

WORLD WATER DAY SPECIAL

INDIA TODAY

MARCH 29, 2021 ₹75



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THE GREAT THIRST

600 MILLION INDIANS FACE SEVERE WATER STRESS. MASSIVE GOVERNMENT SPENDING AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS ARE NEEDED TO AVERT AN IMPENDING CATASTROPHE

WHERE WOMEN RUN THE SHOW
Paani Samiti members in Motipura Veda, Gujarat

REG. NO. 2638/775 REGISTERED NO. TO (IND) 11/6068/2021 72-2023 LICENSED TO POST WPP NO. (MC) 88/2021-23 FARIDABAD/05/2020-22

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Volume XLVI Number 13; For the week
March 23-29, 2021, published on every Friday

- Editorial/Corporate Office Living Media India Ltd., India Today Group Mediaplex, FC-8, Sector-16A, Film City, Noida - 201301, Phone: 0120-4807100
- Subscriptions For assistance contact Customer Care India Today Group, C-9, Sector-10, Noida (UP)-201301, Phones: Toll-free number: 1800 1800 100 (from BSNL/MTNL lines); (95120) 2479900 from Delhi and Faridabad; (0120) 2479900 from Rest of India (Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.); Fax: (0120) 4078080, Mumbai: 022-66063411/3412, Kolkata: 033-40525327, Chennai: 044-24303200, e-mail: wecare@intoday.com
- Sales: Direct all trade enquiries to General Manager (Sales), Living Media India Limited, C-9, Sector-10, Noida-201301 (UP)
- Regd. Office: F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001
- Impact Offices: 1201, 12th Floor, Tower 2 A, One Indiabulls Centre, (Upper Miller), S B Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai-400013, Phone: 66063355; Fax: 66063226 • E-1, Ground Floor, Videcon Towers, Jhandewalan Extn, New Delhi • Guna Complex, 5th Floor, Main Building, No. 443, Anna Salai, Chennai-600018, Phone: 2847 8525 • 201-204 Richmond Towers, 2nd Floor, 12, Richmond Road, Bangalore-560025, Phones: 22212448, 22213037, 22218343, Fax: 22218335 • 52, Jawaharalal Nehru Road, 4th Floor, Kolkata-700071, Phones: 22825398, Fax: 22827254 • 6-3-885/7/8, Somajiguda, Hyderabad-500082, Phone: 23401657, 23400479, 23401000, 23402481, 23410982, 23411498; Fax: 23403484 • 39/1045, Karakkatt Road, Kochi 682016, Phones: 2377057, 2377058 • Fax: 2377059 • 2/C, 'Suryarath Bldg', 2nd Floor, Behind White House, Panchwati, Office C.G. Road, Ahmedabad-380006, Phone: 26560393, 26560929, Fax: 26565293 • Copyright Living Media India Ltd. All rights reserved throughout the world. Reproduction in any manner is prohibited.

Printed and published by Manoj Sharma on behalf of Living Media India Limited. Printed at Thomson Press India Limited, 18-35 Milestone, Delhi Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007, (Haryana). Published at F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.
Editor: Raj Chengappa

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UPFRONT
BENGAL: THE BATTLE FOR NANDIGRAM PG 6

INSIDE

LEISURE
Q&A WITH SUNNY LEONE PG 90



20
COVER STORY

THE GREAT THIRST

INNOVATIVE IDEAS AND MASSIVE SPENDING ARE CRITICAL TO AVERTING INDIA'S IMPENDING WATER CATASTROPHE

BANDEEP SINGH

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RURAL DRINKING WATER | IRRIGATION | CONCLAVE 2021 SOUTH |
| 26 DIRECT TO HOME | 56 MAKING EVERY DROP COUNT | 84 INDIA TODAY CONCLAVE |
| URBAN SUPPLY | GROUNDWATER | SONG OF THE SOUTH |
| 36 CITIES OF WOE | 66 THE GROUND REALITY | From political debates to a post-pandemic blueprint for India, all the buzz at the event |
| CONSERVATION | NAMAMI GANGE | |
| 46 THE GUJARAT MODEL | 74 ODE TO A SACRED RIVER | |

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KERALA:
PINARAYI TAKES
CONTROL PG 9

ASSAM: PROJECT
CONFIDENCE
PG 12

UPFRONT

TAMIL NADU:
THE SOP OPERA
PG 10

THE QUAD: THE
HYPE VS REALITY
PG 14

SYMPATHY VOTE
A wheelchair-bound
Mamata Banerjee at
a public meeting



**THE BATTLE
FOR BENGL**

DEBAJYOTI CHAKRABORTY

FIGHTING FOR NANDIGRAM

By Romita Datta

At the Nandakumar crossing, about 75 km southwest of Kolkata, the highway takes a magnificent loop before branching out in four directions. Though there are few signboards here marking the turn for Nandigram, political indicators are aplenty. Two campaign hoardings dominate the scenery—one from the Trinamool Congress (TMC) that reads ‘*Bangla nijer meye kei chaye* (Bengal wants its own daughter)’ and another from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), proclaiming ‘*Nandigramer bhumi Putra* (Nandigram’s son of the soil, Suvendu)’. These mark the road to the highest-voltage contest of

the 2021 assembly election—the battle for Nandigram between chief minister Mamata Banerjee and her former minister Suvendu Adhikari.

From here on, the road is heavily flanked by poll symbols—saffron party flags, hoardings and buntings carrying images of Ram and Hanuman, interspersed with bright blue posters pitching for the TMC. In Nandigram proper, there are also many undercurrents—like anti-incumbency—that surface in conversations with locals. “The demand for political change has been growing for the past three years,” says Amar Bag, a resident of Nandigram’s Reyapara. “The TMC has politicised the beneficiary lists

for various government benefits and given job cards to its own members,” he alleges. “I was ostracised, my tea-shack was vandalised and my job card was cancelled because I spoke up against the party.” Other locals allege various other kinds of political extortion—for the empanelment of candidates for teaching jobs in schools, to get PMAY (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana) funds, to obtain job cards and for relief payments following cyclone Amphan.

The electoral impact of these undercurrents has also been visible for some time. In the 2016 byelection for the Tamluk Lok Sabha seat, which includes Nandigram, the BJP got about 196,000