

EL NINO THREAT

CM orders water conservation drive

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

CHIEF Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday directed officials to treat the Jaladhara-Jalaharati programme as a continuous water-conservation initiative, warning that the impact of El Nino could be more severe than initially anticipated and pose challenges to drinking water supply, agriculture and livestock. Reviewing the programme through a video conference from his camp office, the Chief Minister asked officials to prepare in advance for a possible 39 per cent rainfall deficit between June and December. Officials said normal rainfall during the period is around 867 mm, while the current projection is only 525 mm, with August alone potentially recording a 56 per cent deficit. The water position is already under pressure. Officials said the state's reservoirs currently hold 563.05 tmc ft, against 825.67 tmc ft during the same period last year, while groundwater levels are expected to decline further from August.

Naidu directed officials to

- State braces for a projected 39% shortfall between June–Dec with reservoirs holding far less water than last year

- Calling for priority to drinking water, CM calls for advance storage, tanker readiness and district-wise allocations through Nagarjuna Sagar

give priority to drinking water storage in Veligodu, Gorakallu, Auk, Jeedipalli and Cherlopalli reservoirs and prepare district-wise water allocations through the Nagarjuna Sagar canal system. "Water conservation must be a continuous process," the Chief Minister said, directing officials to make maximum use of available water, including floodwaters entering the State from upstream areas. He asked them to identify villages and habitations facing drinking water shortages and keep wa-



Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu holds a review on Jaladhara-Jalaharati programme at his camp office in Undavalli on Saturday

ter tankers ready in advance. The Jaladhara-Jalaharati programme has so far covered 82,865 works, of which 79,826 have been completed, with a sanctioned value of Rs 3,409.35 crore. The works include desilting tanks and feeder channels and construction of farm ponds and trenches. The Chief Minister also asked officials to protect standing crops amid the anticipated rainfall shortage by prioritising available water for agriculture and promoting less water-intensive crops in the future. At the same time, he directed them to ensure adequate water for industries even under constrained availability. Naidu

called for a public awareness campaign on prudent water use, with collectors tasked with closely monitoring the situation at the field level. He also directed officials to act early against a possible fodder shortage district administrations were asked to ensure adequate fodder and water for livestock and establish Gokulams (cattle shelters) wherever necessary, backed by special district-level action plans.

The CM further asked officials to identify tanks and canals that had remained dry for prolonged periods and explore micro-basin linkages to transfer water from surplus areas to water-deficit regions."

Modi urges Gen Z to solve problems, embrace change

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Modi urged the graduates to connect their careers with India's development goals over the next three decades, saying national needs should inform their decisions. He said India's pursuit of self-reliance in economic, technological and industrial sectors would form a foundation for "Viksit Bharat", or developed India. "The more empowered the youth of the country are, the more empowered the entire country will be," he said.

The Prime Minister pointed to the space sector, semiconductor manufacturing, drones, startups, digital payments and financial technology as areas where young Indians were already creating new opportunities. He said reforms had opened sectors that were previously

restricted, allowing young innovators to participate in areas including space technology.

Modi also highlighted emerging fields including artificial intelligence, data centres, critical minerals, deep-sea exploration, quantum computing and energy security, saying they were waiting for young talent and innovation.

The Prime Minister also called on graduates to contribute to India's research ambitions.

He highlighted the Prime Minister's Research Fellowship and the Anusandhan National Research Foundation, which he said had a funding target of up to Rs 1 lakh crore. "Today the country desperately needs new research," Modi said, adding that the government's focus was firmly on research. He also cited the

One Nation One Subscription programme, under which research journals are intended to become accessible without additional costs, including to students and researchers in smaller cities. Modi said the country's research ambitions would ultimately depend on the commitment of young people.

The Prime Minister ended his message to the graduates with a warning about comparisons driven by social media. He urged students not to measure themselves against peers based on salaries, placements or startup milestones, saying such comparisons could distract them from their own development. "Life is absolutely not a leader-board; your real race is not with anyone else, it is with yourself," he said.

Kanimozhi explains DMK's position on delimitation

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Declaring that there was nothing new to discuss on the delimitation issue now, she said, in a statement on Saturday, that it was DMK president M K Stalin who warned about delimitation first and called all parties for a meeting to oppose it, besides passing a resolution in the Assembly. He also organized a meeting of various Chief Ministers and party leaders in different States to seek a fair delimitation.

When there had been no official announcement by the Union government that the delimitation Bill would be passed in the current session of Parliament what was the need for the meeting and what was there to discuss, she asked. The DMK had already conveyed Tamil Nadu's position through the resolutions passed in the all-party meeting held earlier, she said.

