

Modi govt's record on environment protection not reliable: Jairam Ramesh

NEW DELHI, JULY 03: Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh on Thursday alleged that the track record of the Modi government on concerns related to environment protection does not inspire confidence that they will be discussed and resolved.

Ramesh, a former environment minister, said that several activists and societies working for environment protection have written to the prime minister seeking redressal of their issues.

In a post on X, Ramesh said that 150 civil society groups and activists have made five major points, starting with Minister of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav's statement, allegedly holding the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 "responsible for degra-



dation and loss of prime forest areas". He also said that they raised continued submission of legally untenable data on encroachment of forest areas to Parliamentary forums as well to the National Green Tribunal.

They also raised the issue of orders issued by the National Tiger Conservation

Authority in June 2024 for the eviction of almost 65,000 families from tiger reserves across the country.

The Congress leader claimed that activists and societies have raised "mis-attribution" by the Forest Survey of India for the loss of forest cover over the last decade to the implementation of the

Forest Rights Act, 2006.

Ramesh said they also raised the "2023 amendments to the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 that were bulldozed through Parliament and the subsequent Van Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan Rules, 2023 that adversely impact both the quantity and quality of forests."

"The issues that have been raised are of profound significance especially to tribal and other communities residing and earning their livelihoods in forest areas. They are also of fundamental importance to ecological security."

"The track record of the Modi Government does not inspire the confidence that these issues will even get discussed and debated with those who have been compelled to bring the PM's attention to them," the senior Congress leader said.

Hydro ganja proving to be a challenge: Fadnavis

MUMBAI, JULY 03: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Thursday that 'hydro' ganja is proving to be a big challenge for the government and asserted that the Centre and state have intensified their fight against the drug business.

Replying to a calling attention motion in the legislative council, he also raised concerns over synthetic drugs and said that even terminal cancer patients are being used as drug carriers.

The number of cases has increased because of the government's anti-drug crackdown, he said.

It was found that ports in Gujarat and the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), the country's largest container port located in Maharashtra's Raigad district, were used to bring in drugs concealed in cargo consignments, he said.

"Scanners that can detect concealed drugs have been installed in Gujarat and Maharashtra. Randomised checking of shipments from certain countries, where there is a possibility of drug supply, is being done," he said.

Five days ago, two Indonesian nationals were arrested with 21 kg of hydroponic ganja valued at Rs 21.55 crore in Mumbai, he said.



Hydroponic ganja refers to cannabis plants grown without soil. This method gives growers precise control over the plant's environment, which can result in faster growth and higher yields.

Since drug peddlers secure bail and again resort to similar activities, the state government is amending the laws to book them under the stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, he said. Under MCOCA, it is difficult to get bail.

"Hydro ganja is proving to be a challenge. Thailand and the US have made it legal. So, hydro ganja is being pushed into the country through courier services and other routes," Fadnavis said.

The CM highlighted the deportation of alleged drug cartel operator Naveen

Chichkar from Malaysia to India in May. He said Chichkar had bought an island in Australia and acquired its citizenship.

Chichkar used to send hydroponic ganja from Thailand and the US through courier. He was arrested along with a few associated with the postal and Customs departments and two policemen, who have since been sacked," said the CM. "The policy (of the government) is of zero tolerance (towards drugs)," Fadnavis said.

He said drug peddling is not only an interstate but an international racket. States have been coordinating in the fight against drugs. He said the police are not only arresting drug peddlers but have also made probes into the forward-and-backwards linkage compulsory.

"Even last-stage cancer patients are being used (as carriers). There were three cases where they were battling cancer," he said.

"We have intensified the fight against drugs. Courier companies have been told to ensure that drug transportation does not happen through them, or they will be named as accused in the case," Fadnavis added.

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar inspects rising Ganga water levels, urges officials to stay alert

PATNA, JULY 03: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday assessed the water levels of the Ganga at various ghats in Patna and directed officials to remain on high alert and prepared for any potential emergency.

Accompanied by senior officials from various departments, the CM visited JP Setu, Digha Ghat, Krishna Ghat, and Gandhi Ghat to assess the situation.

According to a statement by the Chief Minister's Office, "The CM assessed the situation near JP Setu, where the water level of the Ganga was rising. He asked the district administration to remain prepared to tackle the situation if the water level further increases."

Ganga's water level has increased at Maner, Digha Ghat, Gandhi Ghat, Hathidah, and other locations due



to recent rainfall.

However, in most parts of Patna, the Ganga is still flowing below the danger mark.

Rivers across the state have also shown a rising

trend following incessant rains over the past two to three days.

"The CM travelled along Atal Path, JP Ganga Path to take stock of the situation",

it said.

The Patna Meteorological Centre has predicted light to moderate rain in most parts of the state over the next two days.

Woman, son killed by domestic help in Delhi's Lajpat Nagar; accused nabbed in UP

NEW DELHI, JULY 03: A woman and her teenage son were killed allegedly by their domestic help at their home in the Lajpat Nagar area of south-east Delhi, police officials said on Thursday.

