

Akali Dal to provide legal aid to Rajoana’s family to fight for relief

Party terms efforts to stall commutation of Rajoana’s death sentence ‘unfortunate’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHANDIGARH

The Shiromani Akali Dal on Wednesday said the commutation of death sentence of Balwant Singh Rajoana to life term was part of a process aimed at bringing to closure the festering wounds of the Sikh community and termed efforts to stall this humanitarian gesture “unfortunate”.

Former Minister and Akali leader Maheshinder Singh Grewal said it was unfortunate that an attempt was being made by certain Congress leaders to recreate tension by opposing the move in the court of law. “The SAD is against such attempts aimed at striking at the core of peace and communal harmony and will provide all needed legal aid to the family of Rajoana to fight these insidious designs



Balwant Singh Rajoana

to reverse the humane relief granted to him,” said Mr. Grewal.

‘Release Sikh prisoners’ He said the Union government should release all other Sikh prisoners who are still languishing in jail after serving their full sentences. “The Punjab government should do likewise for prisoners languishing in State jails,” he said.

Mr. Grewal said the Akali Dal and the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) have always opposed the death penalty as a matter of principle and continue to do so.

“We have waged a long struggle to create consensus on this issue and this included approaching the Union government and the President on several occasions under the leadership of Parkash Singh Badal,” he said.

The decision to release eight Sikh prisoners who had already completed their sentence and the commutation of Rajoana’s death sentence were the fallout of the concerted efforts of the Akali Dal and the SGPC, Mr. Grewal claimed.

He said the Congress leader opposing the commutation of the death penalty was part of the Vidhan Sabha

when the House moved a resolution appealing to the Centre in this regard.

The statement came a day after Gurkirat Singh Kotli, a Punjab MLA and grandson of slain former Chief Minister Beant Singh, said his family would move the Supreme Court against the Centre’s decision to commute the death sentence of Rajoana.

Ludhiana MP Ravneet Singh Bittu, who too is a grandson of the slain leader, also criticised the Centre’s decision. “How is a terrorist of Kashmir different from a terrorist of Punjab? How can Rajoana who hasn’t applied for pardon himself, doesn’t believe in the law of land and wants to spread terror repeatedly be released by Modi Govt? Dual Face of Modi,” Mr. Bittu had tweeted. (With PTI inputs)

Plastic ban comes into force in Odisha

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BHUBANESWAR

Ban on single-use plastic came into effect in all urban areas of Odisha on Wednesday on the occasion of 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. Manufacture, sale, trade, import, storage, transportation and distribution of single-use plastics are prohibited as per a notification issued by Odisha Forest and Environment Department on September 30, an official said.

The ban is imposed on polythene carry bags of any shape, thickness and size (excluding compostable), Polyethylene Terephthalate (Pet/Pete) bottles of less than 200 ml capacity, he said.

The vendors will not be allowed to use polythene sheets of less than 50-micron thickness for storing, transporting, dispensing or packaging of any article or commodity.

29 held for torturing 6 men on witchcraft suspicion

Victims blamed for diseases and deaths in their village

STAFF REPORTER
BERHAMPUR

As many as 29 residents, including 22 women, of Gopapur village under Khallikote police station in Odisha’s Ganjam district were arrested on Tuesday night for their alleged involvement in torture of six persons, aged between 55 and 65 years, over suspicion of witchcraft.

The arrested persons claimed the victims were witchcraft practitioners who were responsible for diseases and deaths in Gopapur.

“On the night of September 30, eight teeth of each victim were uprooted and they were forced to eat human excreta. They were also beaten up and forcibly restrained at a community hall in the village,” said Sub-Divisional Police Officer Utkal Keshari Dash.

On October 1, after receiving information about the in-

Police managed to rescue the victims and admitted them to a hospital in Berhampur

SATYARANJAN PRADHAN
Inspector, Khallikote police station

cident, a police team reached the village to rescue the victims but faced stiff opposition from the villagers who threw chilli powder and stones at them.

