

FAIR REPORT

THE DAWN OF A FEARLESS PEN

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Before the Thirst Hits: Rajasthan Pushes ₹90,000-Crore Ramjal Setu to Redraw Eastern India’s Water Map

HEMRAJ TIKAMCHAND
FAIR REPORT
JAIPUR

Seeking to fast-track one of Rajasthan's most ambitious water infrastructure projects, Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma on Thursday directed officials to complete the Ramjal Setu Link Project ahead of schedule, stressing strict adherence to timelines, construction quality and transparent rehabilitation of affected families. Reviewing the multi-crore project at a high-level meeting, Sharma described the initiative as a “historic intervention” to secure eastern Rajasthan’s long-term water future, saying it would transform drinking water supply, irrigation and industrial development across the region.

The revised 90,000-crore Ramjal Setu Link Project aims to create an integrated water transfer network linking major reservoirs and river systems, significantly expanding the scope of the earlier Eastern Rajasthan water plan. In its first phase alone, the project is expected to provide drinking water to nearly 32.5 million people across 17 districts, while also strengthening irrigation and industrial water availability. “The project is not merely about moving water; it is about reshaping the economic and social future of eastern Rajasthan,” Sharma said, directing departments to closely monitor every component, submit monthly progress reports and ensure that construction quality remains uncompromised.



The Chief Minister reviewed progress on critical components, including the Bisalpur-Mor Sagar link, Isarda-Bandh Baretha feeder, Isarda-Ramgarh water diversion, Khura Chainpura-Jaisamand link, and the

Brahmani Barrage, instructing officials to maintain continuous supervision of ongoing works. Sharma also underlined that land acquisition, rehabilitation and compensation must be carried out with “complete transparency and sensitivity,” ensuring that no affected family faces hardship during implementation. Officials informed the meeting that projects worth over 24,000 crore are currently under execution, while construction of the Navnera Barrage and Isarda Dam has already been completed. Work is progressing on the Ramgarh and Mahalpur barrages, the Navnera Pump House excavation, feeder canals and multiple pumping stations

forming the backbone of the interlinked water network. A major engineering highlight is the 2,330-crore Chambal Aqueduct, where nearly 3,700 of the planned 5,060 foundation piles have already been completed. Once operational, the aqueduct will lift water from the Navnera Barrage into the Mej River before distributing it through an extensive system of feeder canals and pumping stations to Galwa, Bisalpur and Isarda reservoirs. The structure is also expected to serve as an additional transport corridor connecting parts of Kota and Bundi districts. Officials said alignment work for the Isarda-Ramgarh and Khura Chainpura-Jaisamand pipelines is in its final

stage, while land acquisition and forest clearance processes for the Brahmani Barrage are progressing simultaneously. The Ramjal Setu project gathered momentum after the Rajasthan government signed an MoU with Madhya Pradesh in January 2024, followed by a tripartite agreement between Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and the Union Government, exchanged in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Jaipur on December 17, 2024. If executed on schedule, the project is expected to become one of India’s largest inter-basin water transfer systems—promising to redefine water security, agricultural resilience and industrial growth across eastern Rajasthan for decades to come.

Kriplani to Head Key Rajasthan Assembly Panel on Home, Urban Governance and Panchayati Raj

FAIR REPORT
JAIPUR/NIMBAHERA

In a significant legislative appointment, senior BJP MLA from Nimbahera and former Rajasthan Urban Development Minister Shrichand Kriplani has been appointed Chairman of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly’s Committee on Home, Local Bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions for the 2026-27 term. According to a bulletin issued by the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly Secretariat, the appointment was made under the directions of the Speaker of the Assembly. Kriplani succeeds Dr Jaswant Singh Yadav, who will continue to serve as a member of the committee. The committee is one of the Assembly’s key oversight bodies, entrusted with examining matters relating to the Home Department, urban local bodies and Panchayati Raj institutions, while reviewing governance, policy implementation and administrative accountability across these sectors. A seasoned legislator with extensive administrative experience, Kriplani said he was honoured by the responsibility entrusted to him. Thank-



ing the Speaker of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly and the party leadership, he said he would discharge his duties with integrity, impartiality and accountability, while giving top priority to public welfare and the state’s interests. The appointment has been widely welcomed across Nimbahera and the Chittorgarh district. Public representatives, social organisations, BJP office-bearers and party workers congratulated Kriplani, expressing confidence that his legislative experience, administrative acumen and commitment to public service would enhance the committee’s effectiveness and strengthen legislative oversight.

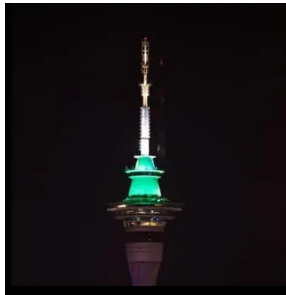
₹30,000 Trap, ₹1.3 Lakh Alleged Demand: Udaipur Health Official Goes Missing as ACB Nets Middleman

Jaipur/Udaipur, July 10: A bribery investigation in Rajasthan’s health department took a dramatic turn on Thursday after the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) arrested an alleged middleman while the senior government official he was purportedly working for fled before investigators could reach him. The ACB said it trapped Abdul Qadir, who allegedly acted as a conduit for Dr. Ratan Bilwal, Joint Director, Medical and Health Services, Udaipur Zone, in connection with an alleged bribe demand linked to regulatory approval for a private diagnostic laboratory.

