২৪ অক্টোবর, ২০০৩। বি জে পি-র 'ফিল গুড' পর্ব শুরু হতে চলেছে। ওই ফিল গুড-এর আঁচ নিয়ে বিধানসভা ভোট পার হওয়ার আশায় চিকচিক করছে চন্দ্রবাবুর চোখ। হায়দরাবাদে অত্যাধুনিক স্টেডিয়াম উদ্বোধন করলেন আদবানি। চুনোপুটি থেকে উপপ্রধানমন্ত্রী, সকলেই সাড়ে-উচ্ছ্বাসিত প্রশংসা করে গেলেন চন্দ্রবাবুর। প্রশংসার প্রতিযোগিতা, ফাস্ট অবশ্যই আদবানিজি। তীক্ষ্ণ চোখে তিনি তো শুধু স্টেডিয়াম দেখছিলেন না, পরবর্তী লোকসভা ভোটে অঙ্ক থেকে জোটের ৩৫ আসনের ছবি দেখছিলেন। মুখ্যমন্ত্রী চন্দ্রবাবু নাইডুও শুধু স্টেডিয়াম আর সমবেত আমন্ত্রিতদের দেখছিলেন না, আসন্ন বিধানসভা ভোটে জয়ের নিশ্চিত ছবি দেখছিলেন। চোখের সেই চিকচিক আমরা দেখেছি, ভেবে এখনও দেখতে পাচ্ছি। কী মজা। এক, রাজ্যে ক্ষমতায় থেকে যাচ্ছি আরও পাঁচ বছর। এবং দুই, কেন্দ্রে আমারই মদতে থেকে যাবে বাজপেয়ী সরকার, সুবিধে আদায় অব্যাহত থাকবে। ফিল গুড, একেবারে 'ডাবল ফিল গুড'! অঙ্কের লক্ষ লক্ষ চাষী সেদিন স্টেডিয়ামে ছিলেন না। অঙ্কের লক্ষ লক্ষ শ্রমজীবী মানুষ সেদিন স্টেডিয়ামে ছিলেন না। তাদের মনে মনে অন্য ছবি আঁকা হয়ে যাচ্ছিল। রাখব না!

যে সাংবাদিকরা নির্বাচনের আগে অঙ্কে গেছেন, খোলা চোখে তারা প্রায় সকলেই চন্দ্রবাবুর আসন্ন পতনের খবর টের পেয়েছেন। যারা চন্দ্রবাবুয়ানার সমর্থক, তারা আশঙ্কা প্রকাশ করেছেন। সব সমীক্ষাতেই একই কথা বলা হয়েছে। কিন্তু, বোঝা যায়নি, পতন এত সশঙ্ক হবে। ২৯৪ আসনের বিধানসভায় পঞ্চাশও পাবে না তেলুগু দেশম-বি জে পি জোট, এতটা কেউই বোঝেননি। কারণ এক, সাধারণ মানুষ কত বড় ধাক্কা দিতে প্রস্তুত হচ্ছেন- তার হিসেব আগে পাওয়া সম্ভব নয়। দুই, আমাদের বোধহয় মনে ছিল না, অঙ্ক এমন একটা রাজ্য, যেখানে জনরায় এক দিকেই দারুণভাবে চলে পড়ে, পরাজিতকে সাহসনা পুরস্কার দিতেও রাজি হয় না। এ রকম আরেকটি রাজ্য দক্ষিণেরই তামিলনাড়ু এবং সেখানেও এবার একই রকম ধাক্কা অপেক্ষা করছে বি জে পি জোটের জন্য। কেন এমন শোচনীয় হার? চন্দ্রবাবু নিজে বলেছেন, ভাৰতে হবে, পর্যালোচনা করতে হবে। টেলিভিশনে বি জে পি নেতারা কিন্তু ব্যাখ্যা দেওয়ার চেষ্টা করেছেন। এক, স্বাভাবিক প্রতিষ্ঠান-বিরোধী হাওয়া। অ্যান্টি-ইনকামবেলি। অর্ধেক সত্য। সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি যথার্থ বলেছেন, 'ডাবল অ্যান্টি-ইনকামবেলি'। রাজ্য সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে হাওয়া। কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের বিরুদ্ধেও হাওয়া। বি জে পি নেতারা দ্বিতীয়টি চেপে যাচ্ছেন। দুই, বি জে পি নেতারা বলছেন, পৃথক রাজ্যের দাবিদার তেলেঙ্গানা রাষ্ট্রীয় সমিতির সঙ্গে বিপজ্জনক আঁতাতের ফলেই বিপর্যয়। সিকি সত্য। পৃথক রাজ্য গড়ায় যারা মুক্তকণ্ঠে, তাদের মুখে এ সব কথা মানায় না। এবং, ফল বলাচ্ছে, তেলেঙ্গানা অঞ্চলে এমন সাফল্য না পেলেও এবার সরকার গড়ত কংগ্রেসই।

সে কী প্রশংসা কাগজে কাগজে, চ্যানেলে চ্যানেলে। নতুন সময়ের সেরা মুখ্যমন্ত্রী। ভবিষ্যতের আদর্শ প্রধানমন্ত্রী। একুশ শতকের আদর্শ নেতা। হায়দরাবাদকে সাইবারাবাদে পরিণত করার উজ্জ্বল রূপকার। একমাত্র মুখ্যমন্ত্রী যিনি নিজেকে বলেন রাজ্যের 'সি ই ও'। তা, এই উজ্জ্বল চিফ একজিকিউটিভ অফিসার কী কী করেছেন? বিশ্বব্যাপ্ত থেকে প্রায় ৫০ হাজার কোটি টাকা 'এনেছেন'। সবচেয়ে বড় সমর্থক দল হিসেবে দিল্লি থেকে বাড়তি সাড়ে সাত হাজার কোটি টাকা এনেছেন। বিল গেটস-এর সার্টিফিকেট আদায় করেছেন। হায়দরাবাদকে বন্ধুকে সাইবারাবাদ বানিয়েছেন। কিন্তু, সি ই ও আর মুখ্যমন্ত্রীর কাজ তো এক নয়। কোম্পানির খাতায় বেশি লাভ, সুতরাং সি ই ও-র দাম বেড়ে গেল, ব্যাপারটা তো এ রকম নয়। টাকা তো এল, গেল কোথায়? অর্ধেক বা তার চেয়ে একটু বেশি খরচ হয়েছে সাইবারাবাদকে বন্ধুকেপনায় জাতীয় ও আন্তর্জাতিক দর্শনীয় স্থান হিসেবে তুলে ধরায়। বাকি অর্ধেক বা তার চেয়ে একটু কম গেছে নানা মাপের পেটে-পকেটে। গত চার বছরে ২০০৯ জন চাষী আত্মহত্যা করেছেন চন্দ্রবাবুর অঙ্কে, বেশির ভাগ চন্দ্রবাবুর নিজের অঞ্চলে। সাড়ে সাতাশ হাজার কোটি টাকা কোথায় গেল, কী হল, সাধারণ মানুষ টের পাননি। গ্রাম-অঙ্কের মানুষের কাছে কিছু পৌঁছয়নি। বরং সি ই ও-র তথা সাইবারাবাদের চাকচিক্যের খবর পেয়ে গরিব অল্পবাসী ক্রমশ আরও আরও রুগ্ন হয়েছেন। এবং যথাসময়ে মোক্ষম ধাক্কা দিয়েছেন। কণ্ঠটিকের কংগ্রেসি মুখ্যমন্ত্রী এস এম কৃষ্ণ সুখী মিডিয়ায় আরেক রাজপুত্র। কণ্ঠিক বিধানসভা ভোটের ফল আজই প্রকাশিত হবে। তিনি 'অর্ধচন্দ্রবাবু' দেখবেন, হয় কোনওরকমে টিকে যাবেন, নয়তো প্রত্যাখ্যাত হবেন। পশ্চিমবঙ্গে এমন হওয়া কার্যত অসম্ভব, কারণ, ভারসাম্য আছে। এখনও। শিল্পের অগ্রগতি চাই, তথ্য ও প্রযুক্তির ব্যবহার চাই, কিন্তু সবই হতে হবে সাধারণ মানুষের স্বার্থে। বিল গেটস বা ভারতীয় শিল্পপতিদের সার্টিফিকেটের দাম নেই, আসল ব্যাপার হল জনসাধারণের সার্টিফিকেট। শিক্ষা দিয়ে গেল অঙ্কের নির্বাচন। এবং অবশ্যই ভারতবর্ষকে এই শিক্ষা প্রদানের ক্ষেত্রে চন্দ্রবাবুর ভূমিকা অনস্বীকার্য, বোধহয় এজন্য ধন্যবাদও পেতে পারেন তিনি। অচেতনভাবে এই সত্য প্রতিষ্ঠিত করে গেলেন যে, হাইটেক চাকচিক্য নয়, সাধারণ মানুষের সুখদুঃখই আসল কথা। এবং, যারা সংসদীয় গণতন্ত্রকে শূন্য দেন, তাঁরাও কি বুঝবেন না যে, ভোটাধিকার এক দুর্দান্ত অস্ত্র যা এই ব্যবস্থাতেও যথাস্থানে আঘাত করার কিঞ্চিৎ ক্ষমতা রাখে?