“The police managed to rescue the victims and admitted them to MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur. Later, the accused persons were rounded up and arrested,” said inspector-in-charge of Khallikote police station Satyaranjan Pradhan.

Tensions gripped Gopapur two weeks ago after some villagers suddenly fell sick and three of them died. The villagers alleged some

sorcery practitioners were causing the ailments and deaths. On September 28, more persons fell ill and the villagers started collecting money to call up a sorcerer to identify the alleged witchcraft practitioners. The same day, the Ganjam district administration and the police tried to intervene and make the villagers see reason.

Medical team On September 30, a medical team from MKCG Medical College and Hospital reached the village to take blood samples of the inhabitants for tests and treat the sick. But these measures failed to convince the villagers who rounded up the six victims, based on details given by the sorcerer, and tortured them. The victims were all men in their late 50s and 60s.

‘Mo Sarkar’ initiative launched

Bid to provide service with dignity to people of Odisha

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik to Wednesday launched his government’s new governance initiative ‘Mo Sarkar’ on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti when different parties organised padayatras and other events to derive political mileage on the occasion.

Mr. Patnaik called eight persons in seven districts over phone from his residence to collect their feedback about treatment at government hospitals and service at police stations. The phone numbers of these people, who had earlier come to hospitals and police stations, were collected randomly from the ‘Mo Sarkar’ portal.

Logo released

Later Mr. Patnaik went to the Capital Hospital and Saheed Nagar Police Station in the city and released the logo and preamble of the ‘Mo Sarkar’



Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik

programme. He had announced this new programme on the occasion of Independence Day this year.

The ‘Mo Sarkar’ was launched at all police stations across the State along with 21 district headquarters hospitals and three government-run medical college hospitals at Cuttack, Berhampur and Sambalpur. The programme will be effective at all the 30 district headquarters hospitals of the State by October 30.

The objective of the ‘Mo

Sarkar’ programme is to provide service with dignity to people who are coming to government offices for different purposes. The phone numbers of people who are coming to government offices will be collected randomly with the purpose to improve the governance system by collecting feedback on behaviour and professionalism of government officers.

Feedback collection

The Chief Minister, Departmental Minister, Director General of Police (in case of police stations) and Departmental Minister, Secretary and Director (in case of hospitals) will call on random numbers to collect feedback.

The employees will be ranked as good or bad on the basis of the feedback and those with good rank will get out-of-turn promotion and action will be taken against employees with bad rank.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BEGUSARAI (BIHAR)

The BJP-led NDA in Bihar, which has been ruling the State for about a decade and a half, owes an apology to the people of Patna who have been reeling from inundation following heavy rain, Union Minister Giriraj Singh said here on Wednesday.

The firebrand BJP leader also attacked the Nitish Kumar government saying an alert had been sounded ahead of the downturn but it failed to ensure attentiveness in the administrative machinery, which could have lessened the severity of the crisis.

“It is not a failure of the people of Patna. It is our failure. Residents of the city have reposed so much trust in the NDA, especially the BJP. We owe an apology to them,” said Mr. Singh, the Lok Sabha MP from Begusarai.

A former member of the



Residents of Rajendra Nagar wading through waterlogged roads with the help of a makeshift boat, after collecting relief materials in Patna on Wednesday. ■RANJEET KUMAR

Nitish Cabinet, the Union Minister is a known detractor of the Chief Minister and his deputy Sushil Kumar Modi, a senior BJP leader.

“The government issued an alert asking the people to

be on guard. But was it on guard itself? Had it been so, people would not have been compelled to suffer so much of misery,” he said.

The slow pace of relief operations has fuelled anger

among the people affected by a flood-like situation, particularly in Patna, parts of which have been under water for days. On Wednesday, water was being pumped out of the inundated areas in the

State capital. Mr. Kumar urged people to “have patience”, but lost his cool on Tuesday night in the face of persistent queries from a journalist about the waterlogged streets of Patna. The Chief Minister shot back at the scribe, asking him whether there was similar outrage when Mumbai was deluged or when floods disrupted life in the U.S.