According to the ACB, the complainant alleged that 1.30 lakh was demanded to approve the registration required for adding a radiologist’s name to operate a sonography machine at the laboratory. During verification, investigators claim the alleged demand was negotiated down to 30,000, which was allegedly agreed to be collected through the middleman. Acting on the complaint, an ACB team from Banswara laid a trap under the supervision of Deputy Inspector General Dr. Rameshwar Singh. Investigators alleged that Abdul Qadir accepted and counted the cash before sensing

Sky Tower Turns Tricolour as PM Modi Touches Down in New Zealand — First Indian PM Visit in 40 Years

New Delhi: In a gesture that captured the weight of the moment, Auckland’s iconic Sky Tower lit up in the colours of the Indian tricolour on Friday, marking Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s arrival in New Zealand — a visit that carries historic significance, coming four decades after an Indian Prime Minister last set foot on Kiwi soil. The illuminated skyline, a striking visual against Auckland’s night sky, was New Zealand’s way of rolling out the ceremonial red carpet for a visit both governments are billing as a potential turning point in bilateral ties. PM Modi himself described the trip as “historic,” a word that carries particular weight



spacious. Modi’s visit, then, isn’t merely protocol — it signals an active recalibration of India’s outreach across the Indo-Pacific, with New Zealand entering a diplomatic conversation that has, in recent years, centred more heavily on Australia, Japan, and the Quad grouping. **What’s at Stake :** Officials on both sides are framing the visit as one poised to chart new direction for India-New Zealand relations — although specifics of the agenda, from trade to strategic cooperation, are expected to unfold over the coming days. The optics, at least, have already made their statement: a glowing tower, a tricolour salute, and a Prime Minister determined to make up for lost decades.

Poison in the Pantry? Rajasthan Cracks Down on Unsafe Mustard Oil, Bans Three ‘Tagore’ Brand Batches

FAIR REPORT
JAIPUR

In a decisive move to protect public health, Rajasthan’s Food Safety and Drug Control Department has imposed an immediate ban on the manufacture, sale, distribution, storage, and display of three batches of Tagore Brand Mustard Oil after they were declared unsafe by the State Food Laboratory in Jaipur. The action is more than a regulatory order—it sends a strong message to food manufacturers that consumer health cannot

be sacrificed for commercial gain. Based on laboratory analysis, Batch Nos. 01, 02, and 10, manufactured by M/s Goyal Oil Industries, were found to be unsafe under the provisions of the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. Acting on the findings, Food Safety and Drug Control Commissioner Dr. T. Shubhamangala ordered an immediate prohibition on the manufacture, sale, distribution, storage, and display of the affected batches. The restriction will remain in force for an



initial period of two months, or for such duration as prescribed under law.

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The crackdown comes amid growing concerns

over food quality and adulteration, reinforcing the state’s resolve to hold manufacturers accountable when public health is at stake. Dr. Ravi Shekhawat, Designated Officer (Food Safety) and Chief Medical and Health Officer, Jaipur-1, urged consumers not to use Tagore Brand Mustard Oil from the prohibited batches if they already possess the product and advised them to return it to the retailer. He also directed wholesalers, distributors, and retailers to immediately remove

the affected batches from their shelves and comply with the department’s orders. The department has warned that any food business operator found selling or storing the prohibited batches will face stringent legal action under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. The action also serves as a warning to companies that compromise quality standards while placing unsafe products on consumers’ tables. Officials have made it clear that inspections and enforcement drives will continue, and any attempt to endanger public health will invite strict regulatory action.

The issue extends beyond a single brand. It raises a larger question about accountability within the food industry. Consumers have the right to expect that the products they buy are safe. When that trust is violated, regulatory authorities are expected to act swiftly—and Rajasthan’s latest crackdown demonstrates exactly that.

NIA chargesheets 6 Hurriyat leaders in 1996 case

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

On Friday, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) filed a chargesheet in the NIA Special Court in Jammu against six senior leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference. They are accused of being involved in mob violence and firing at police officers in Srinagar in 1996.

The chargesheet lists Shabir Ahmad Shah, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Abdul Ganie Lone, Mohd Yaqoob Wakeel (also called Mohd Yaqoob Vakil), Javid Ahmad Mir, and Shakeel Ahmad Bakshi. They are charged with criminal conspiracy, attempted murder, rioting, and assaulting public

servants under the Ranbir Penal Code, 1989, and Section 13 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Abdul Ganie Lone, and Mohd Yaqoob Wakeel have passed away. Charges against them have been dropped, but the NIA has still recorded their alleged roles in the incident.

The case is about events on July 17, 1996, when a large crowd, said to be led by Hurriyat leaders, carried the body of militant Hilal Ahmad Beigh from Parimpora to Eidgah in Srinagar for burial. At Naaz Crossing, police from Shergarhi station tried to control the procession, but violence broke out. The crowd reportedly threw



stones, damaged property, blocked traffic, and shouted slogans like “Hindustan Murdabad.” Unidentified militants, said to include Hizbul Mujahideen members in the

crowd, fired at the police with the intent to kill. Several security personnel were hurt.

The original FIR was filed at Shergarhi Police Station in Srinagar, and the NIA later took over the investigation.

The agency claims that the separatist leaders planned and encouraged the mob, which led to the armed attack on the police.