WEDNESDAY, MAY 12, 2004

LESSONS FROM ANDHRA PRADESH

THE ROUT OF the TDP-BJP alliance and the landslide victory of the combine of the Congress, the Telangana Rashtra Samiti and the two Communist parties in the Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh ought to be viewed primarily as the triumph of brick and mortar issues over click and mouse rhetoric. After nine years in office, the Chandrababu Naidu Government has been emphatically voted out of power because it neglected basic issues relating to electricity, irrigation, unemployment, education, and inadequate social security for farmers and artisans. The character of the verdict makes it clear that much more than an incumbency disadvantage was involved. What Andhra Pradesh experienced was a powerful negative vote against the imbalance between World Bank-led models of economic reform and the imperatives of welfare in a society where deprivation is a non-shining mass reality. Four consecutive years of drought, mismanagement of the relief measures, and apologetic implementation of anti-poverty programmes such as 'Vegulu' only compounded the ruling party's woes. The strident negativism of the TDP's campaign backfired badly.

Over the last few years, the ruling party in Andhra Pradesh became weedy and unwieldy, faction-ridden and self-serving. Despite his genius for organisation and getting certain things done, the CEO — the darling of the corporate world and the media — seemed to have little time for issues revolving round basic needs. "You are surrounded by courtiers/Don't they give you good advice?" asked the saint composer Tyagaraja of the ruler of the universe. This seems to apply to many a Strong Leader today. Chief Minister Naidu surrounded himself with a clutch of bureaucrats and technocrats and was gradually starved of authentic feedback about real issues in the State. For all his political shrewdness, he miscalculated the decision to advance Assembly

elections. The Vajpayee factor does not seem to have made any difference on the ground.

The Congress returns to power after almost a decade in Opposition, with its alliance getting a three-fourths majority in the State Assembly. On June 1, 1947, Mahatma Gandhi likened the Congressman's relation to political power to a wooden loaf. If you eat it, he noted, you are bound to suffer from colic. If you don't eat it, you are bound to starve. The challenge for the Congress is somehow to avert colic, considering its track record of factionalism and conflicting ambitions in the State. The obvious choice for Chief Minister is Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, to whose campaigning and mobilisational skills the party owes a good deal. The new Chief Minister must be given a free hand to constitute his own team and work out fresh policies that must address, as a matter of priority, what his predecessor failed to do. Aside from having to decide what to do about the promises made during the campaign, notably the promise of free electricity to farmers, the Congress will have the difficult job of dealing with the separate State demand of its ally, the TRS. While the party is clearly in a position to form the government on its own, it cannot summarily abandon its pre-poll ally. Political honour and credibility aside, the TRS numbers in the Lok Sabha will be of obvious value if the Congress and its allies find themselves in a position to stake a claim to form the government at the Centre. Initiating a serious and meaningful dialogue with People's War, an idea first proposed by Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao, and thinking big about the development of an underdeveloped and Naxalite-dominated region might prove to be an effective way of responding to the demands for a separate State. The Congress has earned a tremendous mandate from the people. It must move quickly and with an imaginative plan to demonstrate that this is not a negative triumph.

Andhra logs out 'CEO' Chandrababu

Stanley Theodore in Hyderabad

May 11. — Curtains came down on the 'CEO' regime in Andhra Pradesh with the ouster of Mr N Chandrababu Naidu's TDP. And "anti-incumbency" sounds the most flippant term to describe this total rout.

The obvious question is how could a person of Mr Naidu's stature lose so easily and completely?

After surviving an assassination attempt on 1 October, he allowed wild speculations to spread for six weeks, before dissolving the Assembly. The message sent to the voters was clear — Mr Naidu thinks it's easier now than to face the electorate in September 2004. The voters, however, had enough surprises in store for him.

A number of factors had gone against Mr Naidu. For one, farming had not been able to generate enough revenue for four years and Mr Naidu had paid little attention to the matter. This was evident way back in January 2001 at the Partnership Summit here, during a discussion on agriculture subsidies. Agriculture minister Mr Shobanadeshwara Rao told World Trade Organisation's then director-general Mr Mike Moore that the World Bank was not allowing the government to increase farm subsidies, as a

result of which the farmers were in dire straits.

Of course, Mr Naidu knew the problem better. But though suicides mounted he would only reel off statistics of how much the government spent on agriculture and irrigation. Through three consecutive droughts he repeatedly refused to raise minimum support price, let alone remunerative prices for the farmers.

Secondly, Mr Naidu created unprecedented centralisation. An 'inner circle' was formed with the chief minister and the six officers in the chief minister's office. Review meetings of key departments were held often without the knowledge of ministers. With Mr Naidu establishing a direct contact with the officials and heads of departments, large sections of the bureaucracy were converted into dummies. To take a specific case, the civil supplies minister, Mr Mutyam Reddy, was unaware that Mr Naidu had announced 35 lakh fresh ration cards last November, till he read the newspapers.

Mr Naidu also attempted to paint mandal revenue officers as villains. The MROs handled the grassroots administration in five to eight villages. During his "surprise visits", especially during his pet Janmahoomi programmes he would berate them. Mike in hand he would ask villagers if the MRO was doing his job



and some would say no. Then he used to mock and castigate the officer in full view of the public with the local press in tow. Some officials even attempted suicide.

When the local residents approached the MROs, the latter would simply recall how they complained to the chief minister and jeered at them. As a result they would often say that the villagers were free to go and ask the chief minister to get the work done. Peo-

ple became increasingly aware that centralisation was a ploy to brighten Mr Naidu's image.

Thirdly, Mr Naidu's primary concern was his own image. Since his second innings in October 1999, routine administrative events such as videoconferences were opened for press coverage in the name of transparency.

After nine years, playing "anti-establishment hero" was untenable. This worsened in the past six months

EXIT, EXIT POLLS

PROJECTIONS		
	Cong+	TDP-BJP
N 24	180-205	80-105
NTV	143-158	119-133
STAR NEWS	148	123
Z	148	123
ALL NEWS	148	123
ACTUAL RESULTS		
	Cong+	TDP-BJP
	226	49

with his publicity overkill. Hardly a day passed without Mr Naidu going live on television, interacting with the cadre from party office, with thrift group women in remote villages, dialling voters early in the morning and holding at least one election meeting a day, covered live on TV.

Fourthly, there was the 'vision' factor. Two blocks in the secretariat were pulled down and a new four-storied structure was erected. Mr

Naidu called it the "corporate block", where chambers looked like corporate directors' offices. Sixteen ministers, apart from an equal number of principal secretaries were housed here. By the time they moved in, it was a mess — not a single inch was allotted for parking.

Fifth was Mr Naidu's reluctance to handle the issue of corruption, which grew exponentially. After this correspondent visited Dubai in October 2002 and spoke to Mr Naidu on the lack of corruption there, he lamented: "No matter the good the government does, the MRO demands Rs 100 for a birth certificate and Rs 500 for death certificate". He knew it, assured to work on it, but never did. Through his tenure he sat on Anti Corruption Bureau files, begging for sanction to prosecute top IAS and IPS officers.

The worst case was the Centrally sponsored Food For Work scheme, about which he told the Assembly that there was pilferage of about 10 per cent, which translated into Rs 350 crore.

Finally, Mr Naidu said that if he lost, politicians would stop working hard. He can still be credited for giving a modern look to politics and governance.