Rahul Gandhi, Rijiju spar over women's quota

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Responding to Gandhi's retort, Rijiju said the Congress leader knows "very well" that the reservation of seats for women in the House of the People and Legislative Assembly of the State is provided in the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023. He said that Gandhi also knows that it shall come into effect after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken based on the census figures published after the year 2023, which means the census figures published after the year 2026.

"The exercise for publishing the census figures after the year 2026 is currently underway. However, this may take substantial time due to the caste-based census to be finally published. In view of this, it may result in considerable delay in the implementation of women reservation, at least not before the 2034 General Elections," the senior BJP leader said. Therefore, to implement the women reservation at the next general elections in 2029, the delimitation exercise needs to be undertaken at the

earliest, based on the latest available Census figures, as published, he added. Rijiju said the implementation methodology has been proposed under the Delimitation Bill 2026, introduced in the Lok Sabha along with the amendments to the Constitution. However, the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, which was introduced for this purpose, has been defeated, the minister said. "Also, a reminder to Rahul Gandhi, there's no woman in Karnataka DK Shivakumar's Cabinet! This raises serious questions over Congress's stand on 33% Women quota," Rijiju said in another post on X. Reacting to the criticism, Karnataka Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said, "We are the ones who piloted (women's reservation bill), we are the ones who passed (the bill)." "The Congress party believes in it (giving priority to women). You know how many seats we gave (to women) in Parliament, I think you remember. So, in Karnataka, definitely we are sorting out that issue. Rijiju may not worry about the Congress Party," the chief minister said.

On Friday, Gandhi said no country can be successful and will remain stunted if its women do not express themselves. The Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha said it is important to bring women back into the conversation and allow them to do what they want to do. His remarks in an Instagram post came as an addition to his reply made during his Thursday's "Ask Me Anything" session. Rijiju on Thursday had a telephonic conversation with Gandhi to seek support for the passage of the women's reservation and delimitation bills, but the leader of opposition insisted on convening an all-party meeting on the proposed legislation, sources aware of the matter had said.

This was the second time in a couple of days that the parliamentary affairs minister spoke with Gandhi on the phone. The minister also met him twice in 10 days for smooth functioning of the House. "I had a productive conversation with Rahul Gandhi. I have made a request on a few specific issues and discussed other matters.

Mojtaba Khamenei critical: Israeli media

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The report also referred to claims by IranWire, which cited sources close to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's administration, which more or less made similar claims. The outlet cited two sources that said Mojtaba Khamenei had not met any Cabinet members since the US attack on the Supreme Leader's compound that killed his father and other family members on February 28.

The source said that he could "die at any moment" and the news of his condition is currently being circulated within senior levels of Iran's leadership. A source close to Pezeshkian's cabinet was quoted as saying his physical condition was poor. "We would not be surprised if we heard news of his martyrdom soon," the source said.

However, Iranian officials have previously rejected all reports claiming that Khamenei is incapacitated, saying his injuries from the February strike were not serious.

In fact, Iranian President Pezeshkian recently acknowledged that communication with the Supreme Leader was "very difficult" at the moment. However, he insisted that Khamenei remained a source of strength for the government. "It is very difficult to communicate with him at the moment, but in any case, his presence is a very great source of strength for us so that we can continue," Pezeshkian said in an interview with Iranian state media.

He went on to defend the Iranian supreme leader by saying he had held productive meetings with him and described him as having "very sound logic". However, Khamenei's continued absence from public view has fuelled speculation among both regional and international observers. Previous reports have claimed that he had suffered serious injuries during the strikes, while Iranian officials have maintained that he continues to oversee the country's affairs.

Meanwhile, Western and Opposition intelligence sources have also frequently suggested that he sustained severe or disfiguring injuries during the strikes. The lack of public appearances is fuelling these speculations even more.

100% tariffs on India soon?

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The wider objective is to reduce the flow of money supporting Russia's economy and military campaign.

The legislation gives the US President the authority to impose tariffs of up to 100% on goods imported from countries that are among the top five buyers of Russian oil or natural gas. India is one of the world's biggest buyers of Russian crude, alongside China. The measure is designed to make countries choose between continuing to buy discounted Russian energy and maintaining access to the US market.

