

WANTED TO GIVE HER ABORTION PILLS: POLICE

Pregnant woman stabbed with screwdriver: Boyfriend arrested

ARNABJIT SUR
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

The accused, Yogesh Dedha

THREE DAYS after a 19-year-old pregnant woman was found brutally stabbed with a shaving blade and screwdriver in East Delhi's Mayur Vihar, police Saturday arrested her 20-year-old boyfriend. According to police, the accused claimed he wanted to give her abortion pills but she refused as she wanted to marry him.

The accused, Yogesh Dedha, is a first-year student at an open college and lives with his mother and sister in Chilla Village. He was traced after police scanned almost 100 CCTVs around the area, since the crime scene was not covered by security cameras, and questioned 50 witnesses, including shopkeepers.

Said an officer, "Yogesh was in denial about the victim being pregnant with his child and

overgrown with grass near Crowne Plaza," added the officer.

Police said they sat there for some time during which Yogesh tried to convince the woman to take abortion pills, but she resisted and maintained she wanted to get married. "Angered, he stabbed her several times all over her body with the screwdriver and blade... she collapsed and fell on a stone slab and hit her head," said the officer.

Meanwhile, when the woman did not return home past her usual time of 9.30 pm, her family informed police by midnight that she was missing.

Police teams were formed to search for her. Around 9 am on Thursday, they received a call from a person stating that an injured woman was found in Chilla village near the fire brigade office — her throat was slit, she had stab wounds on her ear and head, and other injuries.

Police said Dedha had planned the crime a week ago and deleted all their chats following the attack.

She was administered first-aid and referred to Lok Nayak Hospital by the treating doctor. The woman is currently stable but is admitted to the ICU. Police said a case under IPC section pertaining to attempt to murder has been lodged.

The woman's family said they knew she and Yogesh were friends but did not know anything about their relationship. Her younger sister told *The Indian Express*, "We knew my sister would interact with Yogesh but did not know that they were in a relationship... we got to know about her pregnancy a few days ago... On Wednesday when she didn't return home, my father made a PCR call... we were all worried... she is still in the ICU." The victim is the eldest of three sisters.

Police said Dedha had planned the crime a week ago and deleted all their chats following the attack.

'Ghar Bachao, BJP Hatao': AAP to launch week-long campaign today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

AAP Delhi unit convenor Gopal Rai; (right) Delhi BJP General Secretary Harsh Malhotra

Malhotra accused the AAP government of attempting to divert attention from corruption allegations by misleading slum dwellers.

Malhotra claimed that despite having houses available, the Arvind Kejriwal government has not allocated homes to the poor during its nine years in power. "Instead of misleading the slum dwellers, it would be better if the Kejriwal government allocates thousands of Rajiv Awas Yojana houses built in Delhi to the poor," he said.

"While on the one hand, the BJP says 'jahangir jhuggi, wahan makanai, (a house in place of a shanty)', on the other hand, it makes them homeless without making alternate arrangements," Rai said.

On Rai's announcement of the week-long protest, Malhotra said, "He should note that today, people of all sections of Delhi are fed up with the corruption of the Kejriwal government and will no longer fall prey to any of his tricks."

150-km search, 2 states: Divya's body found in Haryana canal

AISWARYA RAJ
GURGAON, JANUARY 13

Divya Pahuja was shot dead in a Gurgaon hotel

MAPPING DISTRICTS through which the Bhakra canal flows, tracking subsidiary canals and waterbodies over an area of 150 km; Several teams of Punjab and Haryana Police worked in tandem with state and national disaster relief forces as well as locals to find ex-model Divya Pahuja's body, 10 days after she was shot dead in a Gurgaon hotel.

Following inputs from one of the arrested men, Punjab and Haryana HC lawyer Balraj Gill, police said they found the body was dumped in Punjab's Pasiana. However, it had floated and reached Haryana's Tohana, 150 km away, on Saturday morning when they finally fished it out.

Pahuja, 27, was murdered on January 2, over five months after she was released on bail in connection with the alleged fake encounter of a Haryana-based gangster in a Mumbai hotel room in 2016.

According to police, the search for the body had been going on for over a week but it intensified after Gill, who was arrested at Kolkata airport Thursday, re-

vealed it had been disposed of in Bhakra canal. "We were informed by local teams that the body was found at 10 am on Saturday; it was an extensive operation stretching over 150 km..." said ACP (Crime) Varun Dahiya.

He said the postmortem will be conducted in Fatehabad after which it will be brought to Gurgaon for final rites. The body was found partially clothed, with no hair on the head.

DSP Tohana Shamsher Singh said her family was informed. "... We identified her by a tattoo on her right shoulder," he added.

Asked about the state of the body, the ACP said, "A post-mortem and other medical procedures will help us ascertain if it was disfigured by the accused or if it had decomposed due to prolonged exposure to water."