Yet, he worked hard mainly to better his own image, and his defeat is a lesson for contemporary politicians.

Laloo refuses Patna varsity doctorate

Statesman News Service

PATNA, Jan 11. — Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav refused to accept the honorary doctorate, which the Patna University had decided to confer on him at its convocation programme here today.

The Rashtriya Janata Dal president did not even turn up at the function, which was graced by the Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, Mr Justice (retired) AS Anand.

Some RJD workers, however, gathered at the university gate shouting slogans against the BJP, which had opposed the PU Syndicate's decision to confer honorary doctorate on Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav.

The PU Syndicate on 20 December decided to confer doctorate on the RJD chief fuelling a controversy in Bihar's political circles. A BJP delegation met the Governor who is also chancellor of the universities and submitted to him a memorandum asking him not to allow the PU to confer the "honour to a chargesheeted person".

"I had never expressed any desire to get honorary doctorate", Mr Laloo Yadav said. He added: "I am proud of the honour

that the people of the state have conferred on me. I don't need any other honour."

Taking a dig at his opponents, Mr Laloo Yadav said: "I hope my decision will provide some sort of relief to a section of politicians who are jealous of us. But I think my opponents will never be able to stop the people from honouring me time and again." The RJD chief said he had never applied to Patna University for the honorary doctorate. "I came to know through the media that the University had decided to honour me," he said.

In fact, differences cropped up within the PU's Syndicate itself after it decided to confer doctorate on Mr Laloo Yadav. A section of senior Syndicate members opposed the move. But the majority of the Syndicate members authorised the PU Vice-Chancellor, Dr KK Jha, to recommend conferring of doctorate on the RJD boss to the Governor, Mr M Rama Jois. The Raj Bhavan, however, refused to speak on the development.

The Patna University had last year conferred honorary doctorate to external affairs minister and MP from Bihar, Mr Yashwant Sinha.



Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav in Delhi. — A file photograph

NAIDU KNOCKOUT

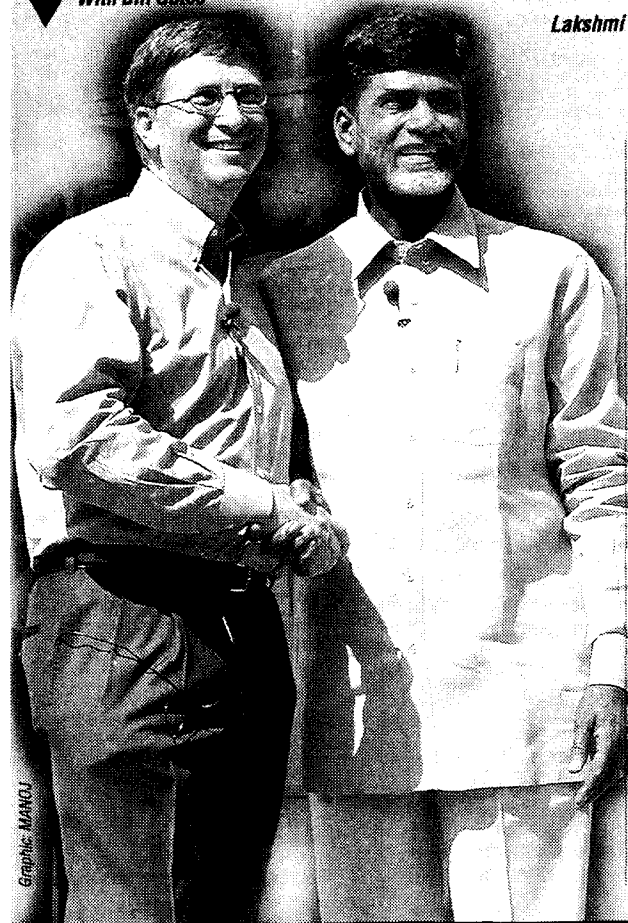
RISE and fall of **NAIDU**

A.P. 9.6.1975 9.8.1975 AP.



NT Rama Rao

With Bill Gates



Lakshmi Parvati



After the assassination attempt



A former farmer from Andhra, who lost his land because of debts, now sells hammocks in Bangalore

Born on April 20, 1951, at Naravaripally village in Chittoor district, N. Chandrababu Naidu is a postgraduate in economics from S. V. University in Tirupati and has done a PhD on the "Economic Ideas of Prof. N.G. Ranga, MP". Was involved in orange plantation in his village

THE RISE

- First step in politics as a Congress panchayat member in his village in 1976. Fought Assembly elections in 1978 on a Congress ticket from Chandragiri in Chittoor
- Married the third daughter of N.T. Rama Rao, N. Bhuvaneshwari, in 1981
- In 1980-81, was inducted into the Congress government as minister of state for archives and cinematography
- Joined the Telugu Desam Party in 1983 after losing the Assembly elections on a Congress ticket
- In the mid-term polls of 1985, NTR did not give him a ticket
- In 1989, won from Kuppam as a Desam candidate. Was made the general secretary of the party and later became its coordinator
- Won from Kuppam again in 1994. Became finance minister

● In 1995, took the reins of the party and became chief minister in a coup. NTR was planning to appoint second wife Lakshmi Parvati Desam chief. Before NTR could sack Naidu for rallying against him, he ousted his father-in-law. NTR died in 1996

● First foray into national politics in 1996, when he played a key role in the formation of the United Front government at the Centre. Became convener of the front

● In 1997, Naidu packaged himself as a tech-savvy chief minister keen on turning Hyderabad into a hitech city that could rival Bangalore. Hyderabad earned the name Cyberabad and e-governance became his signature tune

● Pulled off a PR coup when he got Bill Clinton to visit Hyderabad in 2000, pipping Bangalore in the race to host the American President. In 2002, Bill Gates visited the city. Both Bills were full of praise for his vision and work as CEO of Andhra Pradesh, as he came to be called

● In 1998, the United Front experiment failed. Naidu stunned his front partners by offering outside support to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. Desam's G.M.C. Balayogi was appointed Speaker. The government fell after 13 months

● Was back again as an NDA pillar after the general elections of 1999. Was voted back to power in Andhra in the Assembly elections, but with a reduced majority

THE FALL

In 2000, farmers — mainly those growing cotton and groundnut — committed suicide after crops were destroyed by pest attacks and a prolonged drought. Three thousand farmers have committed suicide till date. Government offered little solace and there was a steep hike in power bills

The Cyberabad dream began to crack as a clamour rose in the hinterland that Hyderabad was being pampered at the expense of the villages

On October 1, 2003, Naidu survived an assassination attempt by Naxalites on the way to Tirupati temple, prompting him to call early polls to take advantage of the perceived sympathy wave. The gamble failed

With Bill Clinton



Andhra Aandhi

Anti-TDP wave could
spell danger for NDA

It was fame in the reverse for Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday, with the opposition Congress handing out a stunning defeat to the Telugu Desam Party in the Andhra Pradesh assembly elections. If the Congress's performance exceeded the wildest guesstimates, so did the extent of the TDP's rout. For the high-profile Naidu there could not have been a worse indictment than the final tally — his party retaining a mere quarter of the seats it held in the previous House. True, it wasn't an easy battle to fight: After all, there aren't too many Indian chief ministers who have won a third term. Yet, Naidu obviously missed the warning signals or else he would not have advanced the polls as he did. He was evidently misled by two assumptions. One, a sense of invincibility brought about by his almost iconic fan following in urban India and in the corridors of power abroad. And two, the popularity of Atal Behari Vajpayee which caused him to hold the assembly elections simultaneously with the Lok Sabha elections. In the event, Elections-2004 has shattered both myths. If Andhra Pradesh hit international headlines thanks to Naidu's cyber-savvy CEO image, today, ironically, that very achievement may have become a badge of dishonour for the man.

