

INDIA bloc meeting: Oppn leaders to write to CJI on SIR, seek Pradhan's resignation

New Delhi, 8 June : Leaders of the Opposition INDIA bloc met here on Monday and decided to write to the Chief Justice of India on the SIR exercise and "vote loot", besides demanding the immediate resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the NEET-CBSE row.

Addressing a press conference after the meeting, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge said the Opposition leaders also demanded that the Union government convene an all-party meeting to discuss the "precarious economic situation" in the country, unemployment, price rise, farmers' issues and people-centric matters. Kharge said the INDIA bloc leaders also decided to meet every two months, with the next meeting scheduled in Hyderabad for August, the date for which will be fixed later.

According to sources, leaders of 22 Opposition parties along with Independent MP Kapil Sibal attended Monday's

meeting held at the Constitution Club here. Earlier, Kharge had said that leaders of 25 Opposition parties met on Monday. Flanked by Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, Mamata Banerjee and other senior leaders of the grouping at the presser, Kharge said: "We have agreed on five issues. A letter would be sent to the chief justice of India (CJI) soon on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, 'vote loot' and 'stealing of elections'."

"It was also unanimously agreed to demand the immediate resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan because he presided over the betrayal of lakhs of youth who appeared in NEET and CBSE," he said. Also, the Centre should immediately call an all-party meeting to discuss the "precarious" economic situation, unemployment, price rise, farmers' issues, and "atrocities" being committed on the oppressed sections, Kharge said. "We are going to raise

many people-centric issues, which all the parties have unanimously agreed to," he said.

"It was agreed that we would meet every two months. The next meeting will be held in Hyderabad in August, the date for which will be fixed later. "The Opposition leaders also decided to continue co-ordination during the upcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament, with daily morning meetings at the office of the Leader of Opposition," he said.

The Congress veteran also said that all the Opposition leaders aired their views freely at the meeting, which Shiv Sena-UBT's Uddhav Thackeray and JMM's Hemant Soren joined virtually. The meeting was held in the backdrop of differences emerging among some of the INDIA bloc constituents.

The leaders began the deliberations to help forge unity and rework their strategy to take on the BJP, while ironing out differences within after the defeat of re-

gional outfits Trinamool Congress and DMK in the recent Assembly polls in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, respectively. Those in attendance included Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Kharge from the Congress, Mamata Banerjee and Abhishek Banerjee from the Trinamool Congress, Akhilesh Yadav from the Samajwadi Party, Tejashwi Yadav from the RJD, Omar Abdullah from the National Conference and Mehbooba Mufti from the PDP, along with Left leaders. NCP(SP) leader Supriya Sule, CPI(M)'s John Brittas, CPI's D Raja and leaders of some smaller parties were also part of the deliberations, while Uddhav Thackeray and Hemant Soren joined virtually.

The DMK and AAP were not part of the deliberations after having opted out of the Opposition bloc. Tamil Nadu's ruling party TVK also did not attend the meeting. Sources said those who were part of the original INDIA bloc were invited for the meeting.

East coast railway gears up for monsoon with comprehensive safety and preparedness measures

DOI CORRESPONDENT

Bhubaneswar, 8 June : With the onset of the monsoon season, East Coast Railway has launched a Special Safety Drive on "Monsoon Precautions" from 10th June to 25th September 2026 across its Khurda Road, Sambalpur and Rayagada Divisions to ensure safe, reliable and uninterrupted train operations during the rainy season.

The drive encompasses intensive inspections, preventive maintenance and close monitoring of railway assets susceptible to heavy rainfall. Special focus is being placed on tracks, bridges, culverts, tunnels, embankments, cuttings, drainage systems, signalling installations, electrical assets and overhead equipment. Water levels in rivers, bridges and culverts adjoining railway tracks will be closely monitored as part of the preparedness measures.

Particular attention is being given to vulnerable locations prone to flooding, erosion, landslides, hill slips and boulder falls. Protective structures such as retaining walls, boulder nets and river-training works are being thoroughly inspected and strengthened wherever necessary. Vegetation and bushes near bridges and track forma-

tions are also being cleared to facilitate effective monitoring and ensure better visibility during adverse weather conditions.

