

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## Mamata asks TMC candidates of recent polls to rebuild party, says 'those who want to leave can go'

**KOLKATA, MAY 16:** After the TMC faced an electoral setback, party supremo Mamata Banerjee urged its candidates who contested the recent assembly polls to rebuild the organisation, asserting that those wishing to quit the party were free to do so.

At a meeting with the Trinamool Congress' contesting candidates at her Kalighat residence on Friday, attended by its national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, she said the organisation would rise again despite suffering a crushing defeat in the recently concluded assembly elections.

"Those who are leaving for other parties, let them go. I will rebuild the party afresh. To those who are staying, I say rebuild the damaged party offices, paint them and reopen them. If needed, I too will paint them. Trinamool Congress will never bow down. People's mandate has been looted," Banerjee was quoted as saying by party sources.

The remarks came days after the TMC was reduced from the ruling party to the



opposition benches following a dramatic reversal in electoral fortunes.

Of the 294 assembly seats in the state, the party managed to win only 80.

Mamata Banerjee herself suffered defeat in Bhabanipur, long considered her political bastion.

The TMC had fielded candidates in 291 seats, leaving three seats in the Darjeeling hills to its ally Bharatiya Gorkha Prajatantrik Morcha (BGP) led by Anit Thapa. Of these, only 80 candidates emerged victorious, while 211 lost, including several heavyweight leaders and ministers.

The meeting at Kalighat

back," she had said.

The TMC's official X handle later posted photographs of the meeting and praised the contesting candidates for their fight during the election campaign.

"Today, our Hon'ble Chairperson @MamataOfficial and our Hon'ble National General Secretary @abhishekaitc met with our contesting candidates at Kalighat. They fought with unmatched courage despite facing unimaginable atrocities and relentless intimidation.

"The Trinamool Congress stands united as one family. We will never bow before those who loot the people's mandate. Truth will prevail," the party posted on X on Friday.

The post also reiterated the party's charge that the electoral mandate had been "stolen", a claim repeatedly raised by TMC leaders after the poll results.

Party insiders said Banerjee used the meeting to boost the morale of candidates who had contested the polls and send a message of unity amid a difficult phase for the organisation. (Agencies)

was convened for candidates who had contested the elections on the party's ticket amid reports of internal discontent and speculation over possible defections after the electoral debacle.

The meeting echoed Banerjee's remarks made a day after the results were declared. Addressing a press conference on May 5, the party supremo had said she was aware that some leaders might switch camps.

"I know many will leave for other parties. They may have their own compulsions. I have nothing to say about that. Whoever wants to go may go. I do not believe in forcibly holding anyone

## CJI's 'youngsters like cockroaches' remark unacceptable, reflects intolerance: Rohit Pawar

**MUMBAI, MAY 16:** NCP (SP) leader Rohit Pawar on Saturday said Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant's remark likening unemployed youth to parasites and cockroaches was "unacceptable" and was a reflection of intolerance towards criticism and questioning.

The Karjat Jankhed MLA said while he has the highest respect for the Indian judiciary, remarks of this nature from a Constitutional authority were deeply hurtful and appeared to mock an entire generation struggling with broken promises, lack of opportunities and rising unemployment.

The CJI on Friday likened some unemployed youngsters to cockroaches and said they go on to "become" media, social media and RTI activists and start attacking the system. The comments were made while a bench of CJI Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi was pulling up a



lawyer for "pursuing" a senior advocate designation. It said there were already "parasites" in society who attack the system, and asked the petitioner whether he wanted to join hands with them.

Pawar, in a statement, noted that though the remarks may have been made in the context of petitions concerning holders of fake degrees and the conferment of senior advocate designa-

tion, bunching unemployed youth and RTI activists in the same category was inappropriate.

"Comparing the youth of India, RTI activists, media representatives, and those who express differing opinions to parasites or cockroaches is absolutely unacceptable. Such language reflects extreme intolerance towards critics and those who ask questions," he said.

He remarked that an RTI activist exposing corruption, a legal journalist raising questions about transparency, and a student speaking truth to power were the true pillars of democracy.

