

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## Polls should have been announced earlier, less time for campaign: Maharashtra Oppn parties

**MUMBAI, OCT 15:** The Opposition in Maharashtra on Tuesday said the 35-day period during which the assembly elections process will take place is shorter than usual while the poll body gave enough time to the government to announce a slew of schemes.

It also pointed out that elections to the 288-member Maharashtra assembly, the second largest after Uttar Pradesh (403), will be held in a single phase on November 20, even though this year's Lok Sabha elections were held in five phases in the state.

Counting of votes will take place on November 23, the Election Commission announced earlier on Tuesday.

Leader of Opposition in the outgoing assembly and Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar said, "The ECI generally gives a minimum of 40 days for the political parties to finalise their candidates, for submission of nominations, and the campaign. But this time it is 35 days, which is unusual and which gives us less time to campaign as well.



"It could be a part of some plan to give the Opposition little time," he claimed, adding that the Shiv Sena-BJP-NCP government has rampantly announced schemes in the run-up to the elections without any application of mind and it will hit the state coffers.

Asked about the fate of these schemes if the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance came to power, Wadettiwar said, "We note that some schemes will strain the state's finances, but we will not scrap all of them. We will evaluate and continue the schemes

that genuinely aim to help the people. Additionally, our administration will prioritise improving the safety of women in public spaces."

Jayant Patil, state president of the National Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar), said, "The ECI held Lok Sabha elections in five stages in Maharashtra, but it has now decided to hold elections for the assembly in one stage. It is good that the NDA government in Maharashtra will lose at one stroke."

The announcement of the assembly elections should have been made earlier, but

the state government was given enough time to announce more and more welfare schemes and sanction development works, he claimed.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said, "Compared to the Lok Sabha, the performance of the MVA which is part of the INDIA bloc will be better. There is no need to worry about the seat-sharing formula."

He also claimed that the questions raised by several Opposition parties over the possible misuse of EVMs were not properly addressed by the EC officials.

## Jharkhand polls: Both NDA, INDIA bloc confident of victory as battlelines drawn

**JHARKHAND, OCT 15:** With the Election Commission announcing the poll dates for the 81-member Jharkhand assembly, the stage is set for a direct contest between the ruling JMM-led coalition and the NDA. With the current assembly's term concluding in January, the stakes are high for both alliances.

The Assembly polls will be held in two phases on November 13 and 20 and counting will take place on November 23, the Election Commission announced on Tuesday.

The BJP-led NDA has already started campaigning to regain lost ground, deploying Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma who have been raising the issues of "Bangladeshi infiltration" and "rampant corruption".

In response, the JMM-led ruling alliance, under Chief Minister Hemant Soren, is countering with a focus on welfare schemes, such as the Abua Awas Yojna and Maiyan Samman Yojna, which increases financial assistance to women aged 18-50 from Rs 12,000 to Rs 30,000 annually.

The opposition INDIA bloc is also intensifying efforts to challenge the NDA's ambitions.

Key factors that are likely to influence the election include the BJP's welfare schemes and the arrest and subsequent bail of Soren by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). The ruling alliance



claims the arrest was politically motivated, as Soren was detained in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land fraud.

In the 2019 assembly elections, the contest was close, with the JMM winning 30 seats and the BJP securing 25, down from 37 in 2014. The JMM-Congress-RJD alliance won a comfortable majority with 47 seats.

The BJP has announced that its seat-sharing arrangement within the NDA is "almost final," with the first list of candidates expected within the next 48 hours.

According to the proposed arrangement, the Sudesh Mahto-led AJSU Party will contest 9-11 seats, while the Nitish Kumar-led JD(U) will field candidates in two constituencies. Talks regarding seat-sharing with LJP (Ram Vilas) are scheduled for

Wednesday or Thursday, pending the return of its chief Chirag Paswan from abroad.

On Monday, Soren confirmed that the JMM-led alliance will contest all 81 seats, although seat-sharing with allies is yet to be finalised. The Congress said it will contest the polls in alliance with the JMM, with a decision on seat-sharing expected soon.

Currently, the strength of the assembly stands at 74, with the JMM-led ruling alliance comprising 44 members — 26 from the JMM, 17 from Congress, and one from RJD.

Two JMM legislators, Nalin Soren and Joba Majhi, are now members of Parliament, while Jama legislator Sita Soren resigned to contest the Lok Sabha elections on a BJP ticket. Additionally, Borio MLA Lobin Hembrom

was recently disqualified under the anti-defection law.