Indeed, the story of Naidu's downfall could well be told in terms of the transformation of Hyderabad from Cyberabad to Hyperabad. Even as the laptop CM was making waves overseas for the glittering IT showcase that Hyderabad had become, it was an altogether different tale in much of rural Andhra Pradesh, stalked as the latter was by starvation deaths and mass debt-induced suicides. Today, in what will surely count as the ultimate insult for Naidu, his TDP has lost a majority of seats even in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. This brings us to the Atal factor and the possible portents that Andhra holds for the General Elections. Had Chandrababu retained his chief ministership, it would have been safe to assume that the NDA too would get a third term. First, because Andhra Pradesh contributes 42 seats to the Lok Sabha, and, second, because of the striking similarities in the campaigns of the TDP and the NDA. Both banked heavily on the feel-good factor. If Atal was the all-India mascot of 'India Shining', Naidu was its poster boy in Andhra. This is not to say that the NDA awaits the same fate as the TDP, but only to make the larger point that political parties need to do much more than unleash a media blitz to win the popular mandate.

Repolling in Chapra urged

CHAPRA (BIHAR), MAY 2. Appearing before a two-member Election Commission probe team here, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party today joined the Bharatiya Janata Party in demanding the countermanding of the election in the Chapra constituency.

The Rashtriya Janata Dal chief, Laloo Prasad Yadav, who contested against the Union Minister, Rajiv Pratap Rudy, denied that irregularities took place on polling day.

Emerging from the session, the BSP nominee, Abhay Raj Kishore, told reporters that he complained to the team that Dalits were prevented from voting and that the district administration "worked as an agency" of the RJD. Bachu Prasad Birju, SP candidate, alleged that RJD activists let loose a "reign of ter-

ror" and indulged in violence and "booth-capturing."

Mr. Rudy said he tendered the evidence with video-clippings and other facts and figures. — PTI

Pressure on poll panel by BJP, alleges Congress

By Our Staff Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 2. The Congress today accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of 'building' pressure on the Election Commission (EC) to countermand the poll in Chapra parliamentary constituency in Bihar where the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) president, Laloo Prasad Yadav, is contesting against the

Civil Aviation Minister, Rajiv Pratap Rudy (BJP).

The All-India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary, Oscar Fernandes, said today that the Election Commission had already sent a two-member fact-finding team to Chapra on the complaint filed by both the RJD and the BJP candidates from the constituency. "The Congress feels that the Election Commission is competent to take a fair and final decision in this matter," he said, adding that the demand for countermanding the election was made by the BJP candidate after he realised that he would be defeated in the election. An NDA delegation had complained to the commission of large-scale rigging by the RJD supporters on April 26 and demanded re-polling in the entire constituency.

THE HINDU

3 MAY 2004

Patna HC order on polls stayed

Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, May 6. — The Supreme Court (coram, Babu, CJ, Mathur, Kapadia, JJ) today stayed the Patna High Court order asking the Election Commission to consider countermanding the election of candidates contesting from behind the bars.

“...Elections have reached the final phase, interference at this stage is not practical,” the court observed while staying the order. The Supreme Court order came on a Special Leave Petition filed yesterday by the EC challenging the High Court order of 30 April.

The court thereby allowed the appeal of the EC against the High Court order. The Commission had in its appeal contended that the High Court order constituted an “interference” in the election process under Article 329(b) of the Constitution.

Under Article 329(b), no election shall be called in question except by an election petition presented to such authority and in such manner as may be

provided for by or under any law made by the appropriate legislature.

It cited earlier Supreme Court orders in which it has been held that the election process begins with the issue of the EC notification calling for elections and concludes with the declaration of results.

The EC urged the Supreme Court to consider the question whether the High Court direction to it to take “remedial action to ensure that persons who are disenfranchised could not be candidates, in the midst of the election process and that too before the declaration of results, entail disruption of the electoral process and therefore not sustainable in law”. It had sought in the interim a stay on the High Court judgment and prayed that it be set aside on merits subsequently. The Supreme Court has, however, left the latter issue open.

The EC had stated that such a disqualification was not provided for either in the Constitution (Articles 102(1) and 191 (1)) or other statutory provisions, including the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Ethnic minorities hold key to the outcome

While a triangular contest may favour the Congress, its position is not that secure. With the BJP poaching on its traditional social base, the party has to maintain its hold on the minorities in order to do well, writes **Yogendra Yadav**

If there is one State in eastern India where the BJP hopes to improve substantially on its tally, it is Assam. In other States, either the BJP and its allies have already hit a point of saturation as in Orissa and Bihar, or they have no hope of any improvement, as in West Bengal. In Assam, the BJP has a lot of room for improvement, for it secured only two seats out of 14 in the last Lok Sabha elections, compared to 10 for the Congress, now the ruling party in the State. The party does have a realistic chance to do so this time. At least this is what the BJP national leadership believes. That is why, like Karnataka in the South, the BJP is devoting a lot of attention, energy and resources to this State.

However, this is not going to be easy. Assam is one of the few States in India where the Congress has improved upon its position in the 1990s. The party's votes and political reputation had sunk following the Asam agitation in the early 1980s and the blood-stained elections in 1983, which the Congress won by default. The Assam accord of 1985 brought the AGP to power and it looked like the days of Congress dominance were over. But unlike the TDP, which built upon its electoral breakthrough in Andhra Pradesh around the same time, the AGP failed to do so. The Congress got another opportunity and grabbed it. The party came back to power in the State in 1991 and dominated the Lok Sabha elections as well. The AGP was given another chance in the simultaneous elections to Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha in 1996, but squandered it within a couple of years. The AGP regime was identified with corruption and a lack of political maturity. The Congress scored comprehensive victories in the Lok Sabha elections of 1998 and 1999, winning 10 out of 14 seats on both occasions, and converted its advantage into a clear majority in the Vidhan Sabha in the Assembly elections held in 2001.

All this while the BJP was quietly creeping up the ladder, occupying much of the political space vacated by the AGP. Assam was one of the States where the BJP acquired a toe-hold in the 1991 elections following the Ramjanabhoomi movement. It captured

ASSAM - 1999

Congress has dominated, BJP has gained at AGP's expense

Lok Sabha elections

	1991	1996	1998	1999
Congress	8	5	10	10
BJP	2	1	1	2
AGP	1	5	0	0
Others	3	3	3	2

Vote Share

	1991	1996	1998	1999	2001
Congress	28.5	31.6	38.9	38.4	39.8
BJP	9.6	15.9	24.5	29.8	9.3
AGP	17.6	27.2	12.7	11.9	20.0

Note: Others include one seat each for ASDC (that became CPI (M-L) in 1999 and independent in all these elections. The third seat under others went to CPI(M) in 1991 and 1996 and to United Minority Front in 1998. The BJP had an alliance with AGP in the 2001 assembly elections and therefore did not contest many seats.

Congress stands to lose some seats to BJP if there is a negative swing

What would be result this time in case...

	Seats in 2004 elections		
	Congress	BJP	Others
If there is a 1% swing against the Congress	9	2	3
If there is a 3% swing against the Congress	7	4	3
If there is a 6% swing against the Congress	5	5	4
If the verdict of Assembly elections is repeated	10	0	4

Note: Calculating one percentage point swing against the Congress means deducting it from the Congress' vote share in the last Lok Sabha elections in each constituency and its reallocation to non-Congress parties in proportion to their strength. The final possibility is based on the results of the 2001 Assembly elections in which the BJP had not contested the majority of the seats.

Graphic by Varhese Kallada

two seats, both in the Barak valley, in the Lok Sabha elections, though its share of votes was less than 10 per cent.

In subsequent Lok Sabha elections, the BJP has improved upon its vote share and managed to expand its regional base.

In the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP nearly touched the 30 per cent mark and felt it was ready to take the final steps toward challenging the Congress. The party had two options: it could try to challenge the Congress on its own, or forge an alliance with the AGP to have a more broad-based support.

The first strategy was tried with di-

sastrous consequences in the Assembly elections of 2001. The BJP tied up with the AGP despite open and loud protests by its own State unit. The local leaders and supporters of both the parties did not accept the alliance and failed to vote for one another. Hence the alliance, which on paper looked like it was capable of defeating the Congress, only ended up reducing the Congress victory margin. Sensing the mood of the party workers, the BJP leadership did not press the case for an alliance in the coming Lok Sabha elections.

