

Majhi meets Shah for Centre’s support

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BHUBANESWAR

ODISHA Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Friday met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, seeking their support to strengthen industrial security and expand rail connectivity in the State, saying both were crucial for accelerating economic growth.

During separate meetings in New Delhi, Majhi discussed issues relating to industrial development, internal security, railway infrastructure and long-term economic planning, according to a statement issued by the Chief Minister’s Office (CMO). In his meeting with Shah, the Chief Minister said Odisha was moving rapidly on a path of development, progress and prosperity, and sought the Centre’s support in strengthening industrial security to sustain the pace of industrialisation.

Majhi also briefed the Home Minister on the State’s developmental initiatives, law and order situation, internal security and implementation of various welfare schemes, the statement said. Majhi said Odisha had been recognised as a “Naxal-free State”, creating a conducive environment for socio-economic development.



He said the State government was implementing Central and State welfare schemes in erstwhile Left Wing Extremism-affected areas through the ‘Gramodaya Yojana’, asserting that the law and order situation was under control due to proactive policing. The Chief Minister also informed Shah about the Centre’s support for the revival of sugar mills and said the State’s “double-engine government” had earned people’s trust through direct public outreach and speedy grievance redressal.

According to the CMO, Shah appreciated the State’s development and welfare initiatives and assured all possible support from the Centre to fulfil the aspirations of the people of Odisha. Later, Majhi met Vaishnaw and discussed strengthening railway infrastructure, expediting pending railway projects and improving connectivity

across the State. “Our priority is to enhance regional and industrial connectivity to accelerate economic growth. With the continued support of the Union government, we are steadily advancing towards a developed and prosperous Odisha,” Majhi said in a post on X after the meeting.

The Chief Minister also met NITI Aayog member and Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) member K V Raju to discuss Odisha’s long-term economic roadmap and district-level GDP estimation. The discussions also covered policy frameworks for Special Marine Zones and Special Farming Zones aimed at promoting balanced regional development, generating livelihood opportunities and accelerating sustainable economic growth in the State, officials said.

Odisha Mahanadi swells as 14 Hirakud Dam gates open

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HEAVY rains in the upper catchment triggered the Hirakud Dam to discharge a huge amount of water into the Mahanadi, swelling the river and impacting seven lakh people in 20 of the State’s 30 districts as low-lying areas got inundated. The rise in the water level of the Mahanadi river led to the swelling of several of its tributaries, aggravating the situation.

However, no rain in the past one day has come as a respite for the State.

Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari, who reviewed the flood situation, said 14 gates of the Hirakud Dam have been opened, discharging over two lakh cusecs of water due to a huge inflow from the upper catchment areas of the Mahanadi in Chhattisgarh.

Earlier, only two gates were open. “The water will take around 36 to 40 hours to reach Mundali near Cuttack,” the minister said. By Friday morning, the water level in the reservoir stood at 623.52 feet against its full storage capacity of 630 feet.



The dam was receiving approximately 3,69,322 cusecs of water per second, while about 65,543 cusecs were being released downstream. Pujari said more than eight lakh cusecs of water at Mundali should be discharged within 36 hours, making space for the excess water being discharged from the Hirakud.”

“It is a big respite that there is no rain across Odisha since the past 24 hours in the State and also in upper catchment areas,” the minister said. He

said some areas in Kataka, Puri, Khordha and Jagatsinghpur districts have been inundated and all preparations were being made to mitigate people’s suffering. The State is operating 520 relief centres in north and coastal regions where provisions have been made for around 2 lakh people, he said, adding that around 1.90 lakh people have so far been evacuated to safety. Special Relief Commissioner Rajesh Prabhakar Patil said the recent flood has im-

pacted over seven lakh people in 20 of the State’s 30 districts. He said 136 rescue teams of the NDRE, ODRAF and fire services have been deployed in various districts.

The rise in the water level of the Mahanadi has led to its tributaries -- the Luna, Karandia, Chitropala, Paika, Salia, Devi, Kandala, Kuakhai, Kushabhadra, Daya and Bhargavi -- to swell, he said, adding that three persons have so far died in flood-related incidents.

Officials said leaves of all government employees in the affected 20 districts have been cancelled and public access to barrages and embankments was restricted. Devotees were barred from visiting the Dhabaleswar Shiv Temple for 48 hours in Kataka district. According to the Water Resources Department, water levels in Baitarani, Brahmani, Jalaka, and Budhabalanga have receded, but fresh breaches of embankments have inundated new areas.

Sahoo drove horticulture growth

C B SINGH
RAYAGADA

ODISHA’S horticulture sector bid farewell to Rayagada’s Deputy Director of Horticulture, Chittaranjan Sahoo, who retired on Thursday. His distinguished three-decade career was defined by innovation, institution-building, and an unwavering commitment to farmers’ welfare.

