

Rajasthan, Bengal lag in providing tap water to schools, Anganwadis, says Parl committee

NEW DELHI: Observing that Rajasthan and West Bengal are lagging in providing tap water to schools and Anganwadis, a parliamentary standing committee has asked the Centre to coordinate with these states to expedite the work and enhance coverage.

In its report, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources noted that the provision of tap water connections in institutions such as schools, Anganwadi centres and Ashramshalas is a key component of the Jal Jeevan Mission, with a direct impact on children's health, learning capacity and overall well-being.

As of February 11, 2026, potable tap water supply has been provided to 9,23,297 (89.62 per cent) schools and 9,66,876 (85.60 per cent) Anganwadi centres across the country, the committee said on Tuesday.

However, the panel found that in some states, especially Rajasthan, the pace of work needs to be expedited as only 57.75 per cent of schools have been covered with tap water.

Similarly, in West Bengal, only 41,895 out of 1,11,074 Anganwadis (37.72 per cent) have been provided with tap water connections, while in Rajasthan, the coverage stands at 53.67 per cent for Anganwadis.

In view of the low coverage in these institutions, the committee urged the Department of Drinking Water and



Sanitation to work in coordination with the lagging states, noting that children are particularly vulnerable to water-borne illnesses and spend a significant amount of time in schools and Anganwadis.

The committee also expressed concern over the time taken in getting the approval for a renewed budgetary outlay under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), noting that no renewed budgetary provisions for actual expenditure have been made to JJM since March 2024 due to pending cabinet approval.

It said states have taken up 6.83 lakh schemes costing Rs 8.07 lakh crore, and stressed that the implementation of such a major programme cannot

be left entirely to states, many of which face financial constraints. The panel urged the department to make concerted efforts to obtain approval on an urgent basis.

The committee also took cognisance of the key findings of the assessment of the reports submitted by central nodal officers (CNOs) which indicated that state-specific policies or practices are leading to technically inconsistent and economically inefficient designs.

It also pointed to serious findings of CNOs, including instances in Manipur and Gujarat where schemes and water supply assets reported on paper were not found on the ground.

The committee called for strengthening

monitoring mechanisms and taking disciplinary action against those responsible.

The panel further noted that only about 52 per cent of sanctioned schemes under JJM have been completed so far. It said states such as West Bengal, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala are lagging behind in providing tap connections to a large number of rural households, and urged the department to work closely with states to address bottlenecks and ensure timely implementation.

Highlighting the low contribution under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the committee urged the department to take up the matter with the Ministries of Finance and Corporate Affairs to frame appropriate policies or amend existing rules to incentivise corporates, including startups, to contribute to JJM and Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) (Gramin).

The committee also recommended that the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) be requested to conduct a performance audit of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin), noting that the scheme has been extended till March 2027 and such an exercise would help identify deficiencies at various levels and improve its long-term sustainability.

Assembly polls: Congress leader announces to contest as rebel in K C Venugopal's home turf

ALAPPUZHA: A district Congress leader on Wednesday revolted in AICC General Secretary K C Venugopal's home turf, Alappuzha, over the party's candidates' list for the upcoming Assembly polls and announced that he will contest as an independent in the key Kuttanad constituency.

Venugopal represents the Alappuzha constituency in the Lok Sabha. As the grand-old party is busy finalising its candidates list for the April 9 polls, its DCC vice president Saji Joseph on Wednesday resigned from the party in this coastal district and announced he would contest as an independent candidate from the Kuttanad Assembly constituency.

The leadership's decision to give the Kuttanad seat to the UDF ally, Kerala Congress (Joseph) faction, against the reported request of the local Congress leaders and workers, irked Joseph and those who support him.

Addressing a press conference here, he said that there had been per-

sistent demands within the Congress here to reclaim the Kuttanad seat and field a party candidate there.

Declaring himself a rebel candidate, Joseph said he would take on the official UDF nominee in the upcoming polls scheduled for April 9 as a mark of protest.

The press conference also witnessed emotional scenes as the leader broke down while speaking about his long association with the Congress, stating that he had been part of the movement "since birth" and had made significant sacrifices for the party.

He maintained that he had never shied away from agitations, including police action during protests.

However, Joseph said his decision to contest was driven by the need to protect the "self-respect" of the people of Kuttanad.

Calling it a fight against "two major financial forces," Joseph admitted that he faces serious financial constraints in mounting his campaign but expressed confidence in securing a decisive vic-

tory. He further claimed that several party workers and leaders would quit the Congress and join him in his campaign.

Ruling out any possibility of withdrawing from the contest, Joseph also expressed sadness over leaving the Grand Old Party.

Earlier in the day, Saji Joseph hit hard at the leadership of both the Congress-led UDF and CPI (M)-headed LDF in a Facebook post.

In the FB post, he alleged that both the UDF and the LDF have reduced Kuttanad to a "commodity" for wealthy interests, ignoring the region's pressing issues while selecting candidates for the Assembly elections.

He criticised the UDF for what he described as "sacrificing Kuttanad before financial powers" despite claims of fighting for justice for the area.