The chargesheet describes the events and details each accused person's role in provoking the crowd. The NIA has also used laws related to unlawful activities. Shabir Ahmad Shah was arrested in April 2026 in connection with this case and remains in custody. Other accused, like Javid Ahmad Mir and Shakeel Ahmad Bakshi, have also faced action as the investigation continues.

The All Parties Hurriyat Conference was created in the early 1990s as a group of

separatist political and religious organisations in Jammu and Kashmir. It has always opposed the region joining India's constitutional system.

Filing the chargesheet almost thirty years later shows the NIA's ongoing effort to investigate and prosecute cases of past violence and separatist actions in Jammu and Kashmir.

The agency says the investigation is still underway and more legal steps may follow. This move brings new focus to the 1996 incident, as other old cases involving separatist leaders are also being looked at again. The NIA Special Court in Jammu will continue with the case based on the chargesheet filed on Friday.

Pradhan orders probe into NCERT legal lapse in HC



FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has ordered a probe into the role of NCERT officials who failed to defend in the high court a decision of “black listing action” against a firm tasked with supplying paper for textbooks, sources said.

Bafna Global Venture Private Limited moved the Delhi High Court on June 24, citing the blacklisting order by NCERT issued on June 22, barring it for two years from participating in the procurement process of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

While nobody from the NCERT appeared for the high court hearing, the court granted immunity to the firm from coercive action till further orders. The court also restrained the NCERT from invoking over ₹6 crore bank guarantee furnished by the paper supplier. “Taking serious note of reports that NCERT failed to effectively defend its decision to blacklist a paper supplier before the Delhi High Court, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has directed strict action

against the officers responsible for the lapse,” a source said.

“The minister has ordered accountability for the officials who failed to take the necessary legal steps, reinforcing a zero-tolerance approach towards administrative and legal lapses while ensuring greater accountability in textbook production and procurement,” the source added.

The source further said that the minister, while cracking the whip on officials who have defied the high court directions, ordered for initiating strict legal action against them. “The ministry has asked NCERT to examine how Bafna Global Venture Private Limited was selected despite allegedly not meeting the required conditions, why it subsequently failed to adhere to the paper-supply schedule and how the council's case went unrepresented in court,” the source said.

The firm argued in the court that the delay in printing of books was because hydrogen peroxide, the bleaching agent for the purpose of manufacturing paper, was not available to the war in Iran. The case is now listed for July 20 in the Delhi High Court.

West Bengal CM gives cops free hand on law and order

FAIR REPORT
■ Kolkata



Bengal CM Suvenendu Adhikari

Riots, vandalism and destruction of public property are things of the past as the police have been given a free hand to do what they have been trained to do. That was the stern statement Bengal Chief Minister Suvenendu Adhikari issued during his first visit to Murshidabad after assuming charge.

Emerging from an administrative meeting, Adhikari said, “There will be no repetition of incidents that took place at places like Dhulian, Shamsheganj, Rejinagar or Shaktipur... I have told the police that they will not have to wait for permission... I told them, “Do whatever you have been trained to do and whatever the law permits you to do under the BNS... there will be no compromise on law and order.”

The police have also been asked to show no leniency towards the infiltrators. “No mercy for infiltrators... I told them,” the Chief Minister said.

Adhikari was apparently referring to last year's post-Wakf Bill riots in Murshidabad that saw two deaths and hundreds of Hindu families fleeing to neighbouring Malda district. Another ostensible point of reference was the large-scale violence and arson when a number of Railway stations and trains were torched during the anti-CAA agitation a few years ago.

“The Government is committed towards strictly maintaining law and order, and there will be no compromise on that issue... so this is a warning to the mischief mongers... no amount of hoodliganism will be tolerated by the Government,” he said, adding the new “Anti-Social Activities Bill (Anti-Goonda Bill) and the Maintenance of Public Order (Amendment) Bill would be implemented from Monday onwards.

Adhikari was visiting Murshidabad ahead of the Rejinagar Assembly by-election, where the seat fell vacant after local Aam Janata Unnayan Party MLA Humayun Kabir resigned as an MLA from this seat. He had won from two seats of Bharatpur and Rejinagar. The Chief Minister issued warnings to Kabir, a former TMC leader, against issuing communal statements. Murshidabad is a Muslim-majority district.

The Chief Minister, who later addressed a public rally, said within 45 days of his Government coming to power, it had allocated 338 acres of land to the BSF for fencing the international border with Bangladesh. “Out of 368 acres that was the original ask, we have allocated 338 acres to the BSF... the rest will be done soon,” the Chief Minister said, adding his Government was taking up the Ganga erosion issue in the area. About ₹2500 crore had been requisitioned from the Centre and the work would begin post-monsoon, he said.

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Amit Shah, Sonowal review Bureau of Port Security setup

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal on Friday reviewed the status of the Bureau of Port Security (BoPS) establishment.

The home minister directed that only licensed private security agencies be assigned port security duties, with deployment limited to personnel trained by the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF). He instructed that training at the Port Security Training Institute (PSTI) begin as soon as possible, utilising the current infrastructure.

Shah instructed officials to create a database of all security personnel to be deployed under BoPS. He said all ports under the BoPS framework must have container scanning facilities. The CISF was directed to conduct trial runs of the proposed security arrangements at major ports, including Visakhapatnam, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Mundra. The home minister stated that the Government, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, remains committed to strengthening coastal security.