17 lakh people affected A State government statement put the total number of people affected by the rains at 17.09 lakh. The districts hit by the rainfall were Patna, Bhojpur, Bhagalpur, Khagaria, Samastipur, Begusarai, Lakhisarai and Vaishali, situated on either side of the Ganga. According to the State disaster management department, 42 deaths have been reported from areas affected by rainfall, though a district-wise break-up was not yet available.

Manual scavenging still a grim reality in M.P.’s Shivpuri

As PM declares nation 100% ODF, sanitation workers continue to clean sewers without protective gear

SIDHARTH YADAV
SHIVPURI

In his childhood, Sachin Valmik (name changed) wanted to become a teacher when he grew up. But upon dropping out of school, the prospect of working as a safai karamchari, given his caste, seemed more real, and pulled him into what his forefathers did for years.

Despite a law banning manual scavenging, he continues to remove human excreta from an open drain behind the PWD quarters here every morning, along with 15 other men, in shifts.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared the country 100% open-defecation free (ODF) in Gujarat on Wednesday, sanitation workers employed by the Shivpuri Municipal Council and the Public Health Engineering Department continued to engage in manual scavenging and cleaning sewers without protective gear.

Adults in Mr. Valmik’s family – wife, mother, brother,



A sanitation worker cleaning a drain behind the PWD quarters in Shivpuri. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

sister and brother-in-law – are all safai karamcharis. And the predicament of his caste, Mehtar, a Dalit community, has taken away any semblance of hope he had for his children as well.

Caste bias

“We recently pulled out my eldest son, 14, from school. He was not allowed to sit on benches with upper caste children,” said Mr. Valmik,

42. “What use is education when society compels us to take up only one kind of work? *Ghoom phir ke yeh hi kaam karte hain* (We end up doing this work).”

All sanitation workers in the city are Mehtars, with 15 men tasked with clearing drains clogged with human excreta, carcasses and polythene bags and 35-40 women sprucing up the streets. Engaging a sanitation

worker for manually cleaning, carrying or disposing of human excreta is a punishable offence under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, which mandates their identification and rehabilitation by the government. Furthermore, The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, under Section 3 (j) prohibits manual scavenging.

Of the six sewer deaths in Madhya Pradesh since 1993, four occurred in Shivpuri – two in 2014 and two in 2016 – according to the State Directorate of Urban Administration and Development.

Safety concerns

Still, safai karamcharis working in sewers and septic tanks in the district have not been provided with safety equipment, at least since 2013, which the government is mandated to provide, the PHE Department replied to a Right to Information query.

This is despite repeated directions to the contractor of a new sewer line here to provide them.

“I don’t let my boys go down 20-30 feet. When Indore and Gwalior civic bodies have machines for cleaning sewers, why can’t we have them,” asked a supervisor, requesting anonymity. “In the older sewer line, things were easier as it was just six-seven feet deep.”

Unaware of manual scavenging in the city, Deputy Collector Pallavi Vaidya said, “As of now, we are not aware of manual scavenging happening anywhere in Shivpuri. Anyway, we don’t encourage or support it.”

On August 19, the State Human Rights Commission, responding to a complaint by an activist, had asked the authorities to furnish a report on manual scavenging in the district within two weeks. A district official told *The Hindu* that the report had been submitted to the “department concerned”.

Meghalaya NGO objects to ‘overloaded’ Bhutan trucks

‘Damaging already damaged roads’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

After driving into revised traffic rules in Assam, trucks from Bhutan carrying boulders and stone chips to Bangladesh via the northeast have now run into an NGO in Meghalaya.

The Anti-Corruption and Human Development Organisation has urged the authorities in Meghalaya to ban the plying of the “overloaded” trucks from Bhutan as their movement has “damaged the already-damaged roads in the State”.

