

No poll when life is uncertain'

The tenure of the JDU-BJP government in Bihar will end in November 2020. With the Covid-19 infection spreading fast in Bihar, holding polls for a new Bihar Assembly would pose a huge challenge to the Election Commission of India. RJD spokesman and Rajya Sabha MP from Bihar, MANOJ JHA, is known to be one of the most eloquent and articulate political spokespersons in the country. He completed his masters from the Delhi University (DU) in 1992 and PhD in 2000. He was a lecturer at the Jamia Millia Islamia from 1994 to 2002. He has been a professor at the DU's department of social work and was its head between 2014 and 2017. In an interview with ABHIJEET ANAND, Jha spoke on a range of political and electoral issues. Here are the excerpts:



Q. You have been trying to oust the BJP from Bihar. How hopeful are you that the RJD will succeed in doing that in the upcoming elections?

A. First of all, in politics you're adversaries. You fight on two different premises. In 2015, the BJP was decimated. The mandate was in our favour. We were the single largest party. And our alliance had won two-thirds majority. But in 2017, I think for the first time in the history of India, a party which had lost in the elections became part of the ruling coalition. That tells you about the health of democracy. We are going into the election with two objectives. One, people of Bihar should penalise those who actually robbed the mandate of 2015. Two, we are going in this election with a very important and wholesome blueprint for the transformation of Bihar. We want people of Bihar to give us a chance so that we can deliver.

Q. The RJD is against the RSS' ideology. Does that make the Congress its natural ally?

A. The RSS calls itself a cultural organisation but it indulges in everything

that is not cultural. They take political decisions. Their people speak political language on issues — even, in one instance, on China. When you want the government to say something, we hear from the RSS. The default template of the RSS is not similar to the default template of India. India is inclusive, the RSS is exclusive. India stands for everybody, the RSS stands for somebody at the cost of everybody. India believes in civilisational ethos which says "sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu niramaya (may all sentient beings be at peace, may no one suffer from illness)", the RSS does not believe in that. India believes in ideas of Gandhi and Nehru, the RSS doesn't.

Q. There is speculation that the RJD might form an alliance with the BJP. What do you say to that?

A. These speculations can only come in the minds of people who have lost their senses. I have no qualms about saying that only people who have lost their mental balance can ever imagine a thing like this. My

leader (Lalu Prasad Yadav) is in jail. You know he was the one who arrested L K Advani. He was the one who stood when entire north India was burning. He did not allow that flame to reach Bihar. The only thing we have known is that we are not meant for compromise with communal, sectarian politics. We might lose elections. We have lost in the past. That doesn't mean we will compromise on our basics. Social justice, secularism and inclusive development is our motto.

Q. The BJP says that organised crime has come to an end during their coalition government's tenure in Bihar. Your response?

A. I would want informed citizens to compare the charts — 1990-2005 and 2005-2020 — on every indicator, not only crime. I can vouch that those people will never face the real data. Muzaffarpur case, that's a shame not only for the state but for civilisation. When did it happen? Not during our regime. Then you have seen the corruption, mob lynching. People can

talk. But if they compare the data, they will find it otherwise.

Q. Is the RJD asking for postponement of the Bihar election?

A. All non-NDA political parties of Bihar - the CPI-M, CPI, HAM, RLSP, VIP, RJD and Congress - met the Election Commission. We submitted a memorandum (to the EC). We have described the vulnerable conditions. No institutional care, minimum testing, rapid rise of Covid. Now, in democracy, while we have to ensure free and fair elections, we have to also ensure maximum voter participation. There is a fear in the minds of people. What will happen if we end up having only 30 per cent turnout? We have apprised them about the precarious health conditions. Their own people, one of them who was part of EVM training, a teacher from Khagaria, he died (after being detected Covid positive). Ten persons who were carrying EVM machines in Begusarai have been detected positive. These are the issues we have brought to the domain of Election Commission along with the issues of virtual rallies and expenditure. We appeal to them: please have a level-playing field and act accordingly.