The AGP was not very keen either. Prafulla Mahanta's long innings as leader of the AGP came to an end recently when he lost the party's presidency to Brindaban Goswami. The

BATTLEGROUND

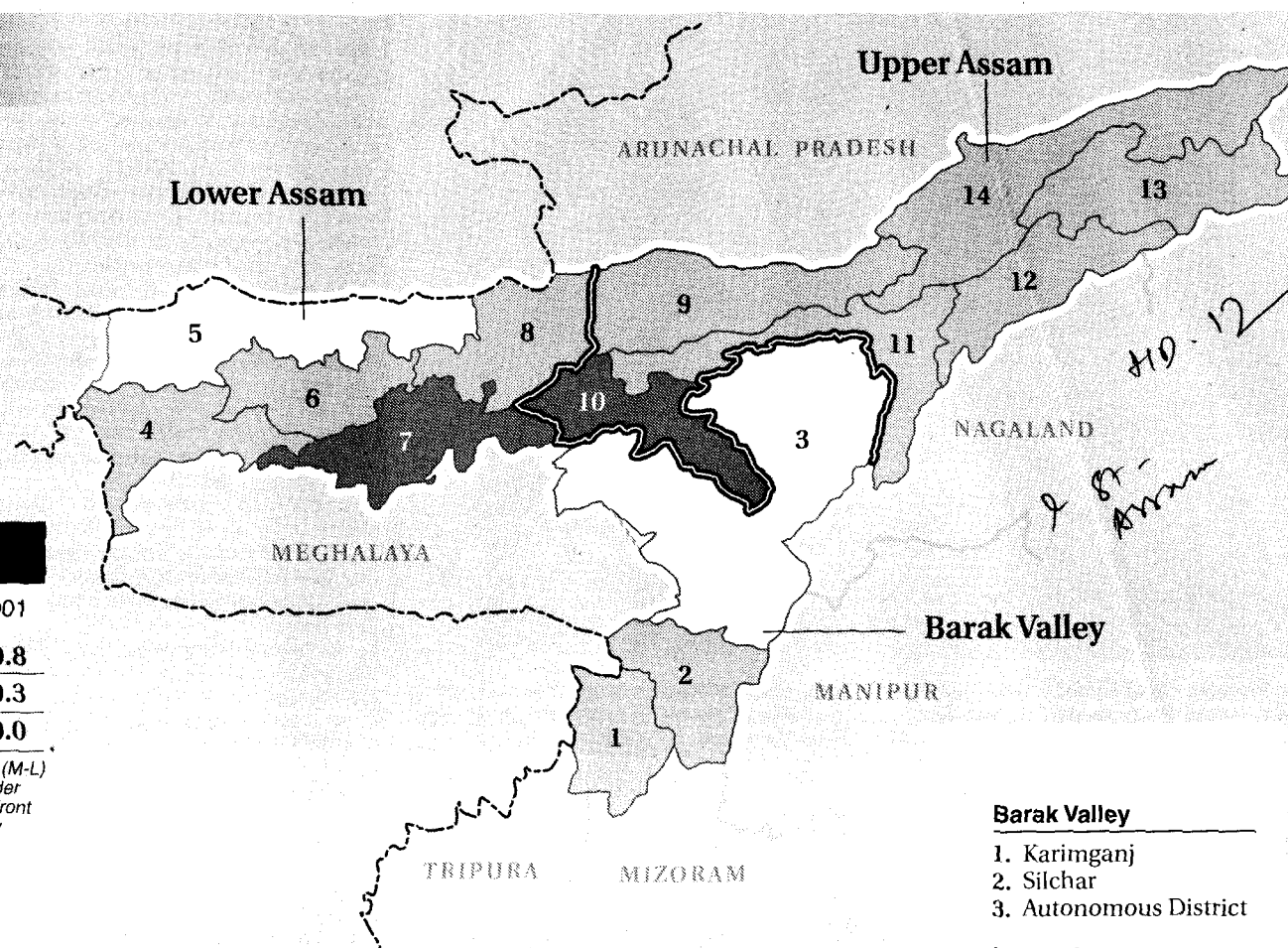
new leader is keen to rebuild the party's own strength. He has managed to bring back Bhriagu Phukan, Mahanta's rival from the beginning, who had come back to the party twice earlier only to face humiliation at Mahanta's hands. This ensures that it will be a

triangular contest in the State, like in the previous Lok Sabha elections.

Given the ethnic geography of Assam, a triangular contest of this kind suits the Congress. Assam has witnessed political fragmentation along ethnic lines in the last two decades. Earlier, the Congress was the party that represented Asomiya nationalism and combined an overwhelming support from the dominant Hindu Asomiya community with backing from other minority groups to perpetuate its rule. The Assam movement changed it all. The

Congress support among the dominant Asomiya Hindus was eroded substantially and it was forced to become a party that drew much of its votes from the various ethnic minorities in the State: the Bengali Hindu immigrants, the non-Assamese tea garden workers and the Asomiya and the Bengali Muslims. Together with the various tribal groups in the State, these minorities constitute an electoral majority. Yet it is a precarious position for the Congress.

The AGP too has had an uncertain existence, for its influence among the Asomiyas, mainly Hindus, is too small to ensure it a stable majority. Besides, the AGP's inability to do anything



Barak Valley

1. Karimganj
2. Silchar
3. Autonomous District

Lower Assam

4. Dhubri
5. Kokrajhar
6. Barpeta
7. Gauhati
8. Mangaldoi

Upper Assam

9. Tezpur
10. Nowgong
11. Kaliabor
12. Jorhat
13. Dibrugarh
14. Lakhimpur

about the 'foreigners' (the immigrants), even when in power, has deprived it of its unique selling point. It needs a political alliance with groups like the United Minorities Front or the various tribal parties to be viable in the electoral competition.

The BJP has been poaching on the traditional social base of the AGP by converting Asomiya nationalism into Hindu nationalism and by combining Asomiya Hindu votes with the votes of Hindu Bengali immigrants, in sharp opposition to the Muslims who constitute about 28 per cent of the State's population. That is why the BJP's early rise took place in the Barak valley with its large proportion of immigrant Muslims. Gradually, the BJP has moved into lower and upper Assam as well and challenged the AGP in its own heartland. A division of the Asomiya upper caste Hindu votes would suit the Congress, as it would prevent the BJP from taking a decisive lead among this group.

The Congress may equal the BJP among the Hindu OBCs and take a decisive lead among the Scheduled Castes and some of the Scheduled Tribes who do not have their own parties.

The last mentioned fact is a source of anxiety for the Congress. The two major Adivasi groups of the State, the Karbis and the Bodos, dominate one parliamentary constituency each, the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District and Kokrajhar. Both the groups have found political expression outside the main political parties. The Karbis have tended to favour the Marxist-Leninist Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) that later merged with the CPI (M-L) and won that seat in the last four elections. The ASDC has split since the last elections and the group opposed to the CPI (M-L) is stronger in that seat.

The Kokrajhar seat has gone to an Independent candidate supported by the All Bodo Students Union, in constant struggle with the Hindi-speaking immigrant Santhal Adivasis in that region. Their MP has supported the NDA at the Centre and is expected to return to Parliament from this seat.

Barring these two seats, the arithmetic of the remaining 12 seats in the State is quite simple. If the Congress retains its position in the last Lok Sabha or the last Vidhan Sabha elections, it would retain its 10 seats. A loss of 3 per cent votes or more would tell seriously on the Congress' tally.

A loss of 6 per cent would mean that the BJP would succeed in coming to the same level as the Congress. It will take at least an 8 per cent loss of votes to the Congress and corresponding gains for its opponents for the BJP to realise its ambition of emerging the frontrunner in the State. That may be a tall order, if the AGP manages to regain some of its political energy this time. If, on the other hand, the BJP succeeds in marginalising the AGP and emerging as an equal of the Congress, it may be the beginning of a long-term realignment in State politics.

Activist murder net snaps up duo

TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Patna, Jan. 27: Investigation into the murder of two social activists on Saturday picked up with police arresting two persons and the Rabri Devi government, under pressure from various quarters, ordering a CBI probe.

Sarita and Mahesh, both in their early thirties, were shot by unidentified gunmen while they were returning after attending a meeting at Shabdo village in Gaya district.

Public anger at the killings was apparent as intellectuals and writers joined street rallies here today and bands were observed in protest against the murders by the CPI(M-L) in Gaya and Jehanabad districts.

The scale of the tragedy was highlighted by governor M. Rama Jois when he said during the Republic Day function that a "sense of insecurity has gripped the people of Bihar". He reminded the government that its greatest responsibility is to ensure security of the public through maintenance of law and order.