Police said Gill and co-accused Ravi Banga (who is on the run) took a BMW car from Singh and drove to Patiala. "Before dawn on January 3, they dumped the body in Bhakra in Pasiana to evade arrest. Later, they left the car at Patiala bus stand. From there, the duo used public transport — they boarded a bus to Bhiwani, went to Jaipur, then Udaipur, and finally Kanpur. From there, they took a train to Howrah... When we came to know Gill would take a flight, we informed Kolkata police and the airport authority and detained him. He did not have his passport, we suspect he planned to go to Delhi to take his documents before fleeing abroad," said the ACP.

He added that the accused did not use his debit or credit card during this period.

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paigning," Rai alleged, terming the ED "a frontal organisation of the BJP".

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Earlier this week, the AAP, which is part of the Opposition INDIA block, had announced that Kejriwal would travel to Goa for Lok Sabha election-related party work between January 18 and 20.

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ANAND VIHAR

Very Poor



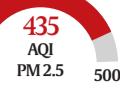
ITO

Severe



SIRI FORT

Severe



RK PURAM

Severe



S K Y W A T C H

FORECAST: January 14
Mainly clear sky. Dense to very dense fog in morning
AQI: Very poorMAX: 19
0.9°C below normalMIN: 4
3.4°C below normal

Patients wait outside Delhi government-run Lok Nayak and (right) GTB hospitals; (below) inside the emergency medicine departments of the hospitals.

Praveen Khanna

HARDLOOK

Testing times

A man died after he was denied admission at 4 govt hospitals due to non-availability of equipment & beds. Another lost his life as a hospital did not have the facility to conduct a test. Both incidents brought the issue of lack of key facilities in Delhi govt hospitals under scanner. *The Indian Express* takes stock of the issues

ANKITA UPADHYAY
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

IN THE hours and days leading up to their demise last week, two men were taken to multiple government hospitals in Delhi for treatment and emergency care. At each one, they were refused admission for multiple reasons: Either key diagnostic equipment was unavailable, or there was no facility to carry out a particular test, or there were just no beds.

Their deaths shed light yet again on how hospital infrastructure is unable to keep pace with patient load. *The Indian Express* took stock of Lok Nayak and GTB hospitals — where the men were taken, with one eventually dying in a lift — to see how the Delhi government's biggest medical facilities are faring and the issues they grapple with.

At Lok Nayak, doctors see almost 600-700 patients a day in just the emergency department. At GTB, this figure is 700-800.

No equipment

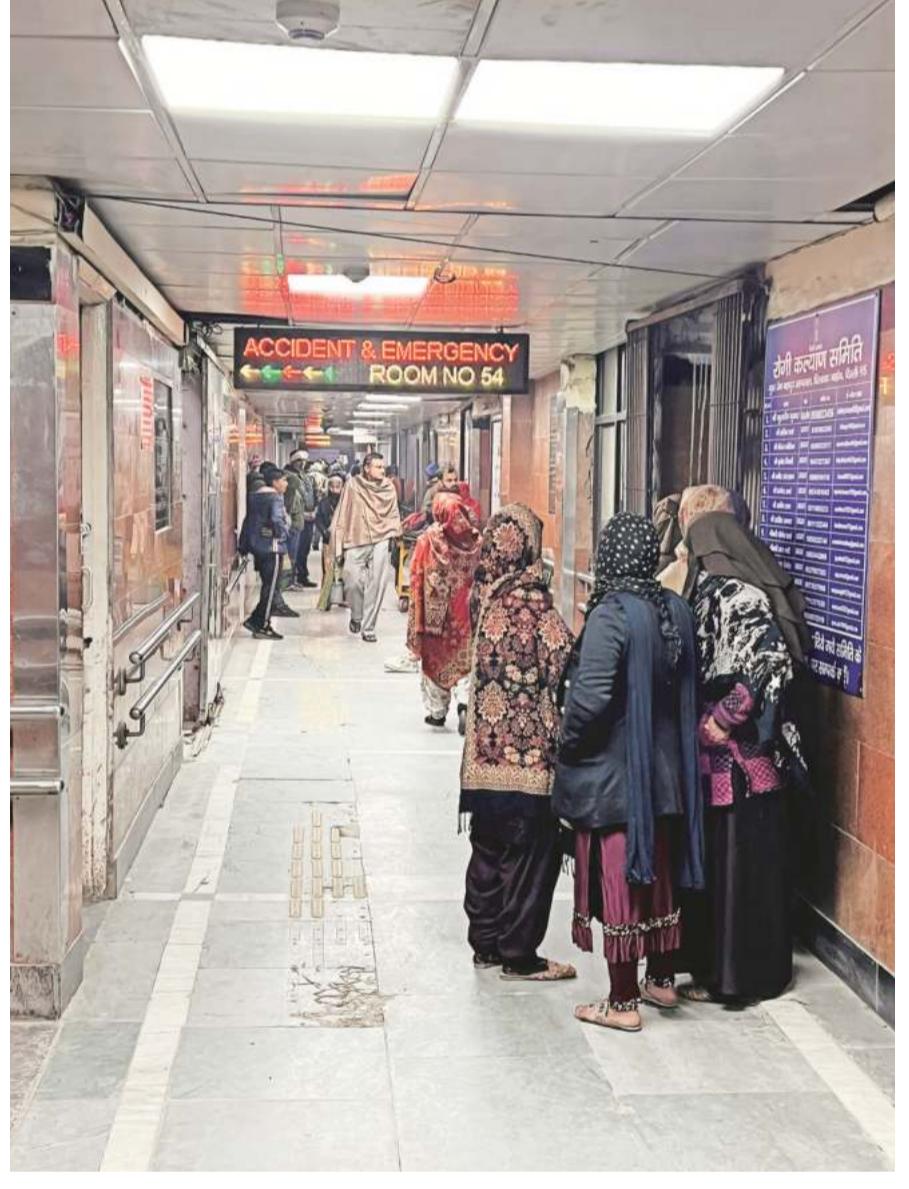
One of the men who died, a 47-year-old picked up in a sexual assault case from Northeast Delhi who jumped out of a PCR van, was taken to four hospitals on January 2 — including GTB. He could not be admitted there as the hospital's CT scan machine was not functional.