The NCP (SP) leader pointed out that today's youth were not unemployed by choice, but were victims of economic failure and political inefficiency.

"Despite grand speeches about employment and development, lakhs of educated young people are struggling for dignity, jobs and survival. They seek accountability and a platform to voice their concerns," he said. Pawar urged the judiciary to exercise sensitivity, restraint and constitutional wisdom while speaking about young people.

"If institutions are afraid of questions raised by the youth, then the problem does not lie with the youth, but with the system," he added. (PTI)

## Experts Flag Cardiac Dangers Linked To Extreme Workouts, Unsupervised Supplement Use

**NEW DELHI, MAY 16:**

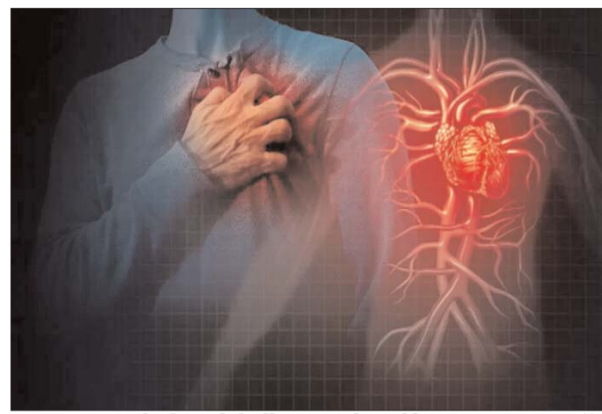
The growing obsession with muscular physiques and rapid body transformations among the urban youth in India is fuelling dangerous misuse of steroids, stimulant-heavy pre-workout powders and unregulated gym supplements, with cardiologists warning of rising risks of arrhythmias, heart failure and sudden cardiac events in seemingly healthy young men.

The trend, amplified by social media fitness culture and online supplement marketing, is pushing many gym-goers towards products and exercise regimens that may severely strain the heart, said Dr Rahul Chandola, Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeon and Chairman, Institute of Heart and Lung Diseases.

We are increasingly seeing young individuals with palpitations, abnormal heart rhythms, high blood pressure spikes and even early structural heart changes linked to unsupervised supplement or steroid use," Chandola said.

"The concern is not exercise itself. Regular exercise protects the heart. The danger comes when people combine extreme workouts with stimulants, anabolic steroids, dehydration and unrealistic body-image expectations," he said.

Sudden collapses and cardiac deaths among young fitness enthusiasts and amateur bodybuilders have become a growing concern



not just in India but globally.

Dr Mayank Yadav, a cardiothoracic and vascular surgeon at AIIMS, said many young consumers wrongly assume that supplements sold online or promoted by influencers are medically safe.

"People think if a product is available on an e-commerce platform or being used by fitness influencers, it must be harmless. That assumption is dangerous because many formulations are poorly regulated or consumed in unsafe quantities," Yadav said.

India's booming fitness economy and social media-driven "aesthetic fitness" culture are contributing significantly to the trend, he said.

Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube are flooded with transformation videos, supplement promotions and extreme fitness challenges targeting the youth, the doctor said.

Recent international scientific reviews have shown that anabolic-androgenic steroid use is associated with

reduced heart pumping efficiency, thickening of heart walls and harmful cardiac remodelling.

Similarly, many modern pre-workout supplements contain combinations of very high caffeine doses, stimulants and performance-enhancing compounds that may elevate heart rate and blood pressure and trigger dangerous cardiovascular effects in susceptible individuals.

Chandola said an equally serious issue is being overlooked — the absence of proper heart-health screening before people begin aggressive exercise pr

He pointed out that most routine annual health check-ups are often inadequate for identifying hidden cardiovascular disease.

"Many patients who suffer heart attacks later tell us they had recently undergone a 'normal health check-up'. Unfortunately, most standard annual packages consist primarily of blood tests and a resting ECG, which is only a brief snapshot of the

heart's electrical activity and has limited ability to detect underlying blockages or deeper structural problems," he said.

According to Chandola, this creates a dangerous false sense of reassurance, leaving many high-risk individuals undiagnosed despite undergoing regular health checks.