The Bureau of Port Security (BoPS) is being set up as a statutory body under the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways. Headed by a Director



General, BoPS will oversee regulatory and inspection functions for ship and port facility security. Its responsibilities include collecting and analysing security information, with a focus on cybersecurity and protection of IT infrastructure.

Shah met with Department of Fisheries officials and directed steps to improve security at fishing harbours and fish landing centres. He instructed wider promotion of the ISRO-developed ‘Nabhmitra’ app to increase its use among fishermen. Also, the Department of Fisheries is to write to the District Magistrates (DMs) and Superintendents of Police (SPs) of all districts, requesting that they submit to the Central Government a list of

all fish landing centres in their respective districts.

He also said that the registration process for fishermen should be simplified and made more accessible. He further directed that the District Superintendents of Police should ensure adequate security arrangements at fish landing centres and that only permanent police personnel are deployed at these facilities.

Union Home Secretary, Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Secretary, Border Management, Secretary, Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Secretary, Department of Fisheries, Director General of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), and other senior officials attended the meeting.

Union Govt, Bihar agree to accelerate PM Surya Ghar scheme

FAIR REPORT
■ Patna/New Delhi

A high-level review meeting on the progress of the renewable energy sector in Bihar, future action plans, and the effective and time-bound implementation of various renewable energy initiatives was held on Thursday in the presence of Bihar Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and Union Minister for New and Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi.

The meeting extensively reviewed the implementation of the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, PM-KUSUM, Utility-Led Aggregation (ULA),

Floating Solar Projects, Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), Green Energy Corridor, Small Hydro Power Projects, Solarisation of Government Buildings, and other renewable energy initiatives.

During the meeting, Ajay Yadav, IAS, Energy Secretary, Government of Bihar and Chairman-cum-Managing Director, Bihar State Power Holding Company Limited (BSPHCL), made a detailed presentation highlighting the progress, achievements, ongoing initiatives, and future roadmap of renewable energy projects in the State.



Santosh Kumar Sarangi, Secretary, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), Government of India, assured that the Government of India would continue to provide all possible technical, policy, and financial support for expanding renewable energy projects in the State.

Appreciating Bihar's innovative Utility-Led Aggregation (ULA) model, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi advised the State Government to expedite the implementation of the approved project. Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary emphasised the need for the timely and effective implementation of the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, PM-KUSUM, and other renewable energy schemes, directing the department to work in mission mode.

Chief Minister also suggested introducing a “Solar Didi” initiative, on the lines of the successful Surya Mitra programme, to encourage

greater participation of women in rural areas while promoting awareness about rooftop solar adoption.

Bihar Energy Minister Shailesh Kumar alias Bulu Mandal stated that the Government of Bihar, with the support of the Government of India, is rapidly advancing renewable energy initiatives and is committed to fully utilising the State's immense renewable energy potential.

Other dignitaries present included Deepak Kumar, IAS, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister; Pratayya Amrit, IAS, Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar;

Anupam Kumar, IAS, Joint Secretary, MNRE; Sanjay Kumar Singh, IAS, Secretary to the Chief Minister; Rahul Kumar, IAS, Managing Director, North Bihar Power Distribution Company Limited (NBPDCL); Dr Nawal Kishor Choudhary, IAS, Managing Director, Bihar State Power Transmission Company Limited (BSPDCL); Shri Vishal Raj, IAS, Managing Director, Bihar State Power Generation Company Limited (BSPGCL), along with senior officials from MNRE and the Energy Department.

ED opens FEMA probe against film producer Dharmesh Sangani

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi



The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has launched an investigation under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) into Mumbai businessman and film producer Dharmesh Narendra Sangani and his company, Kalanee Impex Private Limited. The investigation is looking into claims of undisclosed foreign assets, export proceeds not brought back to India, and suspicious international transactions.

Officials said the investigation conducted searches on Thursday (July 9) at locations linked to the company and Sangani. The investigation found major issues, such as export proceeds from overseas buyers not being returned to India, a large shareholding in an undisclosed Canadian company, and foreign bank accounts in Canada, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates that were not reported to authorities.

ED sources said that export proceeds from some overseas buyers had still not been received despite a long delay. The company reportedly did not receive time extensions from the authorised dealer bank and made no documented attempts to recover the money. Some export proceeds were received from third parties rather than the buyers listed on the export

invoices or shipping bills.

During the raids, officials found evidence of undisclosed foreign assets and bank accounts, including a large shareholding in a Canadian company that had not been reported.

Sangani owned a large share in a Canadian company that was not disclosed, along with related foreign bank accounts and transactions that were not reported to the authorities. Investigators also found a UAE business entity connected to the case that had not been disclosed. Bank accounts in Canada, the US, and the UAE have been flagged in the investigation. Officials noted that Customs authorities in the United States and the United Kingdom are separately probing certain transactions involving Sangani, and the ED is examining potential FEMA violations arising from those.

During the searches, ED officials claimed that Sangani

tried to destroy digital evidence by throwing his mobile phone from the 13th floor of a building. Investigators later recovered the phone and took it as evidence. The ED has filed a complaint with the Mumbai Police against Sangani for destroying evidence.