An RTI filed by *The Indian Express* revealed that GTB hospital has just one CT scan machine that is 10 years old and performs almost 35-40 scans every day. This often results in the machine going out of order.

According to hospital sources, in 2022, the administration had sent a proposal to the state health department twice to acquire new MRI and CT scan machines but claimed it did not get a response from the Delhi government.

As an interim measure, the hospital claimed it has signed an MoU with IHBAS and Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital under which it sends patients to the two hospitals for a CT scan or to avail of any other diagnostic facility.

In the second case too, the victim, a 46-year-old suffering from chronic liver disease, was in desperate need of an upper GI endoscopy test — crucial for any patient with GI bleeding. He was admitted at GTB for six days before doctors asked his family to



Photos: Ankita Upadhyay

go to GB Pant or Lok Nayak Hospital for the test.

Since GB Pant does not provide emergency services in the gastroenterology department, he was shifted to Lok Nayak on January 5. There, his family was told that the UGI endoscopy facility was not available and he was eventually referred admission.

The patient's brother alleged: "My brother died in a lift. I kept requesting the doctors to admit him but all they told me was that the UGI endoscopy machine is not available and no bed is there. No attempt was made to save him. In the end, we were asked to go without any proper referral."

The hospital's medical director, however, had earlier said the

patient was brought in a very critical condition. According to Lok Nayak MD Dr Suresh Kumar, the patient's only option was liver transplantation, which was not possible at this stage.

"Prognosis was explained to the family but he later passed away..." Dr Kumar had said.

After the first death, the state health department set up an inquiry committee and the GTB hospital's medical director was asked to terminate the services of a senior resident doctor who was on duty when the patient arrived.

The Federation of Resident Doctors' Association (FORDA), however, has opposed the decision, calling it another example of scapegoatism. Dr Aviral

Mathur, FORDA president, said, "GTB hasn't had a functional CT scan machine for more than a month now. Why hasn't this been swiftly addressed? Similarly, in other institutes, lack of infrastructure gets blamed on doctors often. They are also working under the same constraints and are administratively not responsible at all."

When asked for a response, a Delhi government spokesperson said the Health Department is working on getting diagnostic test facilities in hospitals on a public-private partnership model so that the working condition of equipment is ensured. "This will ensure tests are conducted even if Radiology vacancies are not filled by Hon'ble L-G. The Health

Secretary has been asked to expedite this PPP model."

Another challenge:
Emergency care

At Lok Nayak, the bigger challenge is emergency care as ICU and ventilator beds are limited. Sources said out of many ventilator beds in the Emergency Medicine department, only a few are functional.

In the case of the molestation accused, police had said he was taken to Lok Nayak from GTB where he was turned away due to a lack of ICU ventilator beds.

When *The Indian Express* visited Lok Nayak's Emergency Medicine department, two neurosurgery patients were on ventilator beds while the rest re-

mained vacant with just one nursing officer. The same ward admits Covid and dengue patients and H1N1 patients, doctors claimed.

A junior doctor claimed, "Today, an H1N1 patient was shifted to the same ward that the neurosurgery patients were lying in. When the patient's attendants raised concerns, nothing happened... they later left the hospital against medical advice."

"In a tertiary care hospital like Lok Nayak, only one CMO is working in one shift with four junior residents. Patients are being forced to look after basic amenities like using the washroom as there are no nursing officers," claimed a doctor, adding that consultants hired for the

emergency medicine department have not reported for duty.

"We have complained about this several times to the Medical Director but no action has been taken," said a junior resident doctor on condition of anonymity.

