

## 530 districts reported as free of manual scavenging: Centre

Ministry says manual scavenging is no longer practised in India; T.N., Chhattisgarh, Bihar among States with all districts reporting free status

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Jammu and Kashmir, Manipur, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Jharkhand are among the States and Union Territories that have the highest number of districts yet to declare themselves free of manual scavenging, showed data submitted by the Social Justice Ministry in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

In response to multiple questions related to deaths caused by manual scavenging or hazardous cleaning of sewers, the Union government said that India had not reported deaths due to manual scavenging in the past five years, while 330 people had died during cleaning of sewers and septic tanks.

The Ministry said 530 districts had so far reported themselves to be free of manual scavenging, while the rest were yet to do so. The Ministry said manual scavenging was no longer carried out in the country.

While 100% of the districts in States such as Bihar, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and a few others had declared themselves to be free of manual scavenging, 15% to 20% of the districts have reported so in several States and Union Territories.



The Union government said that India had seen no deaths due to manual scavenging in the past five years. S.S. KUMAR

In Manipur, just two of the 16 districts had reported as free of manual scavenging. In Jammu and Kashmir and Telangana, just 30% of the districts had declared themselves free. In Odisha and West Bengal, over 60% of the districts were yet to report their respective status.

Uttar Pradesh, which had the highest number of manual scavengers (32,473) in two surveys conducted till 2018, has nearly 90% districts reporting to be free of manual scavenging.

Top Ministry officials said that each district was being asked to either declare itself free of manual scavenging or point out lo-

cations of insanitary latrines and associated manual scavenging. "The district sanitation committees look at data of whether there are insanitary latrines and based on this extrapolate whether manual scavenging exists or not."

Since the launch of the Swachata mobile app in 2016, more than 6,000 complaints have been examined by the Ministry for possible signs of manual scavenging. "But not one complaint was substantiated in all this time," one senior official said.

As government data show that deaths due to hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks continue, the Ministry has decided that its principal focus will be to address this problem, with officials saying the NAMASTE scheme had been launched for this purpose.

"This is why now the focus is to ask municipalities and civic bodies to ensure no hazardous cleaning takes place. And if it takes place, the responsibility should be placed on the employer," another senior official said.

According to data released by the government in Parliament in 2021, over 90% of manual scavengers identified in the surveys till 2018, were from the Scheduled Caste communities.

# No-trust motion against Modi govt. admitted in LS

Speaker Birla convenes meeting of floor leaders today to schedule debate after Congress's Deputy Leader Gogoi moves no-confidence motion; Opposition wants PM to speak on Manipur situation

**Sandeep Phukan**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he stage is set for a high-profile clash between the Opposition and the Treasury benches, as Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Wednesday admitted a no-confidence motion against the Modi government, which was moved by the Congress's Deputy Leader in the House Gaurav Gogoi in a bid to force the Prime Minister to speak in Parliament on the Manipur conflict.

Admitting the motion, Mr. Birla informed the Lok Sabha that he would schedule a debate after consulting leaders of all parties. Sources said the Speaker had convened a meeting of floor leaders of all parties on Thursday.



**Show of support:** Speaker Om Birla conducting the Lok Sabha proceedings amid protests. ANI

When the Lok Sabha reconvened at noon, after a brief disruption during the Question Hour, the Speaker informed the House that he had received a notice from Mr. Gogoi, "expressing a want of confidence in the Council of Ministers under Rule 198". Asking

the Assam MP to seek the permission of the House to move the motion, Mr. Birla took a head count of members backing the motion. It is mandatory to have the backing of at least 50 MPs for a no-trust motion to be admitted. Congress Parliamentary Party chair Sonia

Gandhi, the National Conference's Farooq Abdullah, and the DMK's T.R. Baalu were among those who stood up for the count.

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## No-trust motion against govt. admitted in LS

Asked about the Opposition move, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said people have confidence in the Prime Minister as well as the BJP. "They had done that in the last term also and people had taught them a lesson and will do so again," Mr. Joshi said.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Gogoi admitted that the Lok Sabha numbers may be against them, but emphasised that the Opposition not only wants to hear from Mr. Modi on Manipur but also hopes to express solidarity with the people of the strife-torn State.