The comments re-ignited hostility between the Union government's representative in the state and the Rashtriya Janata Dal government with party chief Laloo Prasad Yadav dubbing Jois a "BJP agent in the state" and demanding his recall. He threatened to take the issue to the President.

The BJP, which is in the Opposition in the state, retaliated

with Sushil Modi, the Opposition leader, saying he would also meet the governor and the President over the state of affairs in Bihar.

The party is agitated because BJP national council member Sikandar Rai was abducted last night while he was returning to Patna from Sasaram after attending a programme.

The two persons arrested today are believed to be associates of a gang led by Budhan and Sadhu Mahato.

"Mahesh and Sarita became the target of the gang as they tried to arbitrate in a dispute over a plot of land purchased by one of the villagers in Shabdo," said P.A. Kumar Beck, the DIG, Gaya range.

Villagers said the gang had

been threatening the two social workers ever since they freed two acres from its clutches.

The gang is also believed to be behind the killing of inspector Krishna Singh of Fatehpur police station.

The policeman was killed in an encounter with the gang last November and investigations have pointed a finger at it, Gaya superintendent of police Sanjay Singh said.

The two are being interrogated to trace Budhan and Sadhu, the key accused in the murders of Sarita and Mahesh, he added. Beck said his team would soon make a breakthrough in the case.

Shaken by the public backlash, Laloo Prasad today visited Shabdo for two hours and prom-

ised the villagers that the culprits would soon be brought to justice. Amid posters saying "Sarita bahen amar rahi", "Mahesh bhai zindabad" on the walls of the houses, he heard the villagers complain that Sarita and Mahesh always wanted him to visit the village once, but he had come when they were no more.

They briefed him on the work undertaken by the two — how the Institute of Research and Action they had started has successfully turned it into a laboratory of socio-economic changes — and the terror unleashed by the Mahato gang.

The RJD chief assured that the work begun by the duo would be carried on and promised to set up their statues in the village.

28/1
g. o. Buh...

Governor raises parties' hackles

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 27: The Congress and the Left launched a double-barrelled attack on Bihar governor Rama Jois for criticising the law and order situation in the state in his Republic Day address.

"The governor of Bihar is the constitutional head of the state," Congress spokesman S. Jaipal Reddy said. "He is playing the role of Opposition leader. His pronouncements against his own government on Republic Day are not only politically motivated but distasteful. And we condemn it."

Jois yesterday said fear and terror were uppermost in the minds of the people of Bihar, prompting Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Laloo Prasad Yadav to demand his removal.

Reddy called the observation — which, he said, came just before the Lok Sabha polls — an "interference" in the political process. "This only shows how the BJP-led NDA government is misusing the governor's office for its partisan interests."

However, he sounded cautious when asked if he would press for Jois' removal. "Nobody is going to respond to it," Reddy said.

The CPI backed Laloo Prasad's demand and said the governor should be removed. "The



Laloo Prasad: Sack cry

BJP government and its nominees seem to have no respect for constitutional proprieties and the limits of a governor's powers and duties," the central secretariat of the party said in a statement.

The CPM politburo said: "This was neither the occasion nor the forum to intervene on the matters which fall under the purview of the state government. The behaviour of the governor betrays the bias of its political affiliations."

The BJP, predictably, sprang to the governor's defence. Party chief M. Venkaiah Naidu complimented Jois for "speaking the truth" and used the issue to corner the Congress for its support to the Rabri Devi government.

"It is the Congress which is allowing the jungle raj to continue and making the lives of the people miserable there and trying to extend the jungle raj to the entire country," Naidu told reporters in Chennai.

He added that even Patna High Court had said on three occasions that there was "no governance" and that Bihar was a "fit case" for imposition of central rule.

দলিত-মিত্র মহেশ-সরিতার হত্যাকাণ্ডে শোকে স্তব্ধ শব্দগাঁও

সূত্রত বসু ● শব্দগাঁও (গয়া)

২৫ জানুয়ারি— সত্যেন্দ্র দুবের পর সরিতা এবং মহেশকান্ত হত্যা। বিহারের মাফিয়ারা ফের বুঝিয়ে দিল তাদের কথামতো না চলার ‘শাস্তি’ এখন একটাই।

গয়া জেলার যে পাথুরে জমির আল তুলে দিয়ে খাল কেটে সেচের জল এনে ‘সোনা’ ফলিয়েছিলেন এই দুই তরুণ-তরুণী, সেই শব্দগাঁও এখন শোকে মুহ্যমান। গ্রামের পুরুষেরা গিয়েছেন লাশকাটা ঘরে, তাঁদের প্রিয় সরিতা বহিন এবং মহেশ ভাইয়ের শব নিয়ে। ঘরে ঘরে মহিলারা বন্ধ করে দিয়েছেন রান্নাবান্নার কাজ।

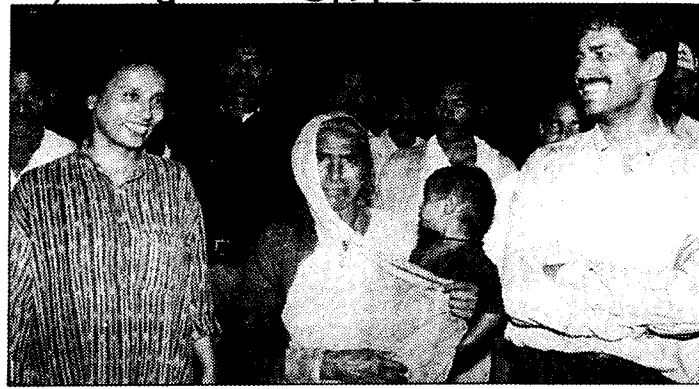
বাচ্চাদের শুকনো চিড়ে মুড়ি খাইয়ে চোখের জল মুছতে মুছতে শব্দগাঁওয়ের অর্চনাকুমারী, মানকিদেবীরা জানালেন, “ওঁরা দু’জনে আমাদের জীবনধারাটাই পাল্টে দিয়েছিলেন। ওঁদের দু’জনের চেষ্টায় গ্রামে মদ বন্ধ হয়ে গিয়েছে। সব বাচ্চারাই এখন লেখাপড়া করছে। মাফিয়াদের কজায় থাকা জমি উদ্ধার করে জমির প্রকৃত মালিকদের মধ্যে বিলি করিয়েছিলেন।”

এই জমি নিয়েই মাফিয়াদের সঙ্গে লড়ে গিয়েছিলেন সরিতা এবং মহেশকান্ত। পটনা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের সমাজতত্ত্ব বিভাগের এম এ সরিতা প্রথম জীবনে ছিলেন নকশালপন্থী। পরে গ্রামের মানুষদের জন্য কিছু করার তাগিদে তিনি রাজনীতি ছেড়ে গয়া জেলার এই প্রত্যন্ত গ্রামে চলে আসেন। তাঁর সঙ্গী ছিলেন হরিয়ানা থেকে পটনায় ব্যবসা করতে আসা মহেশকান্ত। দিল্লি থেকে বিমান

রক্ষণাবেক্ষণে ডিম্বোমা নিয়ে মহেশ নির্মাণ ব্যবসা শুরু করেছিলেন পাটনায়। নিজের ব্যবসার লাভের টাকা দিয়ে গ্রামের উন্নয়নের জন্য গড়েছিলেন ইনস্টিটিউট অফ রিসার্চ অ্যান্ড ডেভেলপমেন্ট (ইরা) নামের একটি সংস্থা। বাইরের কারও কাছ থেকে এক পয়সাও না নিয়ে দু’জনের চেষ্টায় ফতেপুর রকের প্রায় ৪০টি গ্রামের মানুষকে উদ্বুদ্ধ করেছিলেন তাঁরা। তাঁদের দিয়ে খাল কাটিয়ে প্রতিটি গ্রামে পৌঁছে দিয়েছিলেন সেচের জল। শব্দগাঁওয়ের সমস্ত পরিবারের জমি একত্র করে ‘আল’ তুলে দিয়ে করা হয়েছিল যৌথ খামার।