Dharmesh Narendra Sangani is known as an entrepreneur who became a film producer. He is an active director of Kalanee Impex Private Limited, a Mumbai-based company started on December 7, 2011. Other directors are Rajeeta Dharmesh Sangani and Narendra Prabhudas Shangani. Sangani is connected with veteran actor and TV host Shekhar Suman. He co-founded the Shekhar Suman Film Academy (SSFA) and is associated with GBM Studios Private Limited, which operates in film production and training.

This is not his first encounter with regulators. In

September 2016, UK Border Force officers seized about 7.4 kg of gold jewellery from him upon his entry into the UK, stating it was undeclared.

The ED's action is under FEMA, 1999, which regulates foreign exchange transactions and violations in India. Breaking these rules can lead to penalties up to three times the amount involved, as well as confiscation of assets and other strict measures. The agency has become more active in investigating cross-border financial issues.

The investigation into Kalanee Impex continues to raise concerns about export-related foreign exchange violations and the presence of hidden foreign entities and accounts. Customs agencies from the US and UK are also involved, making the case more complex. The investigation is still ongoing. No arrests have been made yet, and officials are focused on collecting more evidence.

The ED is still reviewing documents, digital evidence, and financial records found during the searches. This case has attracted attention in both the entertainment and business worlds because of Sangani's connections to the film industry and the Shekhar Suman Film Academy.

Sangani and his company could not be reached for comment. A statement from the film academy with which he is affiliated is still pending.

No app can block 1600 series Govt, bank calls: TRAI

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

No app can block phone calls originating from 1600 number series that are meant for communications by regulated entities and the Government to citizens, telecom regulator TRAI said in a statement on Friday.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has also clarified that promotional calls originating from 140 number series cannot be tagged or filtered by an app and can only be blocked by the DND registry, which is managed by the regulator. TRAI has also clarified that promotional calls originating from 140 number series cannot be tagged or filtered by an app and can only be blocked by the DND registry.



“Under the Telecom Communications Customer Preference Regulation (TCCPR), any tagging, blocking or filtering of the calls originating from 1600 series numbers is not permitted,” Trai said.

The regulator said that it has mandated the use of 1600 series numbers for service and transaction calls by regulated entities of banking, financial services

and insurance entities regulated by RBI, SEBI, IRDAI and PFRDA to their existing customers and by Government entities for Government-to-citizen communication.

The key objective of assigning designated series for these important communications is to make such calls trustworthy for the citizens, the regulator said.

On calls starting with the 140 number series, Trai said that it is meant for use by registered telemarketers.

“The customers have the right to allow or block promotional calls originating from 140 series numbers from entities of any or all sectors by registering their preference on the Do Not Disturb (DND) registry,” TRAI said.

The regulator said that a customer who has blocked

any or all sectors from receiving promotional calls on the DND registry will not receive any calls from the 140 series originating from entities of the blocked sectors.

“The customer can register his/her DND preference through multiple means, including the TRAI DND App. Any tagging or filtering of calls from 140 series numbers is not allowed except for blocking on the DND registry, as any tagging can mislead a customer who has otherwise allowed receipt of such calls from a sector on the DND registry,” TRAI said.

The clarification from TRAI implies that customers will not be able to tag calls from numbers starting with 1600 and the 140 number series as spam, fraud, or any other type of call.

Govt clears ₹3,000-cr scheme to save 15,000 sacred groves

FAIR REPORT
■ New Delhi

Over 15,000 ‘sacred groves’ across the country will be conserved and restored under a new scheme — ‘Aastha Van Sanrakshan Yojana’ — which was approved on Friday, officials said.

The decision was taken at the 7th Governing Body meeting of the National Compensatory Afforestation



Union Minister Bhupendra Yadav

Fund Management & Planning Authority (CAMPA) in Coimbatore, chaired by Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav.

“The Governing Body

approved the Aastha Van Sanrakshan Yojana, a new scheme with an initial corpus of ₹3,000 crore over five years (2026-27 to 2030-31) for the conservation and restoration of nearly 15,000 sacred groves across the country, along with a new scheme for landscape restoration, combating land degradation and biodiversity loss, to be supported from the national fund,” a senior official said.

‘Aastha Vans’ refers to sacred groves — small, protected forest patches revered by local communities for their cultural and religious significance.

The meeting reviewed the overall performance of CAMPA and considered several new proposals and initiatives aimed at strengthening compensatory afforestation, forest conservation and wildlife protection across the country.

Assam budget revenue neutral, focus on jobs, women empowerment: CM

FAIR REPORT ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday termed the State Budget ‘revenue neutral’, with revenue expenditure, CapEx and revenue receipts balanced.

Addressing a press conference after state Finance Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah presented his maiden Budget in the Assembly, Sarma said the fiscal plan reflects the BJP’s ‘Sankalp Patra’ pledges, with focus on jobs, women empowerment, power, connectivity and agriculture sectors.

“It is a revenue-neutral budget. It means salary, interest, pension, and committed liabilities, which form revenue expenditure, and revenue earnings are balanced... Capital and revenue expenditures, and revenue receipts are at the same pace and balanced,” he said. The Chief Minister highlighted that in 2015-16, capital expenditure was ₹2,951 crore, which has increased to ₹29,000 crore this time.

On the tax front, he said, “Barring the green cess, it is a



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Sarma with Finance Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah before presenting Budget in Assembly on Friday

PIONEER PHOTO

tax-neutral budget. It is in sync with the state’s financial health.” Green cess has been proposed to discourage industries from continuing pollution-causing actions and encourage sustainable practices, Sarma said.