He stressed that individuals engaging in high-intensity fitness programmes, gym training or endurance exercise should undergo more meaningful cardiovascular screening, particularly those above 40 years of age or those with risk factors such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, smoking history or family history of heart disease.

"Preventive cardiology must evolve beyond routine blood reports. Advances in biosensor technology and AI-driven cardiovascular screening are enabling earlier and more accurate assessment of heart health," Chandola said.

He added that emerging technologies such as iLive-Connect, an AI-powered wellness health care management platform, are helping shift healthcare towards proactive and preventive screening models capable of identifying hidden cardiac risk with greater precision and scalability.

"The future of heart care lies in early detection. If we can identify vulnerable individuals before symptoms appear, we can prevent many avoidable tragedies."

## Youth Congress protests NEET paper leak in Delhi, IYC president Uday Bhanu detained

**NEW DELHI, MAY 16:**

The Indian Youth Congress (IYC) on Saturday staged a protest in the national capital, demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over an alleged question paper leak in the NEET-UG this year.

Holding posters, banners and party flags, IYC activists took out a protest march from Teen Murti Circle towards the education minister's residence before being stopped by police.

Several members, including IYC president Uday



Bhanu Chib, were detained during the protest.

The NEET-UG examination held on May 3 was cancelled following alleged ir-

regularities in the exam and a re-test has been announced by the education minister on June 21. The protesting Youth Congress alleged that

the education system had "collapsed" under the BJP-led NDA government.

Claiming that 89 examination papers had leaked in the last 12 years and that NEET itself had allegedly been leaked four times, the protesters said this raised "serious questions" over the integrity of the examination system.

"The BJP has created such a corrupt system that children of the wealthy will secure seats and jobs, while students from poor families will suffer," an IYC worker said.

## NCB Seizes First-Ever Consignment Of Captagon Drug Worth Rs 182 Crore

**NEW DELHI, MAY 16:** The Narcotics Control Bureau has busted an international drug syndicate involved in the trafficking of Captagon and seized approximately 227.7 kg of the "jihadi drug" worth Rs 182 crore, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said on Saturday.

The success was announced by Home Minister Amit Shah on X. He lauded the agency for seizing the first-ever consignment of Captagon.

Captagon is the street name historically linked to fenethylamine, a synthetic stimulant developed in the 1960s which earned the sobriquet of the "jihadi drug" due to repeated allegations and intelligence inputs linking its abuse and trafficking with extremist and conflict-zone networks operating in parts of West Asia, sources said.

The terminology emerged because the stimulant effects of the drug allegedly enabled users to remain awake for extended periods, suppress fear and exhaustion, increase aggression and risk-taking behaviour, and sustain prolonged combat-like activity under stressful conditions.



In his post on X, Shah said the Modi government has resolved to make a "Drug-Free India".

"Glad to share that through 'Operation RAGEPILL', our agencies have achieved the first-ever seizure of Captagon, the so-called 'Jihadi Drug', worth Rs 182 crore," Shah said.

"The busting of the drug consignment destined for the Middle East and the arrest of a foreign national stand out as shining examples of our commitment to zero tolerance against drugs," he said.

"I repeat we will clamp down on every gram of drugs entering India or leaving the country using our territory as the transit route. Kudos to the brave and vigilant warriors of the NCB. @narcoticsbureau," the minister said.

Sharing the details of the operation, the MHA said in a statement that the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) received the information from a foreign drug law enforcement agency that India is being used as a transit route for the trafficking of Captagon.

A house was identified in Neb Sarai, New Delhi, and searches were conducted on May 11, which led to the recovery of about 31.5 Kg Captagon tablets carefully concealed in a commercial chapati-cutting machine. Preliminary investigation suggests that the machine was intended for export to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the statement said.

The said house in Neb Sarai had been rented by a

Syrian national, who had entered India on a tourist visa on November 15, 2024. His visa expired on January 12, 2025, and he was illegally staying in India, the MHA said.