In March 2023, the system made a fresh headway with AIIMS Delhi announcing it would share its patient load with two hospitals — MCD run-Charak Palika Hospital and Indira Gandhi Hospital in Dwarka — but it went into limbo. "GDMOs, nurses were given one-week training on how patients will be looked after in the trauma centre. However, despite a meeting with the Health Minister, no progress happened on that front," an official added.

AIIMS Delhi and the Delhi government did not comment.

3 youths stripped naked, paraded by crowd for 'mobile phone theft' in Outer Delhi

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

Police are making efforts to trace the victims and offenders

am, stating that 30-35 persons were parading three men, in their 20s, naked with their hands tied.

The DCP said the caller had stated that he had come to see

off his sister at Narela railway station and when he was going back, he saw some people beating up three persons, alleged to be snatchers, following which he called the emergency number, 112.

On the basis of the caller's complaint, a case under IPC sections 341 (punishment for wrongful restraint) and 355 (assault or criminal force with intent to dishonour that person) was lodged.

The officer added that they have not received any complaint from any person in the crowd regarding a mobile theft and this can only be verified after the youths are traced.

Said the DCP, "Social media video footage has come on record and efforts are being made to trace the victims and offenders."

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Two students killed after car collided into parked truck on Delhi-Mumbai expressway; no arrest yet

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NUH, JANUARY 13

TWO STUDENTS were killed Saturday after their car collided with a parked truck on Delhi-Mumbai expressway in Ferozepur Jhirk Saturday morning.

According to police, Sohna residents Harsh (21), who was a PG student at Dayanand University in Rohtak, and his cousin Anjali (26), an LLB student at Sunrise University in Alwar, died after their Ford Endeavour car collided with a stationary truck on the highway around 9.30 am on Saturday.

They were going to drop Harsh's sister, Manvi, and Anjali in Alwar for their exams when they met with the accident.

Other occupants, identified as Meera, Pushpa and her son

Happy (7), sustained injuries.

Police said the truck did not have its indicator on and was parked negligently on the highway. "Visibility in the morning was poor and the car driver did not see the truck until they were close and could not stop the vehicle. Though two other vehicles also hit the vehicles to cause a small pile-up, no one in those vehicles were injured," IO in the case, Sl

Virender Singh said.

He added that the victims were declared dead on arrival at Mandi Khera civil hospital.

The driver was not at the spot when police arrived and they are yet to make any arrest.

An FIR was registered on the complaint of Manvi on Saturday under IPC Section 304, wherein she alleged the truck was "deliberately blocking the middle lane of the road."

Rahul sets off on Yatra 2.0: Focus on Hindi heartland states, SC, ST belts

Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Manipur to Mumbai will traverse 6,713 km, covering 100 LS seats in 15 states with Cong terming it an 'ideological Yatra'

MANOJ CG
IMPHAL, JANUARY 13

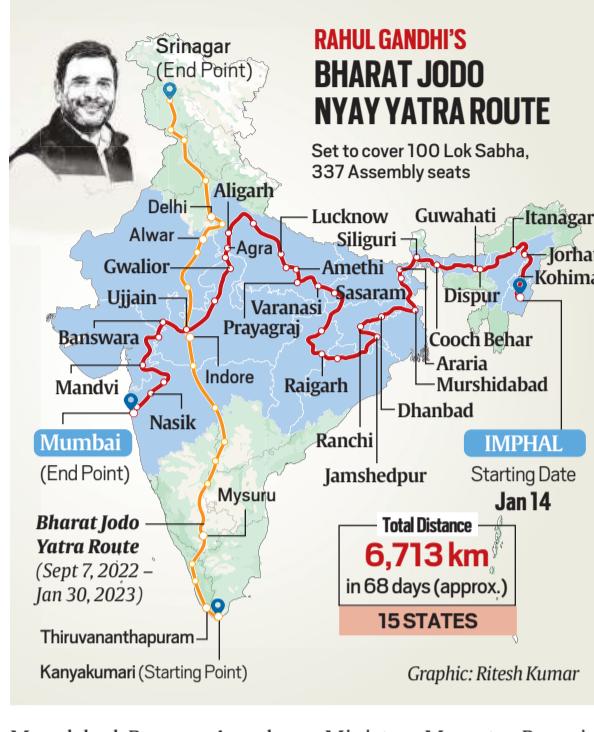
BARELY A couple of months before the Lok Sabha elections and just over a month after the Congress was decimated in the Assembly elections in three heartland states, Rahul Gandhi will kickstart his Manipur to Mumbai Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Thoubal near Imphal on Sunday.

While the Congress said it was not a poll yatra, the list of the Lok Sabha constituencies Rahul's Yatra 2.0 would pass through indicated that the party is heavily focusing on the Hindi regions.