They said the accused, Mukesh (24), was nabbed by Uttar Pradesh Police from a train while he was trying to flee.

The matter came to light when a PCR call was received from Kuldeep Sewani, a resident of Lajpat

Nagar I, at 9.43 pm on Wednesday. He said that his wife Ruchika (42) and 14-year-old son were not responding to calls and that there were bloodstains on the staircase of their house, police said.

"A PCR van and a team were immediately rushed to the spot where the caller, Kuldeep, informed police about the bloodstains and the unresponsive state of his family. The gate of the house was forcibly opened," Deputy Commis-

sioner of Police (Southeast) Hemant Tiwari said in a statement.

The bodies of Ruchika and her son were found inside. While the woman's body was found in the bedroom, her son's was found in the bathroom, he said.

Kuldeep and his wife ran a garment shop in the Lajpat Nagar market and their son was a class 10 student, according to the statement.

During preliminary investigation, it was found that the family's domestic

help Mukesh, a native of Hajipur in Bihar, had been missing since the incident. He also worked at the garment shop and as a driver for the family, the DCP said. He was later arrested by Uttar Pradesh Police from the Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Junction while he was fleeing in a train, Tiwari said.

Police said the motive behind the double murder is yet to be ascertained and further investigation is underway.

Delhi govt announces water bill waiver scheme, improves sewer connectivity

NEW DELHI, JULY 03: Water Minister Parvesh Verma on Thursday said the Delhi government will bring a full water bill waiver scheme in the next few months.

For water bill waiver scheme, the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) is working on improving its billing system software and the work will be completed in two to three months.

"Soon we are planning to waive the entire late payment surcharges for domestic and government categories by 100 per cent," Verma said.

The DJB's board meeting held recently has approved a collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to revive the Wazirabad water supply improvement project.

"The project was conceptualized in 2013. However, the ADB later recused themselves from this project. Rs 2,433 crore in funds were to be provided by them for the project. We have approved the project now and will restart the entire process. As the funding will be provided from overseas, we would re-



quire permission from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)," Verma said.

The Wazirabad project will cost around Rs 3,715 crore after escalation, the government said.

This project will benefit over 30.16 lakh people, covering an area of 123 square kilometers, including areas of Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar, Model Town, Burari, Lawrence Road, Punjabi Bagh, Shakur Basti, Jahangirpuri, Shastri Nagar,

Avantika, Pitampura and nearby areas.

The DJB has also approved water connections for the in-situ rehabilitation project for slum dwellers at Katputli Colony near Shadipur depot and housing projects for lower-income groups carried out by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA).

In a bid to improve sewer connectivity across the city, the DJB has also approved two projects in unauthorized colonies in east Delhi's Sonia

Vihar and Hassanpur areas.

"A lot of sewage directly enters from these colonies into the river. We will trap and then treat the sewage flowing by laying new lines. This will help in improving the health of Yamuna," Verma said.

The Sonia Vihar project costing Rs 69 crore will be completed in one year, a new decentralised sewage treatment plant will be constructed for Hassanpur.

The entire cost of this project, which will be completed in one and a half years, will be Rs 51.43 crore.

Verma further said the "proposal to fill 131 vacancies through the process of the Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE)" was approved during the DJB's board meeting and the "file has been submitted to the LG office for approval".

The DJB will also consider job applications from retired engineers, who have worked in public sector units (PSUs) to ensure better execution and technical supervision of projects.

Man posing as delivery agent rapes techie after entering her Pune home; search on for him

PUNE, JULY 03: An unidentified man allegedly raped a 22-year-old IT professional after gaining access to her apartment in Pune by posing as a courier delivery executive, police said on Thursday.

The accused also clicked a selfie on the victim's phone in which her back and his partial face are seen.

He left a message on her phone, warning her not to inform about the crime to anyone as he had taken her pictures and would share them on social media, and also mentioned: "I will come again", Deputy Commis-

sioner of Police (Zone 5) Rajkumar Shinde said.

The incident took place at around 7.30 pm on Wednesday at a housing society in Kondhwa area of Maharashtra's Pune city and search was on for the culprit, as per the police.

The victim, who has studied Information Technology (IT) at a city-based college and works in a private firm, was alone in her apartment as her brother had gone out of town, the official said.

The man came to her house posing as a courier delivery agent possessing a bank-related document and gained entry.

He asked for a pen to sign

(a document) and as she turned her back to him, he came inside the house and latched the door, the official said. "The woman does not remember anything (further) as she gained consciousness around 8.30 pm. The woman then informed her relatives and subsequently police were alerted," Shinde said.

The man clicked a selfie on the woman's phone. He left a message on her phone that he had taken her photos, and if she revealed about the incident to anyone, he would make the pictures viral, the police said.

He also stated in the mes-

sage that he "will come again", the official said.

There is a possibility that the accused used some substance to make her unconscious. The police were verifying if any spray was used, he said.