Highlighting Budgetary proposals, the chief minister said ₹6,000 crore has been earmarked to implement flagship welfare schemes such as Orunodoi, Nijut Moina.

He further said the state Government was working with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to

develop a ₹1,200-crore semiconductor ecosystem, so that local MSMEs can produce items to meet requirements of such industries.

On the technology front, Sarma said an AI module will be introduced in state Government offices in a phased manner, with four to five departments set to implement it soon.

Asserting his Government’s tough stand against criminals and polygamy, the chief minister warned that “Government employees will lose their jobs for polygamy,

and those with criminal antecedents won’t get benefits of any schemes.”

Baruah on Friday presented a ₹2,85,084 crore Budget for the 2026-27 financial year, proposing to raise the tax exemption limit for small tea growers by four times and cut VAT on piped natural gas by almost 10 percentage points. He also announced continuance of all major schemes rolled out during the last five years, while stating that he aims to cut the Budget deficit to ₹419 crore.

The Budget proposed increasing the tax exemption limit for small tea growers fourfold to ₹10 lakh and raising the subsidy on orthodox and specialty tea by 50 per cent.

Finance Minister also announced a subsidy for export-oriented and premium-quality Assam CTC tea for the first time.

“To provide relief to small tea growers, I propose to enhance the agricultural income tax exemption threshold from ₹2.5 lakh to ₹10 lakh of annual agricultural income,” he added.

Omar Abdullah says no permission yet for July 20 protest on J&K Statehood

FAIR REPORT ■ NEW DELHI

Even after extending an invitation to a cross-section of political leaders to join a sit-in-protest in the national Capital on July 20, the opening day of Parliament’s Monsoon Session, to press the Centre to restore Jammu and Kashmir’s statehood, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday said the party is yet to get permission for the protest.

The National Conference has invited 52 leaders of political and religious outfits across the country to join its protest.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event in Srinagar, the CM said the party is seeking permission for a protest at Jantar Mantar, but alleged that some people were trying to “sabotage” their plan.

Referring to permission granted to the Cockroach Janta Party for the protest, the chief minister said that while the digital outfit received approval within 24 hours, the National Conference had been waiting for the past 4-5 days.

Abdullah also alleged that some people were trying to “sabotage” the NC plan.

“We have been trying for four-five days. Some people are engaged in sabotaging our programme. They have changed their dates and matched them with our dates,” he



said, without naming anyone.

The National Conference has extended invitation to all its likeminded parties and their leaders including Congress leaders Sonia andhi, Mallikarjun Kharge, and Rahul Gandhi, DMK chief MK Stalin, TMC’s Mamata Banerjee, SP’s Akhilesh Yadav, BSP’s Mayawati, RJD’s Lalu Prasad Yadav, NCP’s Sharad Pawar, UBT’s Uddhav Thackeray, AAP’s Arvind Kejriwal, YSR Congress’s YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, BRS’s K Chandrashekar Rao, AIMIM’s Asaduddin Owaisi, and SAD’s Sukhbir Singh Badal.

Tamil Nadu chief minister and Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam chief C Joseph Vijay, CPI’s D Raja, and Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal have also been invited.

Invitees from Jammu and Kashmir include former CMs Ghulam Nabi Azad, who is the Chairman, Democratic Progressive Azad Party and Mehbooba Mufti — the PDP chief — have been invited along with BJP Jammu and Kashmir president Sat Paul Sharma, Apni Parief Altaf Bukhari, Peoples Conference chief Sajjad Lone, JKPC chief Tariq Hameed Karra, CPI(M) leader MY Tarigami, MP and chief of Awami Ittehad Party, Engineer Rashid, are among the invitees.

Mirwaiz-e-Kashmir and chief of Muttahida Majlis-e-Ulema (MMU), an amalgam of several religious bodies, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, and Grand Mufti, Jammu and Kashmir, Mufti Nasir-ul-Islam, have also been invited.

Kill me to silence me, finish my party: Mamata to BJP

FAIR REPORT ■ Kolkata

Former Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday slammed the BJP for planning to silence her and finish her party, saying the BJP will have to kill her to shut her up.

In a video message, Banerjee said, “You have to kill me to silence me ... and you have spared no effort to do so,” launching a fierce attack on the Bengal ruling outfit.

Referring to recent attacks on the party leaders she said, “you have attacked Mahua (Moitra), Abhishek (Banerjee) Kalyan (Banerjee) ... you have even not spared my house,” reminding how “many of our (ministerial) colleagues have been put behind the bar ... they are languishing in jail and sleeping on the floor ... you have paraded some of them with ropes tied around their waist ... things (read eggs) are being thrown at them so that they cannot come out of their houses.”

Banerjee’s attacks against the BJP came almost in tandem with a statement released by former TMC MP and BJP Rajya Sabha nominee Sushmita Dev. On Friday, justified what she called “political somersault”



saying her reason for quitting the TMC was its getting steeped in corruption and lack of direction.

“Yes I have changed my ideology from today because I could not have continued in a party which is steeped in corruption and there is a lack of direction in its leadership ... While M ta Banerjee is calling us back Abhishek Banerjee is calling us gaddar (traitors) ... this party has no future it is as good as finished,” she said.

Banerjee’s statement also came two days after her party men taking part in a rally were allegedly attacked by the BJP men, leaving several persons injured. Her statement also came within hours of the police freezing another four bank accounts of her

party.