Of about 100 Lok Sabha seats the Yatra would criss-cross, as per a tentative list *The Indian Express* has seen, as many as 58 are in the Hindi-speaking states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Rajasthan. In UP, the Yatra would pass through 28 Lok Sabha segments, among them Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Varanasi constituency, Rae Bareli, Amethi, Allahabad, Phulpur and Lucknow.

The Yatra would largely avoid the strongholds of the key INDIA constituent Samajwadi Party (SP) — including Kannauj, Azamgarh, Etawah, Mainpuri and Firozabad even though it would still cross the SP bastions like Rampur, Sambhal and Badaun — as the Congress feels the Akhilesh Yadav-led party is strong enough to challenge the BJP in its turf.

The Yatra will spend the maximum number of days — 11 — in UP, the politically most crucial state with 80 seats where the Congress has failed to make a mark in the last two Lok Sabha elections. The Yatra will pass through 28 seats in UP, including Varanasi, Machilishahr, Jaunpur, Phulpur, Allahabad, Bhadohi, Pratapgarh, Amethi, Rae Bareli, Lucknow, Mohanlalganj, Hardoi, Sitapur, Chandauli, Dhaula, Shahjahanpur, Aonla, Bareilly,



Moradabad, Rampur, Amroha, Aligarh, Badaun, Bulandshahr, Sambhal, Hathras and Agra.

In many states, the Yatra would focus on seats where the Congress still has some strength. In Maharashtra, it would pass through the strongholds of both the party and Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena faction, hoping that the allies can make an impact in the polls together. Congress sources said the biggest test of the Yatra would be the participation of INDIA allies in five states — it will pass via West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, UP and Maharashtra before culminating in Mumbai in the third week of March.

"We have been meeting in five star hotels and on Zoom... now the test is whether we will be seen together on the ground. If in the five states the allies join the Yatra and the cohesion and camaraderie is evident, then we will be able to create an impact," said a Congress leader. The party is not clear whether TMC supremo and West Bengal Chief

Minister Mamata Banerjee would join the Yatra when it passes through her state.

The Yatra would cut through 10 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal — Cooch Behar, Alipurduars, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Malda Uttar, Malda Dakshin, Jangipur, Mursidabad, Baharampur and Birbhum. The Congress is locked in a tussle with the TMC over seat-sharing, with the latter agreeing to concede the Congress only its two sitting seats — Malda Dakshin and Baharampur. After UP, the Yatra will pass through most number of seats in Bengal and Maharashtra. It will cross as many as 10 seats — Nandurbar, Dindori, Dhule, Nashik, Bhiwandi, Kalyan, Thane, Mumbai-North Central, Mumbai North East, Mumbai South-Central — in Maharashtra.

There will be a focus on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes seats too. Overall, the Yatra will pass through 30 reserved seats, including 13 SC and 17 ST seats, across several states. In Assam, where the Yatra will enter

after Manipur and Nagaland, it will cross seats like Kaliabor, Lakhimpur, Tezpur, Dawang, Gauhati, Barpeta, Jorhat and Dhubri — with four with the BJP.

The Yatra's clear focus is the heartland, where the grand old party had been once strong. In Bihar, it will pass through Congress's sitting seat of Kishanganj, Araria, Purnia, Katihar, Aurangabad, Karakat, Sasaram and Buxar. In Jharkhand, it will touch seats like Giridih, Dhanbad, Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Dumka, Khunti, Singhbhum and Palamu — seven of which are with the BJP now. The Congress had won Singhbhum while Giridih was won by the AJSU.

The Yatra will pass through only four seats in Chhattisgarh — Raigarh, Surguja, Janjir-Champa and Korba.

In Madhya Pradesh, the Yatra will pass Guna and Gwalior — the bastions of senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh and Union minister and ex-Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia — besides Morena, Rajgarh, Dewas, Ujjain and Ratlam.

On the eve of the Yatra, the Congress said it was an "ideological Yatra" and not an electoral one. "This is a Yatra by a political party. It is an ideological yatra and not an electoral one", Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said here. The biggest challenge before the country is that it is facing an ideology which believes in polarisation, economic inequalities and political authoritarianism, he said.

The Yatra, which will traverse 6,713 km, mostly in buses but also on foot, covering 15 states, 110 districts, 337 Assembly segments and 100 Lok Sabha seats in 67 days, will be flagged off from a private ground in Manipur's Thoubal district, instead of Imphal, the party's initial choice. Before starting the Yatra, Rahul will pay homage to the martyrs at the Khongjom war memorial, built in memory of martyrs of the last Anglo-Manipur war that took place in 1891.

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Double blow for Assam Cong: Rout in Council elections, state's gen secy resigns

SUKRITA BARUAH
GUWAHATI, JANUARY 13

DRAWING A blank in Council elections and resignation of its Assam unit's general secretary have come as major setbacks for the Congress in the North East ahead of its Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra kick off in Manipur Sunday.