"Manipur has become a matter of national security, the conflict is spreading to other parts, and a huge number of weapons are with civilians, and there is trust deficit between communities. For all of these reasons, whether the motion is won or lost, it is important to calm the situation and heal the wounds," Mr. Gogoi said.

Though the Speaker has 10 days' time to schedule the debate, Congress leader Manish Tewari, on behalf of his party, demanded that it begin on Thursday. "All other work should be suspended and the Speaker should start the debate tomorrow [Thursday]," Mr. Tewari said.

(With inputs from Sobhana K. Nair)

## Southern ICAI council gets new office-bearers

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

The Southern India Regional Council (SIRC) of the Institute of Cost Accountants of India (ICAI) at its 21<sup>st</sup> meeting on Monday elected Chennai-based Divya Abhishek as its chairperson for 2023-24. She is the youngest chairperson in the council's history, a release said. While Pandu Ranga Rao K. has been



Divya Abhishek

elected as vice-chairperson, Srinivas Rao has been elected as secretary and Girish K. as the treasurer.



## 'Zero hour' cannot be telecast live unless leaders of all parties give assurance on sticking to the subject, HC told

**Mohamed Imranullah S.**  
CHENNAI

Assembly Speaker M. Appavu is of the opinion that the 'zero hour' of the Assembly sessions cannot be telecast live unless all party leaders give an assurance that only the subject concerned will be discussed, the Madras High Court was told on Wednesday.

Appearing before the first Division Bench of Chief Justice S.V. Gangapurwala and Justice P.D. Audikesavalu, Advocate-General R. Shunmugasundaram said, "The problem with the zero hour is that sometimes, tempers run high, and members may end up



The problem with the zero hour is that sometimes, tempers run high, the A-G said.

making unwarranted comments that could be expunged by the Speaker."

The A-G also submitted an additional counter-affidavit filed by Assembly Secretary K. Srinivasan, who noted that the Speaker had

said that the zero hour could not be telecast live, and that it required an assurance from all party leaders in the light of Rule 119 of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Rules. Rule 119 authorises the Speaker to expunge certain words from the proceedings of the House, if he was of the opinion that they were defamatory, indecent, unparliamentary or undignified, or that incriminatory charges had been levelled against any member without the Speaker's permission.

Mr. Srinivasan said that from January 6, 2022, the first hour of the Assembly session, termed 'question

hour', was being telecast live, and from April 12, 2023, discussions on 'call attention' motions and important resolutions were being telecast live.

The counter said the Speaker had ordered that DD Podhigai be assigned the task of telecasting the proceedings live, which it did between January and May 2022. It also began laying optical fibre cable to enable smooth telecast in coordination with the Information and Public Relations Department. DD informed the Assembly Secretariat that it was awaiting funds from the Centre. "Later, it expressed inability to telecast

the proceedings," it read.

The counter was filed in response to writ petitions filed by Lok Satta Party State president D. Jagadheeswaran in 2012 and DMDK leader Vijayakant in 2015, for live telecast of the proceedings. AIADMK chief whip S.P. Velumani had also filed an impleading petition.

Senior Counsel Vijay Narayan, representing Mr. Velumani, said his client had decided to file a fresh writ petition, and sought an adjournment for listing the new case. The judges accepted his request and directed the Registry to list all cases together on August 22.

## LS passes amended Forest Conservation Bill

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Amidst pandemonium, the Lok Sabha passed the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Bill on Wednesday, without any changes from the first version introduced on March 29. The contentious Bill was introduced to amend the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.

The 1980 legislation had empowered the Centre for the past four decades, to ensure that any forest land diverted for 'non-forestry' purposes is duly compensated. It extends its remit to land even beyond what is officially classified as 'forest' in State and Central government records.

The amendments made by the Bill and now passed

by the Lok Sabha encourage the practice of cultivating plantations on non-forest land, which can increase tree cover over time, act as a carbon sink and aid India's ambitions of having 'net zero' carbon emissions by 2070.

They also seek to remove restrictions imposed by the original Act in creating infrastructure that would aid national security and create livelihood opportunities for those living on the periphery of forests.

### 1,300 appeals

Objections were raised on various aspects of the Bill when it was first introduced, prompting a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to investigate it threadbare. Nearly 1,300



**Fears remain:** Tribal people staging a demonstration against the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Bill in Bhubaneswar recently. ANI

representations from a multitude of groups – including tribal rights groups and independent think-tanks – were sent to the JPC, objecting to clauses of the Bill. However, these objections were deliberated upon but ultimately dismissed by the JPC.