Based on complaints lodged by Joynagar MLA of the TMC’s breakout section Biswanath Das the Bidhannagar Police on Friday froze another bank accounts of the former ruling party leading to total number of such frozen accounts to 12.

The development comes a day after the Calcutta High Court appointed a special officer to oversee TMC’s bank withdrawal for day-to-day expenses, including legal charges. Das had lodged a formal complaint at the Bidhannagar Cyber Crime Police Station, alleging that party bank accounts contained proceeds from illegal activities, leading to several raids and subsequent freezing of the accounts.

Govt tightens rules on high-alcohol medicinal formulations

FAIR REPORT

■ New Delhi

The Centre has withdrawn the licensing exemption for medicinal formulations containing more than 12 per cent of ethyl alcohol and brought them under stricter regulatory oversight, including mandatory licensing and prescription-only sale, to curb misuse and prevent diversion for intoxication, officials said.

Certain medicinal products, including tinctures of cardamom, ginger and other aromatic preparations, have been exempted from licensing requirements under Schedule K of the Drugs Rules, 1945, the ministry said.

Some of these formulations contain high concentrations of ethyl alcohol, in certain cases up to 80-90 per cent volume per volume (v/v), making them susceptible to misuse for intoxication, it said. References were also received from certain state Governments in this regard, the ministry said.

To address this concern, the Government has mandated that all formulations containing more than 12 per cent v/v ethyl alcohol, in quantities exceeding 30 ml, shall no longer be covered



under the exemption provided under Schedule K.

Such products will be required to obtain the requisite licences under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, the ministry said.

The amendment also shifts these products to Schedule H1 of the Drugs Rules, 1945, which mandates sale against the prescription of a registered medical practitioner and stricter record-keeping.

“The amendment is expected to strengthen regulatory oversight over those medicinal products containing alcohol, ensuring their supply only through the regulated pharmaceutical supply chain.

“It will significantly reduce the possibility of diversion and misuse while ensuring their continued availability for legitimate

therapeutic use,” the ministry said.

The amendments seek to change the part under Schedule K of the Drugs Rules that was misused in certain parts of the country, sources said.

“It allowed certain preparations containing ingredients such as cardamom, ginger and other spices to remain exempt from the prescribed limits on alcohol content. This exemption led to the sale of some products with ethyl alcohol content as high as 80 per cent, despite being marketed as medicinal preparations,” a source said. The proposed changes seek to ensure a uniform regulatory framework across all categories of medicines containing ethyl alcohol.

The existing provisions under the Drugs Rules already prescribe alcohol

limits for several traditional systems of medicine.

Under Rule 161, Ayurvedic, Siddha and Unani syrups are permitted to contain a maximum of 16 per cent alcohol. Similarly, Rule 106B limits the alcohol content in Homoeopathic medicines to 12 per cent.

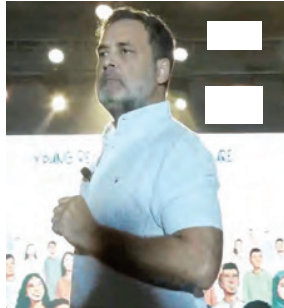
The amendment proposes that medicinal preparations containing more than 12 per cent of ethyl alcohol should no longer be able to claim exemption under Schedule K merely because they contain ingredients such as cardamom, ginger or other spices.

The move is intended to curb misuse of such products while ensuring that genuine medicinal formulations continue to be regulated under the appropriate provisions of the Drugs Rules, sources said.

The initiative is in line with the Government’s continued efforts to strengthen the regulatory framework for drugs, promote the rational and responsible use of medicinal products and safeguard public health, the ministry said.

A gazette notification containing the detailed amendments is available on the ministry website.

BJP criticises Rahul Gandhi for skipping student programmes



FAIR REPORT

■ New Delhi

The BJP on Friday criticised Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for allegedly “vacationing abroad”, describing him as a “non-serious politician” who exploits students only for political purposes.

The ruling party claimed that Gandhi’s absence has led to the cancellation of his scheduled student outreach programmes this month. The BJP’s remarks came after Gandhi’s three scheduled student outreach programmes were reportedly cancelled.

BJP national spokesperson Tuhin Sinha questioned Gandhi’s whereabouts, claiming that he has been absent from public events for nearly two weeks.

He further alleged that Gandhi is “completely immersed in vacationing” and has chosen holidays over political engagements.

“It is absolutely shocking that Rahul Gandhi has cancelled three of his scheduled student rallies because he seems to be completely immersed in vacationing. He appears to be focused on his holidays.

“Normally, students need a break because they are exhausted from preparing for examinations. Here, students may not be vacationing as much, but Rahul Gandhi, who has exploited students for his politics, has gone on a long break, leading to the cancellation of three student rallies,” he said.

BJP hits back at Congress over Australia uranium deal

FAIR REPORT

■ New Delhi

Hitting back at the Congress over its claim that Australia’s decision to supply uranium to India was taken during the UPA Government, the BJP on Friday said international agreements are signed and implemented by Governments, not political parties.

The Congress earlier said that Australia’s uranium sales to India were not a breakthrough achieved by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, pointing out that then-Australian prime minister Julia Gillard had secured her party’s approval in 2011 to sell uranium to India following the Indo-US nuclear pact.