In the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) elections, which took place on January 8, BJP retained power, sweeping 25 of 28 seats, including six seats where it won uncontested, and improving its 2019 figures by six more. While the win in NCHAC, which covers the district of Dima Hasao, has further consolidated BJP's position in the tribal council, it is a blow for the Congress which drew a blank this time from winning three seats in 2019. Independent candidates won the only three seats the BJP lost.

About the significance of Dima Hasao victory, Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma had said around 35% of the population in the region are Christians. After the rout in NCHAC, another blow came with the party's Assam unit general secretary Apurba Bhattacharjee's resignation. Bhattacharjee was also the party's Dima Hasao in-charge. Bhattacharjee told *The Indian Express* that his experience with the Dima Hasao council election convinced him "that we will never recover."

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New high for PM Fasal Bima: Non-loanee area 70% higher compared to 2021-22

HARIKISHAN SHARMA

NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

THE INSURED gross cropped area of non-loanee farmers under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) has reached a new high, indicating growing acceptance of the Centre's crop insurance scheme.

According to the data available with the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, the non-loanee area, the gross cropped area for which farmers have not taken any loan from bank or other financial in-

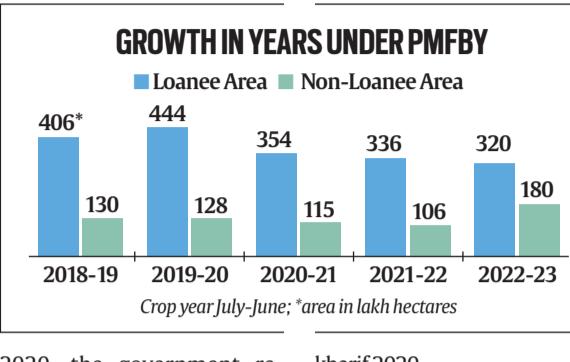
sistutions, has jumped to 180 lakh hectares during crop year 2022-23 under the PMFBY, which is 70 per cent higher as compared to 106 lakh hectares during 2021-22.

In fact, the insured non-loanee area accounted for 36.07 per cent of the total insured area under the PMFBY during 2022-23, which is the highest in the last five years. The proportion of non-loanee area in the total insured area under the PMFBY have been hovering around 24 per cent during the last five years – 23.93 per cent in 2021-22, 24.52 per cent in 2020-21, 22.38

per cent in 2019-20, and 24.3 per cent in 2018-19.

While the insured non-loanee area has increased during the last five years, the loanee area has seen a decline from 441 lakh hectares in 2019-20 to 354 in 2020-21 to 336 lakh hectares in 2021-22 to 320 lakh hectares in 2022-23. In 2018-19, the loanee area stood at 406 lakh hectares.

The NDA government launched the PMFBY from kharif 2016. After implementation of the scheme for initial two years, the government reviewed it and introduced some changes with effect from October 1, 2018. In



2020, the government revamped the scheme's operational guidelines, and the revised guidelines came into effect from kharif 2020.

Initially, the scheme was compulsory for loanee farmers, who possess a crop loan ac-

count/Kisan Credit Card (KCC) account to whom credit limit is sanctioned/renewed for the notified crop during the crop season. However, from Kharif 2020, it was made voluntarily. This explains the drop in the loanee area.

Under the PMFBY, farmers have to pay premium at the rate of 2 per cent of sum insured or actuarial rate whichever is less for kharif food and oilseeds crops (all cereals, millets, and oilseeds, pulses), 1.5 per cent for rabi food and oilseeds crops (all cereals, millets, and oilseeds, pulses), and 5 per cent for kharif and rabi an-

nual commercial/annual horticultural crops. In several states, including Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Tripura, the state governments are paying farmers' premiums, providing insurance for free.

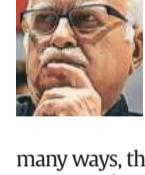
"Since a large number of farmers have benefited from the scheme, even non-loanee farmers are getting enrolled so that they can benefit from the scheme. In view of highly subsidised premiums where a farmer is required to pay a negligible amount, the scheme has become popular. This trend indicates wider acceptance of the scheme," said Rajeev Chaudhary, the former CMD of Agriculture Insurance Company of India Limited.

the non-loanee area under the PMFBY indicates growing acceptance of the scheme.

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How Somnath was a natural starting point for Ayodhya Temple Yatra, writes Advani

VIKAS PATHAK
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13



Like Ayodhya, Somnath had seen foreign invasions, he writes

THE SOMNATH Temple was a 'natural' starting point for the 1990 Rath Yatra to mobilise public support for a grand Ram temple in Ayodhya, veteran BJP leader L K Advani has said in a forthcoming article in the Rashtradharm magazine.

Drawing a parallel, Advani writes that just like Ayodhya, Somnath too had seen foreign invasions. "When in the mid-1980s, the Ayodhya issue rose to the centre stage of national politics, I was reminded of the time political stalwarts like Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad and KM Munshi had, against all odds, effectively steered the reconstruction of another landmark temple in independent India – the Somnath Temple at Prabhavati on the coast of Saurashtra in Gujarat," Advani writes.