Darline Graham, the late senator's sister who was appointed to his seat, said the legislation would force countries supporting Russia's economy to make a choice. "This bill forces those primary countries keeping Russia's economy afloat to make a simple yet critical choice – a choice between doing business with America or buying cheap Russian energy," she said

India's purchases of discounted Russian crude have increased significantly since the Russia-Ukraine war began in 2022. Russia was never a major oil supplier for India but after Moscow's war with Ukraine began and Europe stopped buying Russian crude, it became available at huge discounts for India.

The shift has helped Indian refiners lower crude costs and secure supplies despite disruptions in global energy markets. The reliance on Russian oil has become even more important amid disruptions to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz,

which have affected energy supplies from the Middle East. India has repeatedly maintained that its energy purchases are guided by national interest, energy security and the need to ensure affordable and reliable supplies.

The proposed legislation comes after Washington had already imposed additional charges over India's purchases of Russian oil in the past. However, the earlier measures did not immediately discourage Indian refiners from buying Russian crude. With the conflict in the Middle East disrupting energy markets and creating uncertainty around supplies through the region, Russian crude remained an important source for Indian refiners. India's imports of Russian oil rose 34% in June 2026 alone.

A 100% tariff would make Indian goods significantly more expensive for US importers if it were imposed broadly. The impact could be particularly significant for export-oriented sectors such as engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, textiles and auto components.

US buyers could look for alternative suppliers in other countries if Indian products become substantially more expensive. Indian exporters could consequently face weaker demand, tighter margins or the need to absorb part of the additional cost to remain competitive.

The threat of such tariffs could also encourage Indian companies to diversify their export markets and increase pressure on policymakers to negotiate with Washington.

Employees' unions nix govt's '95% HR expenditure' claim

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Bopparaju said government data comparing southern states put Andhra Pradesh's salary and pension expenditure at around 60 per cent of tax revenue in 2024-25 and 59 per cent in 2025-26.

"The entire revenue is not being consumed by employees. The government itself has submitted these figures to the CAG," Bopparaju pointed out, while questioning why the White Paper did not present employee expenditure as a proportion of total revenue expenditure.

Bopparaju said the approximately Rs 30,000 crore paid by the present govern-

ment towards employee-related liabilities should not be portrayed simply as fresh expenditure on serving employees. A substantial portion, he said, related to GPF, APGLI and medical reimbursement amounts accumulated by employees during their service and paid after retirement. He said many retirees had been waiting for nearly two years even for gratuity, while payments towards surrendered leave were also pending for serving employees and police personnel.

The union leader argued that employee expenditure would naturally decline as large numbers retire. As many as 41,321 employ-

ees retired between 2024 and 2026; 13,643 in 2024, 13,583 in 2025, and 14,095 in 2026. Another 1.51 lakh employees are expected to retire in the coming years, at an estimated 14,000–15,000 annually, he said.

Bopparaju said the NDA coalition government had promised an improved Pay Revision Commission (PRC), Interim Relief (IR), a review of CPS/GPS, restoration of additional quantum of pension, a Pension Corporation and welfare measures for contractual and outsourced employees.

However, more than two years after the government assumed office, employees were still waiting for deci-

sions, he said. "Why did the White Paper not address the five pending DA instalments, Interim Relief, appointment of a PRC Commissioner, restoration of additional pension, and employee health cards?" he questioned.

APJAC Amaravati demanded immediate appointment of a PRC Commissioner, release of the five pending DA instalments, disclosure of outstanding arrears and payment schedules, and a review of CPS/GPS. It also sought restoration of additional pension, establishment of a Pension Corporation, and welfare measures for contrac-

tual and outsourced staff. Bopparaju warned that if the government failed to provide clarity, APJAC Amaravati would launch a joint action plan with like-minded associations after August 15.

Meanwhile, APNGO chairman A Vidyasagar said employee expenditure was below 38 per cent of total revenue expenditure and was comparable with that of Telangana.

He said employees had not received DA for two years, despite the Centre and other states generally releasing DA every six months and undertaking PRC revisions every five years.

Naidu bets big on Amaravati projects

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"Water is subsequently expected to reach Nagarjuna Sagar as well," he said.

Naidu defended the financial white paper recently released by the government, saying it had helped people understand the state's financial position. He said he had spent nearly 10 hours studying the finances before making the presentation and announced that a financial white paper would be released every year. "People will understand the situation only when the financial status is clearly explained," he said.

