

All roads lead to dry Marathwada

GRABBING EYEBALLS All political parties in the state have either planned or have already visited the drought-hit region



HT Correspondent
■ htmetro@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: Be it for survey or as a token gesture, all political parties in the state are heading to the drought-hit Marathwada region, which faces an unprecedented water crisis that is set to worsen as summer advances.

In the first week of March, more than 20 ministers from the state cabinet visited the villages in Marathwada and also conducted a cabinet meeting at Latur to avoid criticism during the budget session. In a bid to show the government was serious in tackling drought, the government had announced various measures, including new water schemes and restructuring of loans of farmers for Marathwada. Last week, Shiv Sena president Uddhav Thackeray visited Marathwada and attended a community wedding ceremony. His estranged cousin and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray is on a ten-day tour of the parched region. Although he has been getting flak for scheduling the tour around his hearings, Raj has been using the opportunity to attack the state over its "failed policies".

Nationalist Congress Party MP Supriya Sule also visited the villages in drought-affected areas on Thursday and Friday. Demanding the water supply to liquor factories be cut, she said proper planning by the government would have minimized the impact of water shortage. Leaders of opposition in both the houses, Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil, Dhananjay Munde, and others, too, have paid a visit to the distressed region and attacked the government for its failure to mitigate drought.

During the six-week budget



■ Latur residents have to wait in a queue for at least five-six hours to get drinking water.

SATISH BATE/HT PHOTOS



■ A tanker provided by the Latur municipal corporation.

session, the Opposition ensured the drought situation was debated and the government was made to reply on various subjects every week.

Meanwhile, Congress state

chief Ashok Chavan on Friday said their key leaders would tour the drought affected areas between May 5 and 7. "The state has failed in getting adequate resources to fight the drought,"



■ NCP MP Supriya Sule interacts with farmers in drought-hit Ambejogai village in Beed on Friday.

PTI PHOTOS

he said. "The Congress leaders will tour the areas and assess the ground reality. We will also check if the announcements made during the cabinet meeting at Latur have been fulfilled."

He said former chief ministers Prithviraj Chavan, Narayan Rane, and other leaders namely Patangrao Kadam and Harshavardhan Patil will participate in the tour.

VISITING HOURS

Days after Shiv Sena president Uddhav Thackeray visited Marathwada, his cousin and MNS chief Raj Thackeray is on a ten-day tour of the parched region

NCP MP Supriya Sule, alongwith other NCP leaders, was in the region on Friday

The Congress plans to send a team of key leaders, including former chief ministers Prithviraj Chavan, Ashok Chavan, Narayan Rane, and other leaders namely Patangrao Kadam and Nitin Raut to Marathwada on May 5

During the six-week budget session, the Opposition ensured the drought situation was debated and the government was made to reply on various subjects every week.

COMPLAINT AGAINST WATER MAFIA



After BJP MP Kirit Somaiya (left) and MLA Ashish Shelar (right) raised the issue of tanker mafia in the city, Vivekanand Gupta, secretary, BJP, Mumbai, has now registered a complaint naming a few tanker suppliers at the Andheri police station

The letter states all officers and engineers involved in supplying potable water illegally to these water suppliers should be caught

Shelar had on Thursday demanded a criminal case be registered against the tanker mafia

He had said 16,890 million litres of water is lost every month to theft and misuse by water tanker owners.

Take back 2 lakes reclaimed by BJP MP: Court to state

HT Correspondent
■ htmetro@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: The Bombay high court (HC) on Friday directed the state to take over two lakes at Eksar in Borivli, whose size was reduced purportedly by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Gopal Shetty to carry out unauthorised construction work.

A division bench of justice Abhay Oka and justice Prakash Naik was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by activists Edwin Britto and Meera Kamath, alleging the smaller of the two lakes was reclaimed completely and the other was reduced in size to create an unauthorised walkway. The petitioner alleged after the unauthorised construction, the area was handed over to Poisar Gymkhana, which is controlled by the MP.

According to the PIL, the revenue and forest department in September 2007 granted Shetty the permission to beautify both the lakes. In May 2008, the collector and the department refused permission to reclaim the smaller lake and to carry out construction over it, but following a minister's remarks in August 2008, they were given a nod to construct up to an FSI of 0.4, alleged the PIL.

The judges held there was gross illegality in the manner a lake disappeared and the size of another was reduced to its two-thirds, after the MP carried out the beautification work without permission from the civic authorities. The constructions included a statue of Rani Laxmibai, a walking track along the border of the bigger lake and boating facilities. The Poisar Gymkhana is charging an entry fee and extra for the boating facilities.

The judges said while it was true the surroundings of the bigger lake were beautified using



THE PIL STATES

A PIL filed by activists Edwin Britto and Meera Kamath, alleging the smaller of the two lakes (in pic) at Eksar in Borivli was reclaimed completely and the other was reduced in size to create an unauthorised walkway. The petitioner alleged the beautified area was handed over to Poisar Gymkhana.

the MLA fund, neither Shetty nor the gymkhana can claim any right over the land and lakes. It added if the gymkhana wants to continue with its possession, it will have to send an application to the collector for grant of permission, subject to a condition that the original area of both the lakes will be restored.