এই কাজ করতে গিয়েই মহেশ এবং সরিতার নজর পড়েছিল রাজাবিঘা নামের এলাকার একটি দলিত সম্প্রদায়ের গ্রামের উপর। শব্দগাঁওয়ের বাসিন্দা বিনোদকুমার জানান, রাজাবিঘার জনা তিরিশেক ‘মুসহর’ (অন্তর্জ দলিত) সম্প্রদায়কে প্রায় আড়াই একর জমি দিয়েছিল রাজ্য সরকার। কিন্তু নিরক্ষর মুসহরদের বাড়িতে আশুণ খরিয়ে দিয়ে ১৯৯২ সালে ওই জমি কজা করে নেয় সনম যাদব নামের এলাকার এক কুখ্যাত মাফিয়া।

সরিতা এবং মহেশ খাল কাটার কাজ শুরু করার পর এই তথ্য জানতে পারেন। মুসহরদের একজোট করে লড়াই শুরু করেছিলেন মাফিয়াদের বিরুদ্ধে। লড়াইয়ে জয় হয়েছিল মুসহরদেরই। রাজ্য প্রশাসন



এখন শুধুই ছবি। শব্দগাঁওয়ের অধিবাসীদের সঙ্গে সরিতা-মহেশ — পারশনাথ

এবং পুলিশ এনে শেষপর্যন্ত মাফিয়াদের হাত থেকে জমি উদ্ধার করে তা দলিত পরিবারগুলির হাতে তুলে দেওয়ার ব্যবস্থা করেছিলেন এই দুই তরুণ-তরুণী। এর পর থেকেই সনম যাদব এবং তার দলবল সরিতা এবং মহেশকে প্রাণে মারার হুমকি দিতে শুরু করে দেয়।

কুখ্যাত এই মাফিয়াদের হুমকি শুনে অবশ্য আদৌ ঘাবড়ে যাননি সরিতা এবং মহেশ। ইরা প্রতিষ্ঠানের এক সদস্য রবীন্দ্রকুমার বলেন, “আমরা বারবারই ওঁদের সতর্ক থাকতে বলতাম। কিন্তু ওঁরা তাতে বিশেষ কান দিত না।” রবীন্দ্র জানান, গত ২ নভেম্বর এই মাফিয়া দলটির সঙ্গে ফতেপুর থানা পুলিশের একটি সংঘর্ষ হয়েছিল। ফতেপুর থানার ও

সি কৃষ্ণ সিংহ গ্রামের একটি জমির বিবাদ মেটাতে রাজাবিঘাতে গিয়েছিলেন। সনম যাদবের দল কানের নিচে রিভলভার ঠেকিয়ে গ্রামের মধ্যেই খুন করে থানার ওসিকে। এর পর অবশ্য পুলিশের সঙ্গে গুলির লড়াই হয়েছিল ওই মাফিয়া দলটির। পুলিশের গুলিতে মারা গিয়েছিল মাফিয়া দলটির নেতা সনম যাদব এবং তার এক সাগরেদ রবীন্দ্র যাদব।

সনম যাদবের মৃত্যুর পর এই মাফিয়া দলটির নেতা হয়ে ওঠে তার দুই ছেলে সাধু যাদব এবং বুধন যাদব। শব্দগাঁওয়ের বাসিন্দারা জানিয়েছেন, এদের ধারণা হয়

পুলিশ ডেকে তাদের বাবাকে মারার পিছনে সরিতা এবং মহেশেরই হাত রয়েছে। এক দিকে জমির কজা হারানোর দুঃখ আর অন্য দিকে বাবার মৃত্যুর বদলা নেওয়ার কথা জানিয়ে গিয়েছিল সাধু-বুধনের দলবল। তাঁদের বক্তব্য ছিল, আগে মহেশ সরিতাকে সরিয়ে দেওয়ার পরে গণহত্যা ঘটিয়ে শ্মশান করে দেওয়া হবে শব্দগাঁও।

মহেশ এবং সরিতার খুনের পর এখন গণহত্যার আতঙ্কে তাই প্রহর গুনছেন পুষ্পদেবী, শান্তা কুমারীরা। পুষ্পদেবী বলেন, “গত কাল আমরা প্রায় সারা রাত দু’জনের মৃতদেহ আগলে বসেছিলাম। বারবার টেলিফোন করে খবর দেওয়া সত্ত্বেও পুলিশ ভয়ে এসাকায় আসতে চায়নি।” আজ দুপুরে

ঘটনাস্থলে গিয়ে পুলিশের দেখা পাওয়া গেল। ফতেপুর থানার ও সি কৃষ্ণ সিংহকে হত্যা করার পরে নভেম্বর মাসে এই থানার দায়িত্ব নিয়েছেন মহম্মদ আয়ুব। তাঁর বক্তব্য, এই মাফিয়া দলটি কখন কোঁঠায় থাকে বলা মুশকিল। তবে এই দলটিই যে মহেশ সরিতাকে হত্যা করেছে তা মোটামুটি স্পষ্ট হয়ে গিয়েছে। মহেশ, সরিতা এবং নভেম্বরে খুন হওয়া থানার ও সি কৃষ্ণ সিংহ তিন জনকেই কানের নিচে গুলি করে মারা হয়েছে। আগেও এরা একই ভাবে কানের নিচে পয়েন্ট ব্রাঙ্ক রেঞ্জ থেকে গুলি চালিয়ে মানুষ মেরেছে। এই মাফিয়া দলটির পিছনে যে আর জে ডি দলের প্রভাবশালী বেশ কয়েক জন নেতাও রয়েছেন আড়ালে, স্বীকার করেছেন পুলিশ কর্তারা।

স্থানীয় মানুষও জানান, মহেশ এবং সরিতার জনপ্রিয়তায় ভয় পেয়েছিল দুর্নীতিগ্রস্ত নেতারাও। গয়ার ডি আই জি পীযুষ অমৃত বেক বলেছেন, মাফিয়াদের পিছনে রাজনৈতিক নেতার মদত আছে কি না তাও খতিয়ে দেখা হচ্ছে। ২৭ জানুয়ারি এই হত্যার প্রতিবাদে ও দোষীদের গ্রেফতারের দাবিতে গয়া এবং জহানাবাদ জেলায় বন্ধের ডাক দিয়েছে সি পি আই এম (এল)। নর্মদা বাঁচাও আন্দোলনের নেত্রী মেধা পটকর এই ঘটনার তীব্র নিন্দা করে দোষীদের অবিলম্বে গ্রেফতারের দাবি জানিয়েছেন।

মাফিয়াদের বিরুদ্ধে লড়াইতে গিয়ে নভেম্বরে গয়াতেই খুন হয়েছিলেন প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সোনালি চতুর্ভুজ যোজনায় কর্মরত ইঞ্জিনিয়ার সত্যেন্দ্র দুবে। শব্দগাঁওয়ে যৌথ খামারের রূপকথা তৈরি করে মাফিয়াদের গুলিতে শহিদ হয়ে গেলেন বিনা স্বার্থে সমাজসেবা করতে আসা মহেশ ও সরিতা।

কংগ্রেস নিরঙ্কুশ, তাই তেলেঙ্গানাবাদীরা শঙ্কায়

৭-৫-৫৫ রজত রায়

ভোটের আগেই পৃথক তেলেঙ্গানা রাজ্যের দাবিতে মাথা তোলা তেলেঙ্গানা রাষ্ট্র সমিতি (টি আর এস)-র একমের্নাধ্বিতীয়ম নেতা কে চন্দ্রশেখর রাও একের পর এক জনসভায় ও সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে একটা কথাই বলে আসছিলেন—সনিয়া গান্ধীর সঙ্গে তাঁর কথা হয়ে গিয়েছে, কংগ্রেস ক্ষমতায় এসে আলোদা তেলেঙ্গানা রাজ্য গড়ার প্রতিশ্রুতি রাখবে। ভোটের আগে সনিয়া প্রচারে তেলেঙ্গানায় এসে দুটি জনসভা করেছিলেন, নিজামাবাদে ও মেহবুবনগরে। দুই জায়গাতেই মঞ্চে হাজির ছিলেন চন্দ্রশেখর রাও। কিন্তু সনিয়া আলোদা তেলেঙ্গানা রাজ্য নিয়ে কোনও কথাই বক্তৃতায় উচ্চারণ করলেন না। এবার ভোটের ফল আসতে শুরু করার পরেই অজ্ঞানদের নিবচনী দায়িত্ব নিয়ে দিল্লি থেকে আসা কংগ্রেস নেতা গুলাম নবি আজাদ জানিয়ে দিলেন, পৃথক তেলেঙ্গানা রাজ্যের প্রসঙ্গটি এখনই করবে, তার একটা ইঙ্গিত অবশ্য গুলাম নবির কথাতেই পরিষ্কার, “কংগ্রেস ও টি আর এস নিজাদের মধ্যে আলোপ আলোচনা করবে।” একই প্রসঙ্গের উত্তরে ভারী মুখ্যমন্ত্রী রাজশেখর রেড্ডি বলেছেন, “এ সব নিয়ে হাইকমান্ড সিদ্ধান্ত নেবে। এ জন্য আমাদের কিছু সময় অপেক্ষা করতে হবে।”