Similarly, the BJP's strength has decreased to 23, with two of its MLAs—Dhulu Mahto (Baghmara) and Manish Jaiswal (Hazribag)—having contested Lok Sabha polls and now serving as MPs. Mandu MLA Jaiprakash Bhai Patel, who joined Congress before the Lok Sabha elections, was also disqualified under the anti-defection law.

Former CM Champai Soren, along with Independent MLA Amit Kumar Yadav from Barkatha, has joined the BJP. Additionally, Kamlesh Singh, the lone NCP legislator in Jharkhand, joined the saffron party on October 4. The AJSU Party currently has three MLAs, while the NCP and CPI(M) have one MLA each, alongside two Independents.

## Have notified board of visitors for Delhi jails: Delhi govt tells HC

**NEW DELHI, OCT 15:** The Delhi government on Tuesday informed the Delhi High Court that a board of visitors -- meant to give feedback on the standard of facilities in Delhi jails -- has been notified.

A bench of Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela was hearing a suo motu case pertaining to problems plaguing jails in the national capital.

The high court had granted a time till Tuesday to the Delhi government to complete the exercise. The

counsel representing the Delhi government said that a notification constituting six such boards in line with the Delhi Prisons Rules was issued on October 14.

The board provides feedback to prison authorities with respect to the standard of basic facilities to be maintained in jail, including health, hygiene and security.

The authorities were further tasked by the high court to fill up vacancies in medical, para-medical and other posts in jail hospitals within 16 weeks.

"Jails are overcrowded.

The jail capacity is 100, but there are about 200 people. So, the sanctioned (strength of) the required staff has to be met. All existing vacancies must be filled," the bench said on Tuesday.

Advocate Ajay Verma, who is representing an inter-venor in the matter, submitted that there several vacancies in the medical and the para-medical posts in Tihar Jail.

Advocate Anuj Aggarwal, appearing for the Delhi government, assured that all the vacancies would be filled as expeditiously as possible.

The court had on October 1 granted time to the Delhi government to notify the board, directing the home secretary to be personally present if the same was not done.

The notification, dated October 14, appointed an official as well as non-official members to the board of visitors for Tihar, Rohini and Mandoli prison complexes.

While the official visitors include judicial and Delhi government officials, the non-official visitors include social workers and mental health professionals.

## Trudeau accuses India of using diplomats, organised crimes to attack Canadians

**WASHINGTON, OCT 15:** Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has accused India of choosing to use its diplomats and organised crime to attack its citizens and make them feel unsafe on their soil, calling it a "monumental mistake" by New Delhi.

These remarks were made by Trudeau on Monday on a day India expelled six Canadian diplomats and announced withdrawing its High Commissioner from Canada and other "targeted" officials from Canada after strongly dismissing Ottawa's allegations linking the envoy to a probe into the killing of Sikh extremist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Canada has also announced expulsion of six Indian diplomats.

India has been strongly rejecting Canada's charge of involvement of Indian agents in Nijjar's killing last year.

The ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in September last year of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Nijjar.

Trudeau spoke to reporters on Monday, hours after the head of the RCMP laid out stunning allegations accusing agents of the Indian government of playing a role in "widespread violence" in Canada, including homicides, and warned that it poses "a serious threat to our public safety," the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reported.

"I believe that India has made a monumental mistake by choosing to use their



diplomats and organised crime to attack Canadians, to make them feel unsafe here at (their) home, and even more, to create acts of violence and even murder. It's unacceptable," Trudeau alleged.

Trudeau also said that, "From the beginning, as of last summer, we've worked closely with our Five Eyes partners, particularly with the United States, where they have gone through a similar pattern of behaviour from India in regards to an attempted extrajudicial killing," Trudeau told reporters at a news conference in Ottawa.

"We will continue to work with our allies as we stand up together for the rule of law, he said.

The US State Department has so far not made any statements on the diplomatic crisis between its two close allies and partners.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), in a statement, said that India reserves the right to take further steps in response to the Trudeau government's sup-

port for extremism, violence and separatism against India.

"In 2018, his visit to India, which was aimed at currying favour with a vote bank, rebounded to his discomfort. His cabinet has included individuals who have openly associated with an extremist and separatist agenda regarding India. His interference in Indian internal politics in December 2020 showed how far he was willing to go in this regard," the MEA said.

During the press conference on Monday, Trudeau said that the situation is extremely undesirable.

"Not only do we not want Canadians to be subjected to violence in their communities, in their homes, but we also do not want to have these tensions in relations with India," he said.