Countering the Congress, BJP national spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari said that Governments sign and implement international agreements, not political parties. “Not every Government functions like the Gandhi-Vadra family’s private limited enterprise,” Bhandari said in a post on social media.

Questioning the Congress’ claims, Bhandari asked that if the 2011 approval was such a major success, why there was “virtually no Australian uranium supply to India between 2011 and 2014”.

He also claimed that Australia had said in 2012 that there would be “no uranium supply to India anytime soon”.

The India-Australia Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement was signed by



BJP national spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari

the Modi Government in September 2014, Bhandari said, claiming that the current Government operationalised the long-term Australian uranium supply commitments in 2026.

He also said the Congress “may claim the Moon to please its supporters”, but “paper announcements alone do not deliver results; what matters is implementing them on the ground”.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh earlier said, “The BJP ecosystem is on an overdrive to show that Australia’s uranium sales to India are a Modi breakthrough. On December 4, 2011, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard got approval of her party to sell uranium to India following the India-US Nuclear Agreement of October 2008.”

“The BJP trolls that include some of its MPs too need to do their homework better,” Ramesh said, sharing a screenshot of media reports from December 2011 stating that Australia’s Labour Party had endorsed plans to open up uranium sales to India.

NHRC chairperson calls for vigilance on bonded labour, seeks helpline

FAIR REPORT

■ New Delhi

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) chairperson Justice V Ramasubramanian (retd) has urged officers to remain vigilant while dealing with cases of bonded labour and emphasised the need to launch a helpline so that labourers can seek help when needed.

The NHRC on July 9 heard online 86 cases of alleged bonded labour in brick kilns across various districts of Haryana, the rights panel said on Friday.

Justice Ramasubramanian



presided over the hearing that saw participation of several senior officials of the state Government and various district magistrates in Haryana.

He said in most of the cases, the records had “not been properly examined” by the Government func-

tionaries concerned.

“Therefore, they did not have credible evidence to declare the labourers as bonded labourers,” the rights panel said in a statement. The NHRC chief urged the officers to remain vigilant while dealing with cases of bonded labour.

He further asked them to follow the requirements laid down in the ‘Standard Operating Procedure for Identification and Rescue of Bonded Labourers and Prosecution of Offenders’, issued by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, vide letter, dated May 14, while constituting a team for an inquiry into a complaint.

He also emphasised the need to launch a helpline so that labourers can seek help when needed to help track the incidents of bonded labour. Samir Kumar, joint secretary, NHRC, highlighted the need to comply with the panel’s directions and take

action as per its ‘Advisory 2.0 to Identify, Release and Rehabilitate Bonded Labourers’.

The Haryana chief secretary, the labour commissioner and the DMs, presented the bonded labour cases during the hearing. The Commission reviewed the action taken reports submitted by the DMs on the complaints, under its consideration, the statement said.

The state’s chief secretary and the labour commissioner assured the NHRC that all the 86 cases would be “reviewed”, and the requisite information and reports would be submitted thereafter.

Ayushman Bharat Digital mission now one of world’s largest health ecosystems

FAIR REPORT

■ New Delhi

The Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) has emerged as one of the world’s largest digital health ecosystems, with over 93.95 crore accounts created, 105 crore health records linked, and 5.33 lakh health facilities and 9.85 lakh healthcare professionals registered on the national digital health registries, the Union health ministry said on Friday.

The initiative has also enabled 2.72 lakh healthcare facilities to adopt ABDM-enabled software, generating around 24 crore scan and register tokens for faster OPD registration and facilitating seamless, consent-based exchange of health informa-

tion across the healthcare sector, according to an official statement.

The observations were made at the third meeting of the Mission Steering Group chaired by Union Health Minister J P Nadda, which reviewed the progress of the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission and deliberated on the roadmap for further strengthening India’s digital health ecosystem.

Addressing the meeting, Nadda underscored the transformative role of digital public infrastructure in improving access to quality healthcare, enhancing continuity of care and empowering citizens through secure and consent-based access to their health records, the statement said.



He emphasised that technology must continue to serve as a powerful enabler for achieving universal health coverage while ensuring inclusiveness, accessibility and ease of use for every citizen.

During the meeting, the Mission Steering Group reviewed the progress on the decisions taken during its previous meeting, including

capacity-building initiatives, strengthening of state-level implementation mechanisms, integration of digital health platforms across Government programmes, enhanced participation of private healthcare providers and international collaborations for knowledge exchange in digital health.

The Mission Steering Group

appreciated the rapid expansion of ABDM across states and Union territories through initiatives such as Model Districts, Model Facilities and Aarogya Setu 2.0, while strengthening integration with flagship Government health programmes, including Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY, CGHS, ESIC and Nikshay, the statement said.

The members observed that these initiatives are making healthcare more accessible, interoperable and citizen-centric by enabling secure digital health records, faster service delivery and seamless access to healthcare services nationwide, it said.

The meeting also deliberated on measures to accelerate adoption of ABDM across

the country, including proposals to expand digital health services, improve interoperability, promote adoption of nationally notified digital health standards, strengthen governance mechanisms and enhance citizen convenience through seamless digital access to health services.

Concluding the meeting, Nadda said, “While a robust digital health infrastructure has been created under ABDM, the next phase must focus on maximizing its adoption and utilization across the country.”

“Strengthening the health sector is integral to realizing the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047, and ABDM will serve as a critical pillar in that journey,” he said.