There were objections that the amendments "diluted" the Supreme Court's 1996 judgement in the *Godavarman* case that extended protection to wide tracts of forests, even if they were not recorded as forests. There were objections to the Act's new

name – Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhinyam, translated as Forest (Conservation and Augmentation) Act, instead of the existing Forest (Conservation) Act – saying it was "non-inclusive" and left out many among the "(non-Hindi speaking) population in south India and in the northeast". There were also fears that large parcels of forest land near the borders would no longer be protected.

"We have made provisions in the Bill that would enable our soldiers stationed in sub-zero temperatures at Ladakh to access better roads and infrastructure," Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav said in reply to questions raised in Parliament.

## + FSI surveys reveal good number of dolphins, whales on the East Coast

**B. Madhu Gopal**  
VISAKHAPATNAM

There are a good number of dolphins and a few whales on the East Coast of India, if the sample marine mammal stock assessment survey, conducted by the Visakhapatnam Zonal Base of the Fisheries Survey of India (FSI), is any indication.

The survey had commenced in July 2021, and would continue up to June 2024.

In all, 2,703 dolphins and four whales were sighted during the survey conducted from Latitude 14 degree North to 21 degree North and Longitude 82 degree East to 89 degree East in the upper East Coast of India along



The Pantropical spotted dolphin sighted during the survey by the Visakhapatnam Zonal Base of the FSI. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), covering Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal (12 to 200 nautical miles).

The larger marine mammal sighting survey was conducted by various FSI zonal bases on the East and West coasts, and the one in Port Blair, using

the FSI fleet, all along the Indian EEZ, under the guidance of R. Jeyabhaskaran, Director-General, FSI, Mumbai.

A total of 10,443 marine mammals, which included 10,416 dolphins of 16 species and 27 whales of four species, were sighted in the survey. The

survey was conducted as part of the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY), which had been launched on September 10, 2020, with the objective of bringing in the 'Blue Revolution' through sustainable development of the fisheries sector for five years from 2020 to 2025, with a total outlay of ₹20,050 crore.

"For the first time in India, a total of 150 Risso's dolphin (*Grampus griseus*) were sighted at 105 nautical miles south-east of Paradeep. We have spotted a large number of dolphins off Krishnapatnam, but they are in a few numbers off Visakhapatnam coast," said G.V.A. Prasad, Junior Fisheries Scientist, FSI, who was the cruise leader.



## India will be among top-3 economies in NDA's third term: PM



Narendra Modi acknowledges the crowd at the inauguration of the IECC complex at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi. PTI

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

With less than a year to go for the Lok Sabha election, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said he guaranteed that in the National Democratic Alliance's third term in government from 2024, India would be among the top three economies of the world.

"In our first term, India was 10<sup>th</sup> in world economy rankings. In the second term, it is the fifth largest economy of the world. Based on this track record, I am saying that in our third term it will be among the top three economies of the world. This is Modi's guarantee," the Prime Minister said after inaugurating a redeveloped HTPO complex in the national capital which would be the venue for the G-20 leaders' summit in September.

The complex has now been named Bharat Mandapam. Mr. Modi said the new venue showcased India's new energy and will power.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, when all work had stopped, our workers toiled day and night to complete this project," he said. "I salute all workers from the core of my heart."

The Prime Minister had met all workers in the morning before which he had conducted a special *havan* at the venue.

He said a convention centre of such scale in Delhi was important for India as the earlier one which had been made several decades ago was not able to match up to 21<sup>st</sup> century India. This would be a medium to showcase our start-ups and the work of our filmmakers and would also be a platform for our craftsmen.

He said the Bharat Mandapam would promote conference tourism and the world would witness the rising stature of India when the venue hosts the G-20 summit.

The inauguration was attended by Union Ministers, leading industrialists, chiefs of trade and commerce bodies and others.

Visual metaphor: The aftermath of people who were used to carrying on the street market in a small, dusty rural town.