"That is why last week, we approached the Government of India through our security agencies, diplomats and police agencies, to look for a way to resolve this deep difference...To protect Canadians...But not to come and de-

stroy the good relations or the relations between India and Canada," Trudeau said.

Unfortunately, India has "not chosen to work with us. They have chosen to deny, repel and to make personal attacks against this government and question the integrity of our agencies and our institutions, and we have had to respond to protect Canadians", he said.

Trudeau said he met and spoke with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on this last week.

"As the RCMP Commissioner stated earlier, they have clear and compelling evidence that agents of the Government of India have engaged in and continue to engage in activities that pose a significant threat to public safety, including clandestine information gathering techniques, coercive behaviour targeting South Asian Canadians, and involvement in over a dozen threatening and violent acts, including murder," he said.

While attempts have been made by the RCMP and national security officials to work with India and their law enforcement counterparts on this matter, they have been repeatedly refused, Trudeau claimed.

"This is why, this weekend, Canadian officials took an extraordinary step. They met with Indian officials to share RCMP evidence which concluded six agents of the Government of India are persons of interest in criminal activities," he alleged.

"Despite repeated requests to India, It has decided not to cooperate," he claimed.

## Baba Siddique murder: Fourth accused sent to police custody till October 21

**MUMBAI, OCT 15:** A court here on Tuesday remanded the fourth accused arrested in connection with the murder of NCP leader and former Maharashtra minister Baba Siddique in police custody till October 21.

The accused, Harishkumar Nisad (23), was apprehended from Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh, earlier in the day.

Police informed the court that Nisad, who is a scrap dealer in Pune, was also part of the conspiracy to kill Siddique and had provided financial help for the operation.



The police said they needed to find details of the financial transactions and

who sponsored them. Police had earlier arrested Haryana resident Gurmail

Baljit Singh (23), Uttar Pradesh native Dharmaraj Rajesh Kashyap (19), both alleged shooters, and "co-conspirator" Pravin Lonkar from Pune. They have been remanded in police custody till October 21.

Another suspected shooter, Shivkumar Gautam, who also hails from Bahraich, is still on the run.

Siddique (66) was waylaid by three persons in Mumbai's Nirmal Nagar area, just outside his MLA son Zee-shan Siddique's office, and shot at on Saturday night. He was rushed to the Lilavati Hospital, where he was declared dead, according to police.

## Investigation in Kolkata rape-murder case going on with utmost seriousness: CBI tells SC

**NEW DELHI, OCT 15:** The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) informed the Supreme Court on Tuesday that the investigation in the rape and murder case of a doctor working at the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata was going on with "utmost seriousness".

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the CBI, submitted the fifth status report of the agency before a bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra.

"Investigation was going on in the matter with utmost seriousness. The chargesheet in the matter was filed on October 7 against accused Sanjay Roy and a Sealadah court has taken cognisance," he told the bench.

The top court observed that the CBI report indicated that the agency was probing the role of other persons as a part of its ongoing investigation and sought a further status report within three weeks.

On the issue of the Na-



tional Task Force (NTF), constituted to make recommendations over the safety and security of medical professionals, the apex court noted that it had held no meeting since the first week of September.

The apex court, therefore, directed the Centre to take proactive steps to ensure that the work was completed within a reasonable period of time.

"The meetings of the NTF should happen periodically and all sub groups should hold regular meetings," the bench said while directing it to formulate recommendations on safety of Kolkata doctors within three weeks.

The hearing is currently underway.

On September 30, the apex court had expressed dissatisfaction over the "tardy" progress made by the West Bengal government over the installation of CCTVs and construction of toilets and separate resting rooms in government medical colleges, and directed the state to complete the ongoing work by October 15.

On September 17, the top court said it was disturbed by the findings given in the CBI's status report in the case while refusing to divulge the details and observed that any disclosure may jeopardise the ongoing investigation.

Earlier, on September 9, the top court had expressed its concern over the absence of the "challan" -- a key document forwarding the body of the junior doctor for post-mortem -- from the records placed before it and sought a report from the West Bengal government.

On August 22, the apex court had pulled up the Kolkata police over the delay in registering the unnatural death case of the woman doctor, calling it "extremely disturbing" and questioned the sequence of events apart from the timing of its procedural formalities.

The top court had constituted a 10-member National Task Force to formulate a protocol for ensuring the safety and security of doctors and other healthcare professionals.

Termining the incident as "horrific", the apex court had censured the state government over the alleged delay in filing of the FIR and allowing thousands of people to vandalise the state-run facility.