The monsoon safety drive includes intensified patrolling of vulnerable track sections, regular inspections of sensitive locations and deployment of watchmen at identified critical points. Adequate stocks of emergency materials, including sandbags, ballast and morrum, have been strategically positioned to enable swift response in case of any contingency.

Special attention is also being accorded to signalling and telecommunication systems, track circuits, relay rooms, point machines and location boxes to prevent disruptions arising from waterlogging and moisture ingress. Measures are being taken to ensure proper visibility of signals, trimming of overhanging tree branches and protection of electrical and signalling installations through effective earthing and surge protection arrangements.

In the traction and electrical sectors, detailed inspections of overhead equipment, switching posts, substations and locomotive equipment are being undertaken to safeguard against water ingress and maintain operational reliability during inclement weather.

UDF govt attempting to implement PM SHRI scheme: Sivankutty

Thiruvananthapuram, 8 May : CPIM leader and former state General Education Minister V Sivankutty on Monday hit out at the Kerala government for spreading "misinformation" regarding the Centre's PM SHRI scheme and alleged that the ruling UDF was attempting to implement the project despite earlier opposing it.

In a Facebook post, Sivankutty said when the Left was in power, the state had not received any funds under the PM SHRI (Pradhan Mantri Schools for Rising India) scheme as its implementation had never commenced in Kerala. "The state General Education Minister's claim that Kerala received funds under PM SHRI is a blatant lie. Kerala has not started the scheme and has not received even a single rupee for it," he said. His reaction came days after the present General Education Minister N Samsudheen had said that the present government was in a continuation of the previous administration, which had signed the agreement with the Centre and received funds under the scheme. "The previous government had signed the agreement and accepted the funds. So, we will examine the report before taking a final decision," Samsudheen, also a leader of the IUML, had said.

Explaining the process for implementing the scheme, Sivankutty said it involved signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU), identification of eligible schools through the designated portal, and submission of a list of selected schools to the Union Education Ministry for approval before funds could be sought. According to him, the previous LDF government signed the MoU only after the Centre allegedly linked the release of funds under the Samagra Shiksha Kerala (SSK) programme to participation in PM SHRI. However, he said the state later decided to freeze the agreement after finding that the scheme could be used to impose provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP), which the LDF opposed.

"The state had formally informed the Centre that the PM SHRI agreement was being frozen. That is why no further steps were taken," he said. The former minister also claimed that the Rs 92.41 crore released to Samagra Shiksha Kerala was not PM SHRI funding but an amount adjusted by the Centre from reimbursement dues payable under the Right to Education Act. He claimed that the previous government had met educational welfare commitments using funds from the state exchequer when central assistance was withheld. Accusing the UDF of adopting contradictory positions, the CPIM leader said the Congress-led front had opposed the scheme while in opposition but was now attempting to move ahead with it.

BJP eyes sweep in Gujarat RS polls as Cong faces wipeout

Ahmedabad, 8 May : All four BJP candidates on Monday filed their nomination papers for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections from Gujarat, and with Congress not contesting, their victory looks certain as of now.

With the term of Shaktisinh Gohil ending later this month, the Congress will not have any representative from Gujarat in the upper house of the Parliament. The four Rajya Sabha seats from Gujarat are falling vacant as the six-year terms of sitting MPs Rambhai Mokariya, Narhari Amin, and Ramilaben Bara (all from BJP), and Shaktisinh Gohil of Congress are ending on June 21.

Gohil is the lone Congress member from Gujarat in the Rajya Sabha. Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, Deputy CM Harsh Sanghvi, ministers, state BJP president Jagdish Vishwakarma and other senior leaders of the party were present when Rajubhai Shukla, Mansinh Parmar, Mukeshbhai Rathwa and Jitendra Kanjariya submitted their nomination papers at the assembly complex in Gandhinagar.