Q. What do you think will be the impact of lockdown and migrant labourer issue on the Bihar election?

A. The way the Bihar government handled the migrant labourers issue — that will remain in our memory forever, whatever be the outcome of the elections. For the first time, migrant workforce left different places in Telangana, Delhi and Mumbai in search of home. But the home state was not willing to allow them to come. So this episode, I think will remain forever in the memory of everyone in Bihar. As far as lockdown is concerned, the Bihar government has wrongly perceived the lockdown as a kind of vaccine against coron-

avirus. It is in fact a cushion, a cover under which you work on institutional care, doing testing, providing basic medical kits and PPE kits and so and so forth. The Bihar government didn't do that. As a result of this, the cases are exploding now. In spite of being in the Opposition, while these things will appear to you as favourable conditions for elections, we are worried for the people of Bihar. Elections don't matter now. We don't want elections when there is uncertainty of life.

Q. Right from day one, the RJD has been against the 10 per cent reservation for economically backward in the general category. Is it doing so to expand its electoral base?

A. I was the one who spoke against it in the Rajya Sabha. Our only argument was that develop a database first. You cannot decide on arbitrary things without a database all of a sudden. This is not how the Constitution works. This is not how policies are made. When the Mandal Commission came, it had many volumes to support its argument. It had a database. We wanted a similar database. But then this government was in a hurry. Their idea was not to provide justice. Their idea was to make it a talking point for the election.

Q. Are there differences in the Bihar Opposition's grand alliance over whether Tejaswi Yadav will or won't be its face in this election?

A. Absolutely not, come what may. There is no doubt. Every political party can give some argument. But ultimately, everybody knows that, we are the nucleus in Bihar politics. Everybody knows the vote share. Everybody knows that the RJD has declared Tejaswi ji as its face. I think when you talk about alliance, these issues don't matter. More or less every alliance partner, they know the reality, and we will win together.

Damage to tiger conservation

ABHIROOP CHOWDHURY AND ARMIN ROSENCRANZ

Around one third of the tiger reserve area of Indian Sundarbans was destroyed due to super-cyclone Amphan and the flooding at Assam has killed hundreds of wildlife at Kaziranga, inundating 85 per cent of the forests while submerging thousands of villages across the region.

The enigmatic Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris*) is the carnivore and keystone species of the tropical ecosystem. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red data list, tigers are 'Endangered', and their population is following a 'decreasing trend'. Unlike other cats, the tiger's range is restricted to pockets of wilderness scattered around eastern Asia.

In India, hunting of tigers was totally restricted by 1970 and Project Tiger was initiated by Government of India in 1973. The recent tiger census report indicates an increase in tiger population from 2,226 in 2014 to 2,967 in 2018 which is a success story of tiger conservation efforts.

The highest population of tigers in eastern India are in tiger reserves of Assam (Manas, Nameri, Kaziranga and Orang) followed by West Bengal (Sundarbans and Buxa), Arunachal Pradesh (Namdapha, Pakke, Kamlang), and Mizoram (Dampa). But these regions are also an active hub for tiger poaching and illegal wildlife trade because of their proximity to China and Myanmar due to the demands of tiger parts in Chinese medicine.

Research indicates that the Myanmar border town of Tachilek and its Thai neighbour, Mae Sai, were important hubs for the trade in tigers in South-east Asia. Tiger parts were sold



without restrictions in the Myanmar-China border town of Mong La for their use in traditional medicine as well as decoration. According to a report, there is a sharp decline in tiger population outside the protected areas in the eastern states of India.

Despite government initiatives and conservation measures, illegal smuggling of wildlife is common. According to a report, illegal trade continues in the Tamenglong district of Manipur. This may be a major reason behind slow increase in tiger population in eastern parts of India in

comparison to other Indian states like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka or Uttarakhand.

The situation got worse with the current Covid-19 pandemic and its associated economic hardships. To aggravate the already bad situation, super-cyclone Amphan and extensive flooding impacted the infrastructure and disrupted economic recovery in the Tiger project buffer areas of Sundarbans and Assam respectively. These catastrophes resulted in wildlife casualties in these areas of impact.

According to a report, 100 animals

have died due to flooding in Kaziranga, a UNESCO world heritage site and abode of about 2,400 one-horned rhinoceros. Eighty-five per cent of the reserve forest area of Kaziranga is under water. Thousands of villages are submerged due to the flood and people have been shifted to temporary relief camps. Wildlife displaced due to the flood is also migrating to the higher grounds for survival and this may increase man-wildlife conflicts in the region.

The Indian Sundarbans is the only abode of mangrove tigers in the world. According to the latest tiger census, the

numbers of this big cat have increased from 88 to 96. Human-tiger conflict is common in the villages of Sundarbans. Primary victims of these tiger attacks are fishermen and honey collectors. Tiger widows are women who lose their husbands in a tiger attack. According to a report, Satjelia Island in the Gosaba block of West Bengal has around 100 such tiger widows.