Turning to party affairs, Naidu asked unit in-charges to understand the TDP's ideology and effectively explain the government's welfare and developmental programmes to the public. "If we don't explain the good work being done by the government, people will believe propaganda," he cautioned. Referring to the YSRCP as the "Axe Party", Naidu alleged that it had attempted to create doubts over the Mega DSC teachers' recruitment. He said the government had countered the allegations with

facts and established that there were no irregularities in the examination process. He cited Saturday's protest by DSC-selected teachers in Kurnool as evidence that the beneficiaries themselves had rejected the campaign against the recruitment process. "The teachers selected through DSC have unitedly asserted their self-respect," he said. Naidu said the response to the Bhogapuram Airport project showed that people would support development when they see tangible results. The Chief Minister said there was "absolutely no chance" of the YSRCP returning to power and asked TDP workers to increase the party's vote share at every booth in the next election. He warned that there would be zero tolerance towards leaders who neglected party workers or acted against party policies, while assuring unit in-charges, cluster in-charges and mandal presidents of due respect. Naidu said democratic protests were permitted but warned that demonstrations causing inconvenience to the public would not be tolerated.

SAD backs delimitation bill a day after Badal-Modi meet

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In a post on X, Badal said the party draws inspiration from the Sikh Gurus, who championed the dignity, equality and equal rights of women. "The Shiromani Akali Dal, at a meeting of its senior leaders in Chandigarh, demanded the immediate implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill in the country. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee has already set an example by providing for women's reservation in its House," Badal said. The development comes amid speculation that Badal's meeting with PM Modi could pave the way for the erstwhile allies to join hands again ahead of the Punjab Assembly elections due early next year.

US mulls ending 60-day grace period for H1B workers

Removing that window could make an already difficult job transition significantly more urgent.

USCIS has previously acknowledged that the 60-day period gives unemployed foreign workers time to seek new employment and explore other immigration options. The impact could extend beyond H1B workers. The existing framework also covers categories including E1, E2, E3, H1B1, L1, O1 and TN, as well as eligible dependents. For Indians, the H1B category is likely to be the most closely watched because Indian professionals make up a large share of H1B beneficiaries.

Jharkhand students to continue protest

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The controversy began soon after the Jharkhand Public Service Commission (JPSC) declared the preliminary examination results of the 14th Combined Civil Services Examination on July 2. The Commission shortlisted 2,204 candidates against 103 vacancies, but allegations of irregularities emerged soon after. Around 3.5 lakh people took the exam.

At the heart of the protest, which comes against the backdrop of the developments at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar, are allegations of paper leaks in the exam. The Soren government has tried to

act quickly – 19 people have been arrested, and the Chief Minister has said they stand with the youth – but the protests have shown no signs of slowing.

On Saturday, an eight-member delegation of the JPSC-JSSC Abhyarthi Nyay Manch left the protest site at Ranchi's Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium and reached a guesthouse in Morabadi around 10:30 am for the meeting. The talks began around 11:30 am.

The delegation reiterated the demands already put forward by the other platform that has emerged during the protests, the JPSC-JSSC Reform Manch, which held talks with the

government on Friday night. Saturday's meeting also saw some additional demands concerning candidates from different recruitment tests, including issues related to the TGT examination and other teacher recruitment examinations.

The government side was represented by Sudiyya Kumar Sonu (JMM), Chamra Linda (JMM), Deepika Singh Pandey (Congress), and Sanjay Yadav (RJD).

After the meeting, Sonu addressed the media and appealed to students and candidates to send their suggestions and views to the government through a dedicated email so that

their concerns could be considered. Student representative Chandan Rajak said their demands would now be taken forward to Chief Minister Soren. "Only after a decision is taken will we move away from the hunger strike and the agitation," Rajak said.

Meanwhile, the crowd continued to swell at Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium. Two students sitting on hunger strike were taken to Sadar Hospital after their health deteriorated, while several other protesters were also reported to be unwell. Students from both key outfits have said they plan to march towards the Assembly for a gherao on

August 10.

The protests have drawn support from the Cockroach Janta Party, which spearheaded the New Delhi protests, and on Saturday, singer-actor Piyush Mishra dropped by to offer his support. Simultaneously, student outfits of political parties have waded into the protests too. The ABVP clashed with the police on Friday, while the AISA took out a march in Ranchi.

The ruling JMM's students' wing, the Jharkhand Chhatra Morcha (JCM), has also placed five demands before the government panel, including the cancellation of the 14th JPSC examination.

No charges for UPI users

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The institutional framework for these potential updates hinges on the upcoming legislative agenda.

Once Parliament passes the Taxation and Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026—which proposes to amend Section 10A of the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007—the final authority on MDR structures will be handed over to the "UPI and Services Steering Committee," headed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