Shukla, 62, is currently in charge of the BJP's Surendranagar district unit. He had earlier served as president of the Kadi municipality and general secretary of the Mehsana district BJP. Tribal leader from Chhotaudapur district, Rathwa (39), currently serves as the general secretary of the BJP's district unit. Earlier, he was the vice-president of the BJP's youth wing. Parmar, 45, who hails from Gir Somnath district, is the BJP OBC Morcha's Gujarat unit president. Another prominent OBC leader, Kanjariya (39) hails from Devbhumi Dwarka district. He had earlier served as a member of a district panchayat executive committee. With the BJP having 161 MLAs in the 182-member Legislative Assembly and the Congress not fielding a candidate, the ruling party is set to win all four seats unopposed.

TN CM Vijay honours chess champion Praggnanandhaa with Rs 50 lakh

Bengaluru, 8 May : Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay on Monday honoured Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa with Rs 50 lakh, and tried his hand at a game with the 20-year-old city player at the Secretariat here, only to be checkmated by the youngster.

The Chief Minister felicitated Praggnanandhaa, who became the first Indian to win the prestigious Norway Chess title with a final round victory over Germany's Vincent Keymer in Oslo. He also played a game of chess with the young Grandmaster at his chamber in the Secretariat. The government released a video of the

grandmaster meeting Vijay with his parents.

As Vijay, completely absorbed in the game stood up beside his huge office table to make a strategic move to defend his king, Praggnanandhaa, the latter's parents, state Public Works and Sports Development Minister Aadhav Arjuna, and member secretary of Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu J Meghanatha Reddy, stood around watching. The final move by Praggnanadhaa showed Vijay's king being checkmated.

The Chief Minister put up a smile and applauded

his 'opponent'. Soon the onlookers too smiled and applauded as a beaming Praggnanandhaa looks at the Chief Minister, as seen in the video. Later, Vijay presented a cheque for Rs 50 lakh as cash incentive on behalf of SDAT to the young grandmaster for etching his name in history. "I didn't expect the Chief Minister to play chess; he played well. We played for about 15 minutes and I won," Praggnanandhaa told reporters. He said he was asked to bring a chessboard and the game was arranged for them to play. "The CM is very supportive and encouraging," he added.

Indian Railways Sanctions Upgradation of Electric Traction System on Mahbubnagar-Secunderabad-Medchal Section

DOI CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, 8 May : Indian Railways has sanctioned a significant project to enhance rail operations on the Mahbubnagar-Secunderabad-Medchal section of South Central Railway. Under the project, the existing 1x25 kV electric traction system will be upgraded to a modern 2x25 kV electric traction system. The work will be undertaken over this approximately 141 route kilometre rail section at a cost of ₹285.01 crore. The project is part of Indian Railways' ongoing

efforts to enhance capacity on busy rail corridors across the country. The introduction of the 2x25 kV system will provide a more stable and efficient power supply for train operations, making rail services smoother, safer and more reliable. The Mahbubnagar-Secunderabad-Medchal section is part of one of the country's important High-Density Network (HDN) routes. It falls on the Dharmavaram-Dhone-Mahbubnagar-Secunderabad-Medchal-Mudkhed-Indore-Ajmer rail corridor, which carries substantial passenger and freight traffic. Upon

completion, the project will further improve train operations on the route. Freight movement will become more efficient, enhancing both the speed and capacity of goods transportation. The project is also expected to support trade, industry and economic activity across the region. The initiative will further strengthen Indian Railways' commitment to developing a modern, future-ready rail network and will benefit both passengers and industry through improved rail infrastructure and operational efficiency.

Indian Railways Approves Mararikulam - Alappuzha Doubling Project at a Cost of ₹220 Crore

DOI CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, 8 May : In a significant step towards strengthening rail infrastructure and enhancing capacity on the Southern Railway network, Indian Railways has approved the doubling of the 10.65 km Mararikulam - Alappuzha section of Southern Railway at a sanctioned cost of ₹220.51 crore.

The project has been approved under the umbrella work for doubling, tripling, quadrupling, flyover and bypass works aimed at augmenting the capacity of the railway network. The Mararikulam - Alappuzha section is presently the only remaining single-line stretch on the Ernakulam - Turavur - Alappuzha - Ambala-

puzha - Kayankulam corridor, where other doubling works have already been commissioned or are under implementation.