According to official records, 52 people were killed between 2010 and 2017 due to tiger attacks. But the real figure could be higher as illegal entries into the reserve forest are not intimated to forest authorities by the families.

On May 20, Odisha, West Bengal and Bangladesh were hit by super-cyclone Amphan. This resulted in massive devastation throughout the Sundarbans Tiger Reserve amidst the Covid-19 lockdown. Official statements have mentioned that about one-third of the Sundarbans was damaged due to the disaster and 1,200 sq km of the total 4,263 sq km of forests had been destroyed. The cyclone and associated flooding destroyed earthen dams that would impact the productivity of farmlands. In this economic vacuum, illegal entry into the forest and tiger poaching cases may increase which would result in more human-tiger conflict.

The Covid-19 pandemic has restricted the ecotourism influx in forest areas; labour migration was also stopped due to the lockdown. As a result, the socio-economically marginalised forest fringe communities are under immense economic stress. This may result in more human-wildlife conflicts scenario as well as push people into the clutches of illegal wildlife traders of China. The enigmatic tiger, the flagship conservation species of India, faces an uncertain future amidst the natural disasters and Covid-19 lockdowns in eastern India.

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OCCASIONAL NOTE

The question of future sites for factories in urban areas is now under the consideration of the Calcutta Corporation and the Bengal Chamber of Commerce. The Rent Committee appointed by the Bengal Government in accordance with the resolution of the Legislative Council last September suggested the desirability of not licensing any more factories than exist at present in the central areas. The Bengal Government have asked for the opinion of the Corporation, which, in its turn, has sought the counsel of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, so that there is every prospect of obtaining in the end a well considered view of the subject. Meantime the Health Officer of Calcutta has submitted what may be regarded as the hygienic ideal. While supporting strongly the proposal to prohibit new factories in the central areas of the city, he considers that this does not go far enough, and suggests that the time has now come when portions of the city or its environments should be definitely set apart in future for large industrial concerns, particularly where steam power is used. This leads to the alternative ideas of the reservation of zones along existing canals, railways, and docks; or the development of the extensive area in Tangra set apart for offensive trades and hide godowns so as to concentrate factories, tanneries, to the east of the city. The Health Officer is inclined to favour the Tangra area, with the understanding that parks or breathing-spaces should be provided.

NEWS ITEMS

TECHNICAL EDUCATION

His Excellency Sir George Lloyd, speaking at the New Poona College, dealt with the question of Technical Education and its present day aspect. India, said His Excellency, is now in economic competition with the great industrial countries of the world and the generation that is growing up must be equipped for this competition; for no great industrial concern can prosper without good material from which to take its staff, and, that condition can never be attained unless a certain proportion of her young men receive technical education equal in quality to that which is obtainable in the foremost industrial countries. Parents who are sending their boys to school shoulder a great responsibility if they do not consider the possibilities of each of the many professions that are open to them.

PRECAUTIONS AT OORGAUM

Oorgaum, July 31
The Khilafat Committee of Madras, Bombay, Delhi and other places in India have sent circulars which are being distributed amongst Muslims here enjoining observance of third Khilafat day, tomorrow 1st August, and requested Hindus and Mahomedans to close their shops and business, and devote the day to prayer and fasting. The local Khilafat committee is circulating the notices advising observance of full hartal on Sunday, and requesting mining employees not to absent themselves from work without permission from their employers. The Inspector-General of Police, Mysore, arrived here today to see what arrangements have been made. No breach of the peace is apprehended. The Indian Defence Force and police are taking precautionary measures to safeguard the public in the event of any disturbance.