Export via northeast

Bhutan exports stones to Bangladesh using the land route through Assam and Meghalaya as per the South Asian Free Trade Area agreement among SAARC countries allowing a third country to be used as transit. SAARC expands to South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and its

members are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Each Bhutan truck is supposed to carry 18 tonnes of load from Gelephu on the India-Bhutan border to Dalu on Meghalaya-Bangladesh border covering 321 km. But Bhutanese traders have admitted the trucks carry “a bit more” to offset the “extra expenditure” on transportation.

The Meghalaya organisation based at Chibinang in West Garo Hills district, said that convoys of overloaded Bhutan trucks have been causing more damage to an arterial road that was already in a dilapidated state.

Ishraful Hoque, the organisation’s president said the road to the check point on the border with Bangladesh had been repaired some time ago, but have begun peeling off because of the trucks that are allegedly driven at a high speed.

Call for mass protests against Citizenship Bill

IBOYAIMA LAITHANGBAM
IMPHAL

Civil society groups and social activists in Manipur have given a call for a mass agitation against the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill on Thursday.

Yumnamcha Dilipkumar, convener of Manipur People Against Citizenship Amendment Bill (MAN-PAC), told reporters on Wednesday that six students’ organisations in the State have extended their support to the agitation.

People in Manipur have been opposing the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, which, they claim, is against the interest of the indigenous people of the region. The repeated assurances given to the people of the Northeast by Central leaders have failed to comfort them. There is also disappointment over the President not yet giving assent to the Manipur People’s Protection Bill, 2018.

STATE INDUSTRIES PROMOTION CORPORATION OF TAMILNADU LIMITED
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For and on behalf of State Industries Promotion Corporation of Tamil Nadu Limited, sealed tenders are invited under **“Two Cover System”** for the following work from Civil/Electrical Class-I State level registered in State/Central or Quasi Government Organisations having experience in similar nature of works. Tenders will be received upto 3.00 PM on **06.11.2019** and the same will be opened on the same day at 3.30 PM.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Approx. value of work Rs. in lakhs	EMD in Rs.
1	Providing Street Light arrangements in SIPCOT Industrial Complexes at Gummidipoondi and Cheyyar.	546.00	2,83,000/-
2	Providing Street Light arrangements and Jungle clearance in SIPCOT Industrial Complex/Growth Centres/Park at Perundurai, Hosur, Siruseri, Ranipet and Gummidipoondi.	733.00	3,77,000/-

The tender Schedule can also be Downloaded at free of cost from the website www.tenders.tn.gov.in and www.sipcot.in
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Cement firm to use plastic waste for fuel in Meghalaya

The State began battling plastic waste in 2018 by building the first road with it in Nongstoin town

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

The Meghalaya government has signed an agreement with a major cement firm for buying plastic waste to be used as fuel instead of coal for producing clinkers.

Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma made this announcement during an official programme to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi in the State capital

Shillong on Wednesday.

“We have had an understanding with one of the cement companies which will use the plastic as raw material to burn and produce energy from it. It will be a process very much within the control limits of the pollution board,” Mr Sangma said.

At least half a dozen companies manufacture cement in Meghalaya, which has al-

most 10% of India’s limestone reserves. These companies rely largely on coal, also mined in the State, for fuel.

Officials said the government would have a similar agreement with the other cement companies if they agree to buy plastic waste.

Pollution monitoring

The Chief Minister said the cement firm that offered to buy the plastic waste had its

factory retrofitted to consume plastics in place of coal. The State Pollution Control Board would be monitoring the ambient air quality after the plastics are burned so that no harmful emission takes place, he added.

A State government spokesperson said Meghalaya had begun battling plastic in 2018 by building the first plastic road in Nongstoin

town followed by another in Tura town this year.

A few months ago, Mr Sangma introduced the Meghalaya Plastic Challenge toward plastic waste management by involving local organisations and traditional tribal bodies.

The movement saw village-level volunteers and rag-pickers collect 17 tonnes of plastic waste from across the State.