Somnath was both a witness to, and a target of, multiple foreign invasions during the medieval period...," he adds.

On Ram Temple, Advani says in 1928, Babar, who founded the Mughal empire, had ordered his commander Mir Baqi to erect a mosque at Ayodhya to make the spot a "place for descent of angels" – hence the name Babri Masjid".

"It is widely believed, and later even confirmed by compelling archaeological evidence, that there was a pre-existing temple at Ayodhya, which was demolished for establishing the mosque. So in

The Indian Express reported Saturday that in the article, Advani wrote how he was only the charioteer of the rath and that destiny had decided the temple would become a reality one day.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Spirit of 'Ram Rajya' enshrined in Constitution: Dhankhar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
JAIPUR, JANUARY 13

THE SPIRIT of "Ram Rajya" is enshrined in the Constitution and its makers had thoughtfully placed the picture of Lord Ram, Lakshman and Goddess Sita on the top of the chapter related to the Fundamental Rights, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar was quoted as saying in an official statement on Saturday.

Addressing the inaugural session of the National Electro-



Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Rajasthan CM Bhajan Lal Sharma in Jaipur on Saturday. [@BhajanlalBjp](#)

Homeopathy Seminar, he said, "I feel pained when someone ignores

rant, who doesn't know history, gives an affidavit that Lord Ram

is an imaginary figure." Rajasthan CM Bhajan Lal Sharma and his deputy Premchand Bairwa were present on this occasion.

Stating there are over 20 pictures in our Constitution, Lord Ram and the spirit of 'Ram Rajya' is enshrined in the Constitution and the "makers of the Constitution have kept it at its peak", he said. Dhankhar claimed those disrespecting Lord Ram are "actually disrespecting the makers of our Constitution who have very thoughtfully and judiciously placed those pictures of

Lord Ram there".

"Society will remain healthy only when all its sections remain united... Those who want to divide the society, want to spread poison for immediate political gains are only enemies of the society but also their own."

"There is no need to teach a lesson to such elements because they are our own. There is a need to make them aware... they need to be brought on the right path. This needs to be done not institutionally but in our society," Dhankhar said.

Lucknow-based Muslim activist-analyst Athar Hussain argues on the same lines, to say, "The Congress must position itself for future politics... This is not an issue of the rule of law, of the judicial system, or even of justice. Ram is overwhelmingly accepted all over India, including the South. Can you deny this sentiment, of maybe 90% of the Hindus?"

Hussain adds that there is another dimension to the dispute, of "Babur vs Ram... a foreign invader vs the most important deity (for Hindus)".

The Congress has for long relied on the politics of "default" to bring it back to power – that all it needs to do is sit back, and be around when people get tired of

Lucknow: Stating that he has received the invite for attending the January 22 Ram temple opening ceremony in Ayodhya, SP president Akhilesh Yadav Saturday said he would visit the temple with his family after the consecration ceremony.

In a post on X, Akhilesh attached a photo of a letter written by him to Ram temple general secretary Champat Rai. ENS

Dehradun: Uttarakhand government Saturday announced a dry day on January 22. "... We decided all liquor shops, bars, and departmental stores across the state will remain closed...," said Uttarakhand Excise Commissioner Hari Chandra Semwal in an order Friday. ENS

Liquor shops to remain shut in Uttarakhand

Jaipur: The Amrit Rath Yatra, with statues of Lord Ram, Lakshman and Hanuman, on its way to Ayodhya from Rajasthan's Bikaner, reached Lucknow on Saturday. Vishal Srivastav

Yatras, rallies, bhajans from NY to Sydney

LALMANI VERMA
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 13

FROM WASHINGTON DC to Paris to Sydney to New York, events have been planned in various parts of the world to mark the Ram temple ceremony on January 22. These programmes are either being organised by the VHP or are being undertaken by Hindu diaspora groups.

VHP joint general secretary Swami Vigyananand said the VHP had "direct contacts" in over 60 countries and it has planned programmes with the Hindu community organisations there.

He added the programmes were either car rallies, rath yatras or a prabhat pheri (marches undertaken while singing bhajans). The consecration ceremony will also be live-streamed in temples in different countries.

In Paris, a Ram Rath Yatra will be carried out from the Place de la Capelle, an arena in the northern part of the city, to the Eiffel Tower. There would also be "chanting of Shree Ram Dhun, devotional songs, cultural pro-

mimes and prasad distribution" at the Eiffel tower. That rath yatra will start after a puja and a vishwakalyan yagna and pass through the Le République, Musée de Louvre and Arc de Triomphe.

Devotees in New York will assemble at Times Square on January 22. In Washington DC, the VHP has organised a car and bike rally on January 20 at the Shri Bhakti Anjaneya Temple. After January 22, prasad will be distributed in temples across America, starting from Boston.