U.S. POLITICS

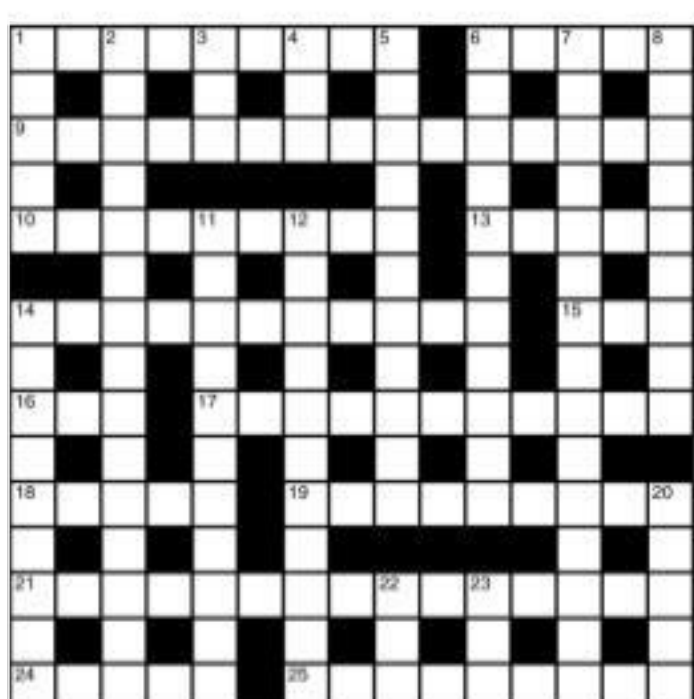
At the opening of the Republican National Convention at the Coliseum today, Senator Lodge, the temporary Chairman, defended the Senate's opposition to the Peace Treaty as a patriotic duty. He declared that President Wilson and the autocracy he represented must be excluded from any future control because he stood for a non-American theory of government. The people must now make a vital choice between President Wilson's plan and the independence and safety of the United States. He promised that the Republicans would cope with the profiteering evil. He urged that firm steps should be taken to end the "disgraceful record" of the United States during the past seven years with regard to Mexico. It was the primary duty of the United States to deal with Mexico under the Monroe Doctrine but nothing was done.

MADRAS LOCAL BODIES

A Government Order says the Government have reduced the number of nominative seats on local bodies. This number will be still further reduced when the new District Municipalities Act and the proposed amendments of the Local Boards Act come into operation. The few nominative seats that will remain are mainly intended for the representation of minorities and of the depressed class. Under these circumstances it is inevitable that the number of departmental officials nominated as members of local bodies should be reduced. If at any time a local body should need the advice of such officers he should be invited to a particular meeting at which his assistance will be actually required.

CROSSWORD

NO 2830



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

WORDGAME JERSEY
P O T I A A U X
DUBONNET NINTH
S R I T U N A
ODDS REPEATEDLY
E E H R E
MIDDLE LAYASIDE
E E U
ABERRANT EMPIRE
R R G N E
MINIMALIST CITY
G N D N E A O
AROUND STRIPOUT
O B A U L I N G
MEMORY MIDNIGHT

SOLUTION FOR 25 JULY

SCRATCHY VLTAVA
O A O I E G P
U L M U L T R A M A R I N E
A P C O L N T R
S C A T H I N G L Y D A B T
H G A E I T I T
T E N N I S M A T R O B T
A U D S O N P
T H O U G H T O U T F O X
H R O R O P P A
E V I L W I N D E R M E R E
W F D O T E R A
H I G H M I L L I G
P H I L A T E N I S A W
T H R O G M I C
S N E A K Y R E D O L E N T

ACROSS

- China divided: the end is nigh (4,2,3)
- Put to work for paper in combat zone, my boss receives going (5)
- Circled 'No. 4' literally remedied with it? (10,5)
- Breaking: Man in Raincoat opens up to public (9)
- Peppery fish quite dry on the inside (5)
- Grand lakeside wing appended to complete force's HQ (11)
- Modified one's language (3)
- Area that's dry up tree (3)
- Perhaps European is satisfied with Scarface staying at home? (11)
- Knock beers back near the rear of the Lawyer's Bar (5)

DOWN

- City trader's unloaded fruit stalls they pick (9)
- Yet some go when he plays for time? (3,4,3,5)
- Mark signalling about daughter in top hat (5)
- Helicopter for American to attend oologist's gathering (3,6)
- Master Cellarman cleared out, making space for old burgundy (5)
- With a bit of luck hitherto, we won't easily concede (5,2,5,5)
- Sparklers kill (3)
- Just twenty letters — not much put on top of what's taken from bin ... (3)
- ... and whatever else 'hero' wrote is for pulping (2,9)

ACROSS

- Finally the successor to M adapted to Bond's compulsion (11)
- Maybe sledgehammer learner deployed in stunt to crack Brazil nut? Me joshing (5,10)
- I declare the end of this dreadful year (5)
- He's greedy, Henry — his shot past Lehmann? (3)
- Yorkshire Wensleydale wouldn't be the same without her! (3)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