"The people of Kuttanad will never forgive the UDF and LDF leadership for treating the region as a mere object for political and financial transactions," the leader alleged.

'33 per cent of MP budget still unutilised, but govt taking loans'

BHOPAL: The Congress on Wednesday criticised the BJP government in Madhya Pradesh, accusing it of taking loan after loan while failing to spend the budgeted amount on time.

While only 12 days remain in the current financial year, the government has still not spent "33 per cent of its budget, or nearly Rs 1.1 lakh crore", claimed former leader of opposition Ajay Singh.

The government is now preparing to "dispose" of this huge amount in a haphazard manner in the last fortnight, he said. "This is a clear sign of wastage of public money and corruption," said Singh.

The state's economic condition is so dire that in the past week alone, the government has taken new loans worth Rs 9,900 crore, he said.

In a statement, he claimed that the state's total debts have exceeded Rs 5.1 lakh crore, and that every citizen will face a heavy debt burden in the future.

NITI Aayog itself has raised questions about the MP government's "rising borrowings and low revenue col-

lection", claimed the Congress leader.

Singh said, "The government's failure to fully utilise the budget, even in crucial departments like agriculture and health, reflects its administrative failure."

Development work remains "stalled" throughout the year, and a race to "spend the budget" begins in the last days of March, said Singh, demanding that the government issue a white paper and explain why the public is being pushed into such a situation.

He claimed that priority departments such as health, public works, agriculture, and renewable energy have averaged nearly 60 per cent of their respective budget allocations.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) claimed that the state borrowed Rs 4,100 crore on March 17th, "its third such loan this month". The state took loans of Rs 6,300 crore and Rs 5,800 crore on March 3 and March 10, respectively, the CPI (M) said.

CPM state secretary Jaswinder Singh said the Mo-

han Yadav government has "set a new record of loans, if not of development".

He said, "The BJP government has bankrupted the state to the point where it doesn't even have enough money to run the administration for a month. And it is so directionless that it lacks even a single month's plan, which is why it has to beg for loans three times in a single month."

The people of the state will have to bear the brunt of the BJP government's "directionlessness and corrupt policies", said the Left leader.

Speaking to PTI, BJP spokesperson Neha Bagga said that only a state with credibility in the country receives such loans.

"The state government has credibility, which is why it is receiving loans. It is also consistently repaying the loans. The state government is using this money for various welfare schemes."

She said the Congress should explain whether its governments in Telangana and Himachal Pradesh are running without loans.

Appellate courts must carefully re-appreciate evidence while altering findings in accident cases: Supreme Court

NEW DELHI: Appellate courts must carefully re-appreciate evidence and give clear reasons before altering the findings and compensation awarded by the Motor Accident Claims Tribunals in accident cases governed by welfare legislation, the Motor Vehicles Act, the Supreme Court said on Wednesday.

The observations were made by the top court in a judgement by which it enhanced the compensation awarded to a former manager from Rs 35.61 lakh to Rs 97.73 lakh in a road accident case.

"Before parting with the

matter, we deem it appropriate to reiterate that when an appellate court interferes with findings of fact duly recorded by the Motor Accidents Claims Tribunal (MACT), particularly on issues such as assessment of disability and loss of earning capacity, it is incumbent upon it to undertake a thorough re-appreciation of the evidence and to assign cogent, clear and convincing reasons for departing from the conclusions arrived at by the MACT," a bench comprising Justices Prashant Kumar Mishra and Sandeep Mehta said. Justice Mehta, who au-

thored the judgement, said that such an obligation is more on appellate courts in proceedings under the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, "which is a beneficial and welfare-oriented legislation enacted with the object of ensuring expeditious relief and just compensation to victims of motor accidents and their families."

The bench said the statutory framework is designed to advance social justice and to provide solace and financial security to those who suffer on account of road accidents.

"Any interference with a reasoned award of the Motor Accidents Claims Tribunal

must, therefore, be consistent with the spirit and object of the enactment and supported by sound judicial reasoning," the verdict said.

The top court set aside a 2022 order by the Madras High Court which had drastically reduced the victim's compensation and held that severe cognitive impairment and brain injuries should be treated as 100 per cent "functional disability" when they prevent a victim from performing their professional duties.

In the instant case, appellant R Halle was working as a manager at a logistics firm in

Chennai when he met with a head-on motorcycle collision on May 5, 2016.

The accident resulted in a severe head injury, facial fractures, and a broken femur. While the MACT initially awarded him Rs 65.53 lakh based on a 63 per cent physical disability, the Madras High Court later slashed this to Rs 35.61 lakh, reducing his functional disability to just 30 per cent.

The top court rejected the high court's approach and noted that it had "abruptly concluded" the disability was lower without analyzing the medical evidence.

Properties worth Rs 650 Cr restored to over 2,300 homebuyers in SRS Group case

NEW DELHI: A Special PMLA Court in Gurugram has ordered the restitution of immovable properties worth Rs 650 crore to 2,312 genuine homebuyers in connection with a money laundering case against the SRS Group, being investigated by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

The restored properties include flats and plots across various SRS Group projects, including SRS City, SRS Pearl Floor, SRS Pearl Tower, SRS Residency, SRS Royal Hills, SRS Prime Floor, SRS Pearl Unity, SRS Affordable Housing Project, SRS Pearl Height, and SRS Retreat Farms.