কংগ্রেস নেতারা হাইকমান্ডকে দেখিয়ে দিচ্ছেন, অপেক্ষা করতে বলতে পারছেন, কারণ একটাই। এবার নিবচনের ফলে কংগ্রেস একাই বিধানসভার ২৯৪টি আসনের মধ্যে ১৮৫টি পেয়ে গিয়েছে, অর্থাৎ জোটসঙ্গী তেলেঙ্গানার টি আর এস কিছুতেই সরকার ফেলার হুমকি দিতে পারবে না। আপাতত, টি আর এস নেতা

চন্দ্রশেখর রাওকে মন্ত্রিসভায় ঢুকিয়ে কিছুদিন শান্ত রাখার পরিকল্পনা যে মোটামুটি তৈরি, তা জোটশরিকদেরও মন্ত্রিসভায় অংশ নিতে গুলাম নবির আহ্বান থেকেই পরিষ্কার। মাত্র ২৬টি আসন হাতে নিয়ে ১৮৫ আসন বিশিষ্ট কংগ্রেসের লেজুড়ে পরিণত হওয়ার আশঙ্কা সম্ভবত এখনই চন্দ্রশেখর রাওয়ের মনে ঢুকে গিয়েছে। তা না হলে, ভোটের ফল জানার পরেই কেন চন্দ্রশেখর রাও বলতে শুরু করবেন যে “তেলেঙ্গানা রাজ্যের দাবি নিয়ে কংগ্রেস ধোঁকাবাজি করলে পরিণতি ভাল হবে না”? তিনি আজই হুমকি দিয়েছেন, কংগ্রেস তেলেঙ্গানা রাজ্যের আশ্বাস থেকে সরে এলে তিনি আন্দোলন শুরু করতে বাধ্য হবেন।

এমনিতে সংখ্যার বিচারে কংগ্রেসের সরকার পড়ার ভয় নেই, তার উপরে নতুন সহযোগী সি পি এম এবং সি পি আই কংগ্রেসকে আলোদা তেলেঙ্গানা রাজ্যের দাবি না মানতে উৎসাহ দিচ্ছে। এই অবস্থায় কংগ্রেসের

পক্ষে এখনই চন্দ্রশেখর রাওয়ের ইচ্ছাপূরণ করার কোনও তাগিদ নেই। সর্বোপরি, তাঁদের নিশ্চয়ই তেলেঙ্গানা আন্দোলনের ইতিহাসের কথাও মনে পড়বে। যাঁদের দশকে পৃথক তেলেঙ্গানা রাজ্যের দাবি তুলে রাজ্য জন্ম আন্দোলন করে চেমা রেড্ডি ক্ষমতায় এসেছিলেন। কিন্তু তিনি কংগ্রেসে যোগ দেওয়ার পরে

আলাদা রাজ্যের দাবি দুর্বল হয়ে যায়। এবারও চন্দ্রশেখর রাওকে মন্ত্রিসভায় আমন্ত্রণ জানিয়ে কংগ্রেস একই ফাঁদে ফেলে সময় নিতে পারে। কারণ, বাড়িবাড়ি, ছুটীসপাত, উত্তরাঞ্চলের মতো ছোট রাজ্য হওয়া এখন চল হয়ে গিয়েছে। একবার যদি তেলেঙ্গানার আবেগ মানুষকে রাজ্যায় টেনে নামায়, তা হলে তাতে লাগাম পরালো অসম্ভব হয়ে উঠবে।

কিন্তু সেটা পরের কথা। এই মুহুর্তে কংগ্রেসের সামনে অনেক বড় সমস্যা, অজ্ঞানের মানুষের কাছে দেওয়া আরও জরুরি কিছু প্রতিশ্রুতি পালন করা। ভোটের প্রচারে কংগ্রেসের পতাকা হাতে রাজশেখর রেড্ডি অজ্ঞানের গ্রামেগঞ্জে বলে বেড়িয়েছেন, ক্ষমতায় এলে কংগ্রেস চাষীদের বিনা পরসায় বিদ্যুৎ দেবে এবং সেচের জলের জন্য জরুরি ভিত্তিতে কর্মসূচি নেবে। রাজ্য যাঁরা এমনিতেই বেড়ে চলেছে। তার মধ্যে বিদ্যুতের এই বাড়তি ভর্তুকির অর্থ কোথা থেকে আসবে, তার কোনও সদুত্তর কংগ্রেস এখনও দিতে পারেনি।

তার চাইতেও জরুরি সমস্যা, এবারেও যদি খরা হয়, বর্ষায় ভাল বৃষ্টি না হয়, তা হলে চাষীদের ক্ষোভ আছড়ে পড়বে কংগ্রেস সরকারের উপর। চাষের জলের সঙ্গেই রাজ্যজুড়ে এখন যে তীব্র পানীয় জলের সঙ্কট চলছে, তারও সমাধান খুঁজতে হবে তাঁকে। পাশের রাজ্য কল্টিক আলমাস্তির বাঁধ থেকে কৃষ্ণার জল বেশি করে

ছাড়তে রাজি হবে কিনা, তা বলা কঠিন। রাজশেখর রেড্ডি নিজেই বার বার বলেছেন চাষীদের আত্মহত্যার কথা। বলেছেন, গত চার বছরে দেশে অন্তত চার হাজার চাষি আত্মহত্যা করতে বাধ্য হয়েছে, তার মধ্যে অজ্ঞাই করেছে তিন হাজার। এক এই চাষীদের জন্য শস্যবিমা, মহাজনদের হাত থেকে বাঁচাতে ব্যাঙ্কের সুদভ হারে ঋণ, এ সবেরই সরকারি কর্মসূচিতে গুরুত্ব পাওয়া উচিত। কিন্তু সে জন্য চাই উন্নয়ন সম্পর্কে কংগ্রেসেরও নতুন ভাবনাচিন্তা। তা না হলে, সস্তা জনপ্রিয়তার জন্য চটজলদি কিছু টোটকা দিয়েই মূল সমস্যাকে আড়াল করার আশঙ্কা থেকে যায়।

আরও একটি সমস্যা উত্তরাধিকার সূত্রে পেয়ে যাবেন নতুন কংগ্রেস মুখ্যমন্ত্রী, সেটা রাজ্যের নকশালপন্থীদের সমস্যা। এবারই প্রথম নকশালরা প্রকাশ্যেই জানিয়ে দিয়েছিল যে চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডুর সরকার তাদের শত্রু, তাদের চোখে চন্দ্রবাবু নিজে বহুজাতিক সংস্থা ও বিশ্বব্যাঙ্কের এজেন্ট। তাই নকশালপন্থী জনযুক্ত গোষ্ঠী প্রাণপণে তেলুগু দেশম প্রার্থীদের হারাতে বিরোধীদের মদত দেওয়ার চেষ্টা করেছে। এ জন্য বিভিন্ন জেলায় তেলুগু দেশমের অন্তত ৭৭ জন প্রার্থীকে তার প্রচার করতে নানাভাবে

বাধা দিয়েছে। ভোটের প্রচারের শেষ দিনে শ্রীকান্তলায় থেকে লোকসভার সদস্য ইয়েরান নায়ডুর কনভয় ল্যান্ডমাইন দিয়ে ওড়বার চেষ্টা পর্যন্ত করেছে। কংগ্রেস ও বামপন্থীরা ভোটের প্রচারে এই বাড়তি সুবিধাটুকু উপভোগ করেছে। এখন ভোটের পরে কংগ্রেস ক্ষমতায় এসে নকশালদের আলোচনায় টেনে আনতে না পারলে কিছুদিন পরে এই সমস্যাও মাথাচাড়া দিতে



পি টি আই