Over a 30-year career, Sahoo modernised Odisha’s horticulture by advancing scientific farming, protected cultivation, quality planting materials, post-harvest systems, and farmer training.

Before moving to Rayagada, Sahoo served as in-charge of the Centre of Excellence (CoE) on Horticulture in Deras, Bhubaneswar. He boosted the production of quality fruit plants, hybrid vegetable seeds, and flow-



ers. Under his leadership, the centre grew into a top training hub in Odisha, benefiting many farmers, agri-entrepreneurs and also helping students learn new skills. Throughout his career, Sahoo continuously upgraded his professional expertise through specialised training at leading national institutions, such as MAN-AGE, the Extension Education Institute, the National Institute of Plant Health

Management, the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research in Bengaluru, and INDOCERT in Kerala.

Sahoo helped local farmers grow more mango, cashew, banana, and papaya crops. He also taught them how to use protected farming and grow vegetables out of season in Koraput, Jharsuguda, and Sambalpur. By sharing modern tools and safe methods, his work helped farms grow larger yields and made life better for the workers. As colleagues, farmers, and well-wishers gathered to bid him farewell, Chittaranjan Sahoo retires leaving a profound legacy. His impact is measured not just by completed projects or accolades, but by the thousands of farmers he empowered and his lasting contributions to Odisha’s horticulture sector.

Brahmapur stands against trafficking

SUNIL MOHAN PATNAIK
BRAHMAPUR

AN awareness programme marked the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons at Brahmapur railway station, with a call to strengthen measures against human trafficking and ensure protection of women and children from exploitation.

Organised by ISRD Sakhi One Stop Centre, Ganjam, in collaboration with Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government Railway Police (GRP), the programme featured a human chain, an awareness rally, and a public meeting. Hundreds of railway employees, vendors, porters, sanitation workers, hawkers, and autorickshaw drivers participated in the campaign. Brahmapur Municipal



Corporation Commissioner Akavaram S Reddy urged citizens to remain vigilant against human trafficking and oppose violence against women, adolescents, and children. She stressed the need for grassroots awareness, early identification of vulnerable persons, and co-ordinated efforts by law enforcement agencies and community to prevent trafficking

and exploitation.

The speakers highlighted the importance of educating the public about the various forms of human trafficking, ensuring justice, medical care, and psychological support for victims, and addressing the root causes of the crime through stronger preventive measures and effective enforcement.

Among those who ad-

ressed the gathering were Shitanshu Kumar Panda, President of Berhampur Civil Court Bar Association; Kalyani Sanghamitra Devi, Deputy Commissioner of Brahmapur Municipal Corporation; Durga Prasad Brahma, Station Manager; Vivek Kumar, RPF Officer; Epili Srinivasa Rao, In-charge CTE; Ch Bishnu, Chief Health Inspector; Gopinath Kolaka and Kailash Chandra Behera of the GRP, along with several representatives of civic bodies, voluntary organisations, and railway stakeholders.

The participants took a pledge to remain alert, resist trafficking networks, and work collectively towards building a safe and exploitation-free society. The programme was presided over by Sudhir Sabat, Director of ISRD.

Two get lifer for Ganjam double murder

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BRAHMAPUR

A court in Ganjam district sentenced two persons, including a 27-year-old woman, to life imprisonment for the murder of a mother and her seven-year-old son in 2024, a government counsel said. Additional District Judge Sangeeta Pani sentenced G Devendra and D Gunnama of Chudialanjia village for the murder of D Neelabeni, 28, and her son, D Rushi, within Jarada police station limits on February 19, 2024. Additional Public Prosecutor Santoshini Purohit said. The court delivered the judgment after examining 39 witnesses, including police personnel, and scrutinising relevant documents. Police had recovered the bodies of the mother and son from their house on February 19, 2024, and sent them for post-mortem.

Pujari counters Naveen, says CM upholds Raj Dharma

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ODISHA Minister Suresh Pujari rebutted Naveen Patnaik’s “feasting in Delhi amid flood horrors” jibe at the BJP, saying Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi was discharging “Raj Dharma” by pursuing a resolution to the Mahanadi water dispute with Chhattisgarh in the national capital.

Majhi was in Delhi on Thursday, where he attended a high-level meeting under the chairmanship of Union Water Resources Minister C R Patil over Mahanadi water distribution and management, which was also attended by Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Dev Sai. Seeking to capitalise on Majhi’s absence from Odisha as the State remained on a high alert for floods across the densely populated coastal belt, the Opposition parties



accused the BJP government of lacking sincerity in tackling the calamity.

“Are Odisha’s BJP leaders feasting in Delhi amid the horrors of the floods in the State? While the entire State is reeling from flood conditions due to relentless heavy rain, the Chief Minister and BJP’s top leaders and MPs are currently in Delhi,” Leader of Opposition in the Assembly Naveen Patnaik had

said on social media.