The ED initiated its probe under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) based on 81 First Information Reports registered

under various sections of the Indian Penal Code at police stations across Faridabad and Delhi, as well as by the CBI. The SRS Group is accused of allegedly cheating investors and banks to the tune of Rs 2,200 crore. The group operated in real estate and financing, and its promoters allegedly committed offences including fraud, criminal conspiracy, cheating, and criminal breach of trust by diverting and misappropriating funds belonging to homebuyers, plot buyers, banks, and other financial institutions. According to the ED investigation, the accused entities of SRS Group allegedly lured investors with promises of high returns in residential and commercial projects. Funds collected



from investors were routed through hundreds of shell companies created by the group and subsequently laundered.

The ED had earlier attached assets worth Rs 2,215.98 crore in the case and

filed a chargesheet before the Special PMLA Court in Gurugram. The court took cognizance of the chargesheet in 2022 and framed charges against the accused.

This latest development paves the way for further

restoration of attached properties to other genuine homebuyers and legitimate claimants, including banks and financial institutions. It marks a significant step in securing justice for investors affected by the alleged fraud.

Will election be concluded before panchayats' tenure expires, HC asks UP poll body

PRAYAGRAJ: The Allahabad High Court has asked the State Election Commission (SEC) in Uttar Pradesh to file an affidavit stating whether it is in a position to conclude the panchayat polls in accordance with the mandate of Article 243E of the Constitution.

The court pointed out that according to the mandate under the article, the poll process has to be completed on or before May 26.

Article 243E establishes a fixed five-year term for panchayats from their first meeting.

The order was passed by a bench of Justices Atul Sreedharan and Siddharth Nandan

on a write petition filed by Imtiaz Husain. The petitioner has moved the court with a prayer seeking directions to the SEC to place on record a detailed time-bound schedule for the completion of the entire panchayat poll process well before the expiry of the district panchayat's tenure.

Fixing March 25 for the next hearing in the matter, the court, in its order dated March 13, said, "It is expected from Respondent No.2 (SEC) that the entire schedule for holding the election should be finalised and brought on record before the next date of listing."

"We also request the state to ensure that on the

next date, either the learned advocate general or the learned additional advocate general may appear and apprise the court on the aforesaid issue," the bench added.

The petitioner has submitted before the court that according to the mandate of Article 243E, the duration of a panchayat shall be for five years from the date of its first meeting and "no longer".

He has further submitted that the date appointed for the first meeting for all the gram panchayats in the state was May 27, 2021, and accordingly, the five-year period comes to an end on May 26, 2026.

Auto driver shot at in Delhi, accused at large

NEW DELHI: A 30-year-old auto driver was shot at allegedly by two motorcycle-borne assailants in south Delhi's Neb Sarai area on Wednesday afternoon over prior enmity, police said.

The incident took place around 4 pm when the victim, identified as Bunty, sustained a gunshot injury to his hand and was rushed to a hospital, where he is undergoing treatment,



they said. Two assailants arrived on a motorcycle and opened fire at the victim before fleeing the spot. One of the accused has been identified, and efforts are underway to apprehend him.

Preliminary investigation suggests that the attack was a result of prior enmity, the police said. A case has been registered and further investigation is in progress.

Acid attack on minor girl raised in Maha legislature

MUMBAI: An alleged acid attack on a Class 6 girl student in Sangamner prompted the Congress to slam the Maharashtra government in the legislative assembly on Wednesday, alleging deterioration in law and order in the state.

The matter also came up in the legislative council.

Replying to the issue raised by independent member Satyajit Tambe, Minister of State (Home) Pankaj Bhoyar said the incident took place outside D K More Janta Vidyalaya in Ahilyanagar district.

Terming the incident serious and unfortunate, Bhoyar said instructions have been given to the police to conduct a thorough probe.

When asked how the accused got the acid, Bhoyar said it is available in school laboratories. The minister said police are working on ways to prevent such incidents, and a committee will be formed to deliberate on the matter.

Calling the acid attack extremely disturbing, Congress legislature party leader Vijay Wadettiwar targeted the government in

the assembly and accused it of failing to curb crimes against women and minor girls.

Raising the issue through an adjournment motion, Wadettiwar demanded an immediate discussion, claiming that the minor is in a serious condition and the accused are yet to be arrested.

He questioned how the accused managed to flee after committing such a serious offence. The Congress leader also criticised the functioning of the local police, alleging inefficiency and corruption, and said such lapses

embolden criminals. Wadettiwar further claimed that incidents of atrocities against minor girls have increased in the state, and the government has failed to take effective action. Speaker Rahul Narwekar took note of the issue and directed the government to present a detailed statement in the House on the incident at the earliest. Congress member Nana Patole demanded that the girl be brought to Mumbai and given better medical care for free.