# COVID-19 and the state: policy interventions during the pandemic

How will the rampage of destruction by the SARS-CoV-2 virus be remembered? Several writers look beyond mortality figures and explain the economic and social devastation, and why 'circles of kindness' must be celebrated

**Sudipta Datta**

**T**he Gig Workers Act passed by the Rajasthan Assembly on Monday was the culmination of a campaign which centred around the demand for social security for unorganised workers. A Welfare Board has been proposed, comprising all stakeholders, and also a welfare fund, guaranteeing social security to platform-based gig workers. For thousands in the unorganised sector with no job security and few other guarantees, this will bring some solace for the future. Due to this lack of social security, many were pushed to the brink during COVID-19 and its aftermath.

How will the rampage of COVID-19 be remembered? Over six million people have died globally due to the virus, but the actual toll could be much higher. SARS-CoV-2 was first noticed in the Wuhan province of China in November 2019. By March 2020, the World Health Organization had declared it a pandemic, and it swept across the world, leading to waves of death and destruction.

The virus hit India hard too. Officially, 5,00,000 deaths were recorded in the two waves that hit the country, in 2020 and 2021, but as economists, analysts, researchers and activists on the ground have pointed out, there has been underreporting of cases and deaths.

**Public policy**  
In his latest book, *Burning Pyres, Mass*

*Graves and a State That Failed its People* (Speaking Tiger), Harsh Mander looks back at the first and second waves of the pandemic and argues that the suffering unleashed in the humanitarian crisis was not "caused" by the coronavirus alone. Instead, he says it was the inexorable consequence of public policy choices which treated the lives of millions of the working poor as dispensable.

Economist Jayati Ghosh raises a similar point. In *The Making of a Catastrophe: The State in the Time of COVID-19* (Aleph), Ms. Ghosh says that beyond the direct health and mortality impacts, the economic and social devastation experienced in India was a catastrophe, adding that this cannot be attributed only to the disease. Much of the damage resulted from government action and inaction, she points out.

While agreeing that several countries suffered worse fates, Ms. Ghosh says the damage to living and working conditions in India resulted principally from the way the government first attempted to control the disease with a "brutal lockdown", and then did not do enough to ensure basic protection for the poor. Since a majority of the workforce is in the informal sector, with no legal or social protection, a stringent policy had devastating consequences.

In the book, she mentions a survey of 3,176 households across five States (Assam, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana and Delhi) which found that school education was badly hit, with children affected in multiple ways. While 52% of

the children reported having a TV at home, only 11% said they had watched educational broadcasts; even when there were phones at home, only 30% children had access to it, and in this too boys were preferred over girls. Another survey based on teachers and parents found out that online schooling was not providing any real learning opportunities, given the constraints. The disruption in education, more often than not, led to a rise in child labour.

## Ambiguous directives

In *The Great Shutdown, A Story of Two Indian Summers* (HarperCollins), Jyoti Mukul analyses the government's directives, some ambiguous, and also records the voices of those severely impacted. Filled with data and research, she writes that the low-intensity first wave was not used properly to prepare for a severe spike, which was seen during the second wave. The Union government intended to prevent the spread by imposing a lockdown in 2020, but the harsh lockdown made life difficult for the poor. "The Union government took belated note of the second wave," writes Mukul, "leading to not only the loss of lives but also a situation where things went out of control." People struggled to find medicines and oxygen as also to say goodbye to loved ones with "burning pyres and mass graves" the overwhelming images of the time.

Ms. Ghosh draws attention to the "weak fiscal response and inadequate

public spending" that compounded matters and added to contractionary tendencies within the economy. Mr. Mander is scathing on one other count. He says India's rich and middle classes were "conspicuously indifferent" to the reality outside their safe homes.

## Lessons from a pandemic

"It is our highest public duty that we must not forget," says Mr. Mander. There are inequalities of incomes, assets and opportunities, and the recovery will be a long and hard one, but Rajasthan's law for gig workers provides a glimmer of hope. As the economist Joan Robinson said about India, "... for everything that can be said about India, the opposite is also true."

The obvious question that looms rather uneasily over us, says Mr. Mander, is how should we craft our lives on the other side of the pandemic? He finds hope in the fact that even in times of acute despair, ordinary people, across differences of class, caste, gender, ethnicity, boundaries, came forward to help someone out.

He recounts several stories of "circles of kindness" – a homeless man dipping into his savings to feed others; policemen organising food kitchens for the hungry at police stations; people driving up to migrants offering them food and water and so on. It's imperative, he says, to learn lessons of solidarity, equality and justice. "Can we indeed resolve to fight to build back better?"