In Australia, programmes will be organised at Parramatta Park in Western Sydney and Kingsley Parkin Melbourne. Other cities in Australia where VHP will hold programmes with Hindu communities include Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and New South Wales.

In Africa, Vigyananand said the VHP was organising a car rally and other events in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Mauritius, Ghana, Nigeria and Mozambique. Mauritian government has decided to grant a special leave for two hours to public servants of the Hindu faith on January 22. FULL REPORT

www.indianexpress.com

Staying away from Ram temple on Jan 22 is Congress's cold comfort zone

Cong has for long relied on politics of 'default' – that all it needs to do is sit back, and be around when people tire of BJP. But the days of default politics may be over

like Karan Singh and Arjun Modhwadia openly differed with the party stand, but many others who did not speak out also felt the same. It was Rahul Gandhi who is learnt to have weighed in on the final call.

The party has played it safe – the "Hindu vote" was not likely to have gravitated to it just because its leaders attended the inauguration ceremony; rather, Modi would have got all the credit. On the other hand, by attending, the party ran the risk of losing the goodwill of Muslims. The Congress may have also calculated that it was better to stand with its INDIA allies, who are not going either, than create Babri Masjid been still standing.

Mamata Banerjee was said to be not inclined, with Trinamool Congress sources saying she would take the cue from the Congress. The RJD was also opposed, with its junior leaders criticising the consecration, though Tejashwi Yadav and Lalu

Prasad refrained from a public stand. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav indicated which way he was leaning by saying he would go when Lord Ram's "bidding" came.

While enabling the construction of the temple in its 2019 verdict, the Supreme Court had held the demolition of the Babri Masjid as "illegal". For many, though the verdict brought closure to an issue which had divided communities and Indian politics for decades, it did not bring "justice". They also wondered how the apex court's verdict would have played out had Babri Masjid been still standing.

At the same time, the Congress decision raises larger issues. Can a mainstream force like the party, positioning itself as an alternative to the BJP, ignore the sentiments of a large chunk of India? Truth be told, many Hindus opposed to the BJP also favour the building of a temple in Ayodhya. A survey done by

an institute in UP at the time of the state elections in 2017 – and this included those opposed to the BJP, mainly OBCs – favoured a temple (though many of them did wonder how it would change their lives).

Lucknow-based Muslim activist-analyst Athar Hussain argues on the same lines, to say, "The Congress must position itself for future politics... This is not an issue of the rule of law, of the judicial system, or even of justice. Ram is overwhelmingly accepted all over India, including the South. Can you deny this sentiment, of maybe 90% of the Hindus?"

Hussain adds that there is another dimension to the dispute, of "Babur vs Ram... a foreign invader vs the most important deity (for Hindus)".

The BJP, and that the public will then automatically turn to the party. But the days of default politics may be over. For the Congress needs to have a sizeable number in its kitty to be able to play that game, which it doesn't. Plus, the opponent (BJP) is not into playing the default game – it is out to finish the Congress.

Nor can a mainline party like the Congress afford to play boycott politics beyond a point, and remain relevant. It boycotted the inauguration of the new Parliament building, knowing it would have to enter it soon thereafter; and it is now staying away from the Ram Mandir inauguration, with which Hindu sentiment is so deeply identified, to the point of defying logic.

The visage of a Catholic-born Sonia Gandhi present in Ayodhya on January 22, despite her opposition to Modi and her angst at the unpunished "illegal" committed on December 6, 1992, when the Babri Masjid

was brought down, would have left its own mark. Just as her decision to decline prime ministership in 2004 made her acceptable to the country.

These are decisions for the long term. After all, Ram Bhaktas may one day look at the Congress as their option.

Boycotting the January 22 event is risky for another reason.

The BJP will go to town tarnishing the Congress as "anti-Hindu" – a charge that has done it damage in recent times, one that the party's leaders themselves have admitted to post-2014: that the Congress's perception of being "pro-minority" was a factor in its defeat.

It would not be out of place here to recapture how earlier Congress governments tried to navigate the minefield called Ayodhya. As PM, Indira Gandhi lent her tacit support to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's Ekatmata yatra, a precursor to the temple movement in 1983-84,

where the Babri Masjid had once stood, and created a trust with major Hindu sects represented in it. It even got registered in 1995. Then suddenly, Rao decided he would build the temple after the 1996 elections, when he returned to power – which he did not.

Essentially, since 1989, when the BJP adopted the building of the Ram Temple in its Palampur resolution, the Congress has not known how to counter the challenge of Hindu nationalism posed by the BJP. As a result, it has ceded political space – and imagination and innovating abilities -- to the BJP and continues to do so.

Its boycott of the January 22 event may give the party solace. But it is not a good enough response from India's Grand Old Party.

Neerja Chowdhury

Contributing Editor, The Indian Express, has covered the last 10 Lok Sabha elections.

She is the author of How Prime Ministers Decide