His questioning led to the recovery of about 196.2 kg of Captagon powder from a container in the Container Facilitation Station (CFS) at Mundra, Gujarat, on May 14. "The container was imported from Syria with sheep wool as the declared consignment. A thorough search of the container led to the recovery of 3 bags containing 196.2 kg of Captagon powder," the statement said.

"Preliminary investigation has revealed that the seized consignment was intended for transshipment to the Gulf region, particularly Saudi Arabia and neighbouring Middle Eastern countries, where Captagon abuse has emerged as a serious law enforcement and public health concern," it said.

The MHA said a total of 227.7 kg of Captagon tablets and powder were seized under Operation Ragepill, with an estimated value of approximately Rs 182 crore in destination markets across the Gulf and Middle East.

## Centre Modernising 736 Dams Under Rs 10,211-Crore Rehabilitation Programme

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** India is implementing one of the world's largest dam-rehabilitation programmes under the Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Programme (DRIP), with rehabilitation proposals worth Rs 5,053 crore for 191 dams already approved and major physical-rehabilitation work completed at 43 dams till March 31, 2025, according to the Jal Shakti Ministry.

The ministry said the second and third phases of the DRIP, operationalised in October 2021, together cover 736 dams across 19 states and three central agencies — the Central Water Commission (CWC), the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) and the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC).

Major dams planned for safety improvement under the second and third phases of the project include the Bhakra Dam (Himachal Pradesh), the Ranjit Sagar Dam (Punjab), NTR Sagar (Telangana), the Nagarjuna Sagar Dam (Telangana), the Gandhi Sagar Dam (Madhya Pradesh), the Kadana Dam (Gujarat), the Jirgo Dam (Uttar Pradesh), the Imphal Barrage (Manipur), the Myntdu Leshka Dam

(Meghalaya) and the Silabati Barrage (West Bengal), among others.

The total project outlay for DRIP-II and III is Rs 10,211 crore — Rs 5,107 crore for Phase-II and Rs 5,104 crore for Phase-III. Of this, Rs 7,000 crore are being provided as external loan assistance, while Rs 3,211 crore are being borne by the participating states and central agencies. The Phase-II scheme is cofinanced by the World Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

"Phase II and III together will last for 10 years, each phase continuing for six years with two years overlap," the ministry said.

It added that DRIP-II and III are structured around four major components — rehabilitation of dams and associated structures, institutional strengthening, revenue-generation measures to support sustainable operation and maintenance, and project management for effective implementation.

India currently manages one of the largest dam portfolios globally and ranks third in the world with 6,628 specified dams, of which 6,545 are operational and 83

are under construction. The gross water-storage capacity of these dams is about 330 billion cubic metres and they are critical for ensuring national food, energy and water security.

The ministry said more than 26 per cent of these dams, or 1,681 structures, are over 50 years old, including 291 that are more than 100 years old, while another 42 per cent fall in the 25-50 years age bracket.

"Ageing infrastructure, sedimentation, changing hydrological patterns and increasing climate variability have highlighted the need for systematic rehabilitation and safety management," it said.

According to an analysis of 439 reservoirs by the CWC, reservoirs in India have suffered an average 19 per cent loss of gross storage capacity, with the average annual loss estimated at 0.74 per cent, equivalent to about 1.81 MCM per reservoir per year.

Describing the DRIP as "among the largest dam rehabilitation programmes globally", the ministry said the initiative reflects India's shift towards a "systematic and risk-based approach to dam safety management". The programme is being

implemented in three phases to improve the safety and operational performance of the existing dams through structural repairs, modernisation of spillways and gates, and the installation of advanced monitoring systems.

DRIP Phase-I was launched in April 2012 with support from the World Bank and continued till 2021. The programme covered 223 dams across seven states — Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand.

The ministry said the programme contributed significantly to strengthening dam-safety practices and institutional capacity in the participating states and agencies. Under DRIP-I, design flood reviews, dam-health inspections and the finalisation of rehabilitation proposals for all 223 dams were completed, while rehabilitation work was awarded for 144 dams. The first phase focussed on the rehabilitation and modernisation of dam structures, dam-safety inspections and evaluations, developing emergency action plans (EAPs) and capacity building and training programmes.