Hitting back, the State’s Revenue and Disaster Management Minister asked Patnaik to understand the ground situation before criticising the government. Majhi was in Delhi to attend a tripartite meeting on the Mahanadi water dispute with Chhattisgarh, an issue the previous BJD government of Naveen Patnaik failed to resolve, Pujari said.

“The meeting was chaired

by the Union Jal Shakti Minister. Chief ministers of both Odisha and Chhattisgarh attended the meeting along with their chief secretaries and other senior officials,” he said, asserting that Majhi was discharging “Raj Dharma”. He also raised questions on Patnaik’s absence from the ground.

“The people of Odisha had him as chief minister for nearly 25 years. But where is he now when the State needs leadership?” Pujari asked. The minister undertook an aerial survey of the flood-affected areas in north Odisha and held review meetings on Thursday. Pujari said he was in constant touch with MLAs across party lines in the around 20 districts staring at imminent floods. All people’s representatives and Panchayati Raj department officials are actively working on the ground, he said.

DGP reviews security ahead of Prez visit

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ODISHA DGP Y B Khurania on Friday directed authorities to ensure strict adherence to protocols laid down in the Blue Book for VVIP security during President Droupadi Murmu’s scheduled three-day visit to the State from August 3, officials said. “The DGP directed that all units concerned strictly adhere to the established protocols laid down in the Blue Book for VVIP security. Nodal officers are being designated to ensure seamless coordination of all security-related duties across departments,” a statement by the Odisha Police Headquarters said.

Khurania reviewed security and safety arrangements for the upcoming visit at a meeting attended by senior



officials, including Director (Intelligence) R P Koche, ADGP (Law & Order) Sanjay Kumar, ADGP (SAP) Rajesh Kumar, Commissioner of Police (Bhubaneswar-Kataka) S Devadatta Singh, Principal Chief Security Commissioner (PCSC), East Coast Railway (ECoR), Alok Bohra, IGP (CR) Satyajit Naik and SP, CID-CB, Vivekananda

Sharma.

According to the President’s itinerary, Murmu is scheduled to arrive in Bhubaneswar by a special aircraft from New Delhi on August 3 afternoon and proceed by road to Jagadguru Kripalu University near Banki in Kataka district to inaugurate the institution. She will return to Bhubaneswar for the night.

On August 4, the President will undertake a train journey from Bhubaneswar to Brahmapur, from where she will proceed by road to Tapapani in Ganjam district. At Tapapani, she will offer prayers and perform aarti at the Maa Kandhuni Devi Temple in Gobindapur panchayat under Sanakhemundi block and participate in a tree plantation programme.

Officials said the train journey has been scheduled in view of the India Meteorological Department’s rain forecast. As part of the security preparations, anti-sabotage checks will be carried out as a top priority at all venues and along the travel routes. Track patrolling has been intensified, and all level crossings on the route will remain manned throughout the visit, the statement said.

ODISHA ISSUES SOP FOR RESETTLING BONDED LABOUR

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BHUBANESWAR

ASSERTING that the State government would ensure strict legal action against middlemen and agents involved in trafficking vulnerable people for bonded labour, Odisha’s Law Minister Prithiviraj Harichandan on Thursday released the revised Central Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on Bonded Labour in Odia language.

Harichandan unveiled the SOP at a function

marking 50 years of the Bonded Labour System Abolition Act, 1976 in the country. The SOP provides guidance to frontline officials on the identification, rescue, release, repatriation and rehabilitation of bonded labourers, including those rescued from other States. Officials said the availability of the document in Odia would facilitate more effective implementation across districts and improve coordination among government departments.

More than 200 released

bonded labourers from across Odisha assembled here under the umbrella of Shramavahini, a registered survivor-led collective with over 4,000 survivors as members. Addressing the gathering, the minister said the State government would ensure stringent legal action against traffickers and middlemen involved in recruiting vulnerable persons into bonded labour.

“We will strengthen investigation and prosecution to ensure offenders are brought to justice swiftly

and face stringent punishment. Our objective is to create a strong deterrent and send a clear message that bonded labour and human trafficking will not be tolerated in Odisha,” he said. The minister also released ‘Restored in Odisha’, a publication documenting the State government’s initiatives, policy reforms, rescue operations, rehabilitation measures and inter-departmental efforts to combat bonded labour and human trafficking.

A panel discussion on

strengthening systems to address trafficking for bonded labour brought together representatives of the State government, legal experts, academics and civil society organisations. Participants discussed improving victim identification, access to justice, inter-State coordination and community-based prevention mechanisms. Survivors who shared their experiences spoke of the importance of timely rescue, rehabilitation and sustained community support

in rebuilding their lives and preventing re-trafficking.

Shramavahini secretary Ranjita Rana, herself a released bonded labour survivor, urged the State government to institutionalise February 9 as an annual Bonded Labour Abolition Day across all districts to strengthen public awareness and prevention efforts. She said similar government-led observances in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana had helped reinforce community vigilance.