"Work is on to prepare a sketch of the suspect. We are also scanning the CCTV cameras in the housing society," said Shinde. The woman was sent for a medical examination. A case has been registered under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections 64 (punishment for rape), 77 (voyeurism) and 351(2) (criminal intimidation), the police added.

Party loyalist with RSS roots, Samik Bhattacharya picked to revive Bengal BJP ahead of 2026 polls

KOLKATA, JULY 03: A dyed-in-the-wool party loyalist and articulate communicator with deep roots in the RSS, Samik Bhattacharya's election as the West Bengal BJP president signals the central leadership's calibrated move to steer the state unit through internal churn and retool it into a winning machine ahead of the 2026 assembly elections.

At 61, Bhattacharya's rise to the state's top organisational post is being seen as a reward for decades of silent perseverance, ideological fidelity, and personal discipline, traits that have kept him at the core of the party machinery even when he wasn't in the limelight.

A Rajya Sabha MP, he was elected unopposed as the new president of the Bengal unit.

A bachelor, Bhattacharya's political journey began in the mid-1970s when, as a schoolboy, he first attended RSS shakhas in Howrah's Mandirtala area.

Immersed early in Sangh values, he joined the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), which marked the beginning of his full-time political life as a foot soldier of the Sangh Parivar.

He has been part of BJP since its marginal years in West Bengal, staying committed even when the party had little organisational presence or electoral relevance, long before its breakthrough post-2018.

Gradually, he rose through the ranks: from ABVP to BJYM during Tapan Sikdar era in the 1990s, and over the next three decades held every major organisational post:

state general secretary, vice-president, and chief spokesperson, except the presidency.

It was during his days in BJYM that he forged a camaraderie with his contemporary Rahul Sinha, who would later head the state BJP in 2009.

His prominence grew under Tathagata Roy's presidency, when he was appointed state general secretary. Though he did not wield much organisational power under Dilip Ghosh, he was made chief spokesperson—a position that showcased his clarity, calmness, and command over facts.

Despite serving under nine state presidents, Bhattacharya remained a go-to man within the organisation, trusted for ideological clarity and internal coordination, even as others leapfrogged into power or drifted away.

Many in the party have long wondered why someone with his discipline and loyalty didn't rise earlier. Some attribute the delay to internal sabotage.

"He's that rare politician who knows who tried to block his path but never complains. He forgives and moves on. That sets him apart," said a close associate.

His early electoral journey was a mixed bag. He lost the Shyampur Assembly seat in 2006 and the Basirhat Lok Sabha seat in 2014. But later that year, he sprang a surprise by winning the Basirhat South Assembly bypoll, becoming the BJP's first MLA from the area without riding on any alliance.

The party, which had just one MLA in the Assembly be-

tween 1999 and 2001 from a bypoll, thanks to its then alliance with the TMC, saw Bhattacharya's solo win as a turning point. He also lost in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and 2021 assembly polls.

Although he lost the seat in 2016, his stature within the party remained intact. His credibility grew further after the high-pitched 2021 Assembly polls, when BJP emerged as the principal opposition despite the loss to Mamata Banerjee's TMC.

A close aide claimed that in 2016, Bhattacharya was approached by the TMC with an offer to join and become a minister. He declined.

"His commitment to ideology and loyalty to the party never wavered. He often says that secrecy, belief in ideology, and loyalty to leadership are the bedrock of any strong political outfit," the aide said.

Known for his calm demeanour, sharp oratory, and fact-based communication, he earned respect during his tenure as BJP's chief spokesperson from 2020 to 2024, a period marked by intense confrontation with the TMC.

In April 2024, his nomination to the Rajya Sabha was seen as central recognition of his long, consistent service. In Parliament, he quickly made a mark, speaking on issues ranging from electoral reforms to federalism and internal security.

As he takes charge of a faction-ridden and demoralised state unit, Bhattacharya perhaps faces his toughest political test yet. The immediate challenge: bridging the rift between the old guard and the influx of leaders who de-

fected from other parties post-2019.

Since the BJP's 2021 Assembly poll defeat, the organisation has suffered desertions, infighting, and setbacks in the 2023 Panchayat polls and the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Bhattacharya is now tasked with rebuilding booth-level strength, restoring discipline, and ensuring synergy between the legislature wing, led by Suvendu Adhikari, and the party organisation, previously helmed by Sukanta Majumdar.

Interestingly, his cordial ties with Adhikari are also being seen as a reason behind his elevation. The central leadership wants smooth coordination between the state president and the Leader of the Opposition as the party prepares for the upcoming assembly elections.

Not just Adhikari, he has always had good relationships with leaders who switched to BJP from other parties—be it Mukul Roy or Adhikari.

With Bhattacharya's clean image, Sangh background, and communication finesse, the BJP sees hope for a turnaround in Bengal.

His appointment is being viewed as an attempt to bring back focus, cohesion, and purpose to a state unit that once dreamed of ruling Bengal.

Whether can re-energise the cadre and mount a serious challenge to Mamata Banerjee's dominance remains to be seen. But few would deny that he has waited long enough and worked hard enough for this moment.