Upon completion, the project is expected to facilitate the operation of 9 additional passenger trains in each direction per day and support freight traffic of 2.88 million tonnes per annum (MTPA). The doubling work is also projected to generate additional net earnings of approximately ₹3.08 crore annually through enhanced passenger and freight movement.

The project will significantly improve operational efficiency by reducing detention of both passenger and freight trains, leading to faster and smoother train operations on this important route. It

will also enhance line capacity, improve punctuality and strengthen connectivity across the region.

The proposal has been identified under Mission 3000 MT and the High Density Traffic Network Corridor of Indian Railways. The project has demonstrated strong economic viability, with a Financial Internal Rate of Return (FIRR) of 3.99% and an Economic Internal Rate of Return (EIRR) of 22.30%.

The approval reaffirms Indian Railways' commitment to expanding rail capacity, improving operational efficiency and supporting the socio-economic development of Kerala through modern and future-ready railway infrastructure.

Kharge calls for unity in INDIA bloc to confront challenges facing nation

New Delhi, 8 May : Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday urged opposition leaders to strengthen unity to confront the political, economic, social and foreign policy challenges facing the country due to the Modi government's "misgovernance".

Addressing a meeting of the Opposition INDIA bloc here, Kharge charged that the assault on the Constitution continues and probe agencies are persistently being used as tools to harass, intimidate, and bully political opponents. He also highlighted that the economic environment is extremely negative and new investments are not coming in at the

pace required to generate new jobs.

The Congress chief also pointed out to the "complete mismanagement" of the examination system due to which the hopes and aspirations of lakhs of youth are being betrayed. Batting for unity among Opposition leaders, he said: "On April 17, 2026, we demonstrated our unity and solidarity in the Lok Sabha in a very decisive manner, when we all came together firmly to defeat the Modi government's malicious bills on delimitation."

"Now we must strengthen that same spirit even further and move forward, so that we can con-

front the many political, economic, social, and foreign policy challenges facing the country due to the Modi government's misgovernance," Kharge said at the start of the meeting.

Slamming the special intensive revision of electoral rolls (SIR), he said the voting rights of millions of people are being "stripped away" due to it. "The assault on the Constitution continues unabated. Investigative agencies are being persistently used as tools to harass, intimidate, and bully political opponents," the Congress president alleged, adding discrimination is being meted out against non-BJP governments.

Ai+ Smartphone Turns Launch Into Open Trial: Nova2 Neo & Pro Reviewed Before Retail

No Embargo. No Talking Points. No Influencer Kits. No Sale Until Reviewers Have Spoken

DOI CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, 8 May : In a first-of-its-kind move for the Indian smartphone industry, Ai+ Smartphone today announced that it will send its upcoming Nova2 Neo and Nova2 Pro smartphones to reviewers, creators, journalists, and members of the technology community

across India before we open sales for trusted consumers - critique and review the devices without restrictions. In an industry built around launch events, Ai+ Smartphone is choosing something different - A conversation before a campaign, Feedback before a sale and Consumers before marketing. "At a time when product

launches are often accompanied by carefully controlled narratives, Ai+ is taking a different approach: putting consumer interest ahead of launch-day marketing. We don't want validation. We want unbiased feedback for user benefits," said MadhavSheth, CEO of Ai+ Smartphone and Founder of NxtQuantum Shift Technologies.

Kabuni launches global ai platform to Democratis elite cricket coaching

DOI CORRESPONDENT

Mumbai, 8 June : -Kabuni, a groundbreaking AI-powered global sports platform, has launched at its debut Playtime 2026 event in Mumbai, unveiling a new era of accessible, elite-level coaching for cricket fans at every level.

Positioned at the intersection of sport, technology and play, Kabuni introduces a world-first approach to training: delivering real-time, person-

alized coaching through advanced AI technology, enabling players of all levels to improve their performance anytime, anywhere.

Alongside the global launch, Kabuni has unveiled its Super Coaches - a roster of legendary cricketers including Sourav Ganguly, Shane Watson, AB de Villiers, and Shreyas Iyer - who will play a central role in inspiring and developing the next generation of players through interactive challenges and youth tournaments.

Cancellation of howrah-puri-howrah shatabdi express

DOI CORRESPONDENT

Bhubaneswar, 8 June : Due to the delay of the link train, Train No. 12278 Puri-Howrah Shatabdi Express will remain cancelled on 9th July 2026.

Similarly, Train No. 12277 Howrah-Puri Shatabdi Express will

also remain cancelled on 9th July 2026.

Passengers are advised to take note of the above changes and plan their journey accordingly. For updated train information, passengers may visit the National Train Enquiry System (NTES) or use official railway enquiry services before commencing their journey.

Cong accuses BJP of denying RS nomination to ex-PM Deve Gowda, Vijayendra refutes charge

Bengaluru, 8 June : The ruling Congress in Karnataka on Monday took a dig at the BJP, accusing the party of denying a Rajya Sabha nomination to JD-S patriarch and former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda from the state for a subsequent term.

The grand old party also claimed that the BJP insulted the people of Karnataka by denying Gowda the Rajya Sabha nomination. Late on Sunday, the BJP announced Prof M Nagaraja as its Rajya Sabha candidate from Karnataka, where the party can win one of the four seats going to polls on June 18, based on its current strength in the Assembly. The polls were necessary because four MPs, including Gowda are retiring later this month. The JD-S, an ally of the BJP was reportedly hoping the latter would re-nominate its supreme to the Rajya Sabha. "Yesterday in the dead of the night, BJP has denied a Rajya Sabha nomination to former Prime Minister, H D Deve Gowda, deciding to choose its state vice-president Incharge of District Building Construction, M Nagaraja over Ex PM," senior party leader and Congress in-charge of Karnataka, Ran-deep Singh Surjewala posted on 'X'.

"The constant humiliation heaped upon JD-S by BJP and its leadership and its repeated acceptance by H D Kumaraswamy merely for sticking to a ministerial chair at any cost is highly astonishing and eye-opening. Furthermore, accepting this insult is an absolute extreme," he said. Kumaraswamy is the son of Deve Gowda and union minister for Heavy Industries. Pointing out that in the May 2019 General Elections, BJP's G S Basavaraju had defeated Deve Gowda in Tumakuru Lok Sabha segment, the AICC leader said that the Congress and its leader Sonia Gandhi, despite their political differences and respecting his status as former Prime Minister who hailed from Karnataka, extended support to elect Gowda to the Upper

House. "In fact, Gowda had earlier said and maintained his strong opposition to the BJP, going to the extent of publicly stating that he would disown Kumaraswamy if he joined hands with the BJP," he said. Despite all these claims, in October 2023, JD-S and Kumaraswamy entered into an alliance with the BJP, and the latter became a Union Minister in the PM Modi government with the Heavy Industries portfolio, he further said.

Now, the BJP has "denied" a Rajya Sabha nomination to Gowda, choosing its leader over the former PM. "This tells us - power at any cost, power at all costs is the one and only motto of JD-S in Karnataka now," he added. State Congress president B K Hariprasad said the way the BJP denied Deve Gowda the Rajya Sabha seat is an insult not only to him or the regional party, but also to the people of Karnataka.

"The BJP and the NDA have insulted the people of Karnataka. No one expected them to betray like this after taking the support of JD (S) and Deve Gowda for passing various Bills in the Parliament. People will punish the BJP in the days ahead," he told reporters. However, Karnataka BJP president B Y Vijayendra on Monday said that a common worker who had honestly served the organisation had been nominated as the party candidate for the Rajya Sabha polls from Karnataka. Vijayendra clarified that the nomination of the former Prime Minister and JD-S patriarch Gowda was not discussed at the state unit level.

"Deve Gowda has worked to strengthen the NDA and support Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He is a senior leader, and we have immense respect for him. No discussions regarding Deve Gowda's Rajya Sabha nomination took place at the state unit level," Vijayendra said in response to a question, without commenting further on developments at the national level.