The court directed the collector to decide, if any such application is made within six weeks. The HC has now directed the government to take both the lakes in its possession and take steps to demolish the unauthorised construction put up by encroaching upon the lakes, and restore the lakes to their original size within nine months. The court has granted the Mumbai suburban district collector four months to take possession of the lakes.

KANHAIYA KUMAR EVENT WILL BE HELD AT CHEMBUR



HT Correspondent
■ htmetro@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: After being turned down by various hall owners, student leader Kanhaiya Kumar has finally found a venue to address students in Mumbai on Saturday — Adarsh Vidyalaya, a school in Chembur.

Kanhaiya, president of the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union, shot to fame, when he was slapped with sedition charges. Kumar will be speaking at a convention organized by the All India Youth Federation (AIYF) on the 'dissent in the universities and the resistance on them'. Kumar will speak at the Bal Gandharva auditorium in Pune on Sunday. "We finally overcame all hurdles and the event is happening," said Prethy Shekhar, state secretary, Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), one of the Left outfits.

However, on Friday, the Chembur police station refused to accept the application intimating them about the event. Finally, the organisers got police commissioner Dattatray Padsalgar to intervene. "Some people are spreading baseless rumours via social media that the police are hostile towards the programme. We would like to state a no-objection certificate (NOC) is required from the person, whose place will be used for the programme. Once that is issued, we can provide security depending on the need," read a statement issued by the Mumbai police.

While the state BJP has maintained silence, both the Sena and MNS have taken a neutral stand. The search for a venue was a Herculean task as managements and owners of prominent halls in the city refused to rent out their premises for the meeting. Janata Shikshan Sanstha in Worli was finalised earlier, but the police imposed stringent conditions, which the organisers were not okay with. Finding a venue in Pune, too, was not easy. Rashtra Sewa Dal ground was the original venue, but the Pune police objected to it citing security concerns. Finally, Pune mayor and NCP leader Prashant Jagtap got the venue.

Hrithik-Kangana spat: Cops to get US service provider to help nail imposter

HT Correspondent and Agencies
■ htmetro@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: The Mumbai police's cyber cell has moved a step closer to identifying who created a fake email ID that is at the centre of a spat between actors Hrithik Roshan and Kangana Ranaut.

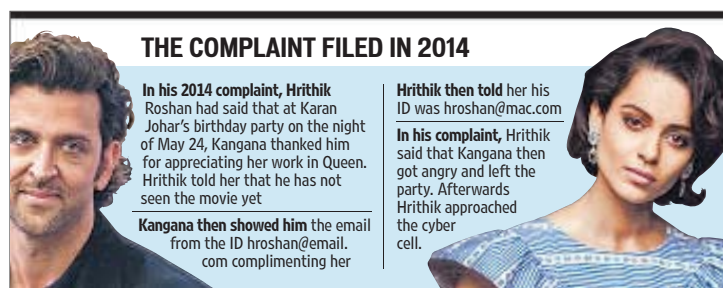
The cyber cell has got a court order that will enable it to get the US-based service provider to disclose who is behind the email ID hroshan@email.com, which Hrithik says an imposter was using to communicate with Kangana.

The two actors have been trading charges over emails that both now say they did not write. Hrithik's lawyers say the email ID hroshan@email.com to which Kangana reportedly sent explicit messages (some of which were leaked to the press on Thursday) is not his and that he had complained to the police about the fake ID as far

back as 2014. Kangana's camp says that she had nothing to do with the emails as her email account was hacked.

On March 25, the Mumbai police's cyber cell registered a FIR against unknown persons for impersonating Hrithik by creating a fake email ID in his name and using it to chat with his fans posing as the actor. This was after Hrithik's father Rakesh Roshan approached the police with a written complaint reminding them of the complaint made in December 2014 to initiate action against the miscreant.

In his 2014 complaint Hrithik had said that at Karan Johar's birthday party on the night of May 24, Kangana thanked him for appreciating her work in Queen. Hrithik told her that he has not seen the movie yet. Kangana then showed him the email from the ID hroshan@email.com complimenting her. Hrithik then told her his



ID was hroshan@mac.com. In his complaint, Hrithik said that Kangana then got angry and left the party. Afterwards Hrithik approached the cyber cell.

After the FIR was registered this March, the police issued summons to Ranaut, asking her to record her statement. However, her lawyer said Kangana would not accept the summons as the

cops had no legal right to ask her to appear before them. The police then withdrew the summons and requested Kangana to record her statement, which she is scheduled to do on April 30.

On Thursday after excerpts of the purported email exchanges were leaked to the press, Kangana's lawyer Rizwan Siddiquee issued a statement saying, "My client is

bold enough to admit and accept the emails which were genuinely communicated to Hrithik on his correct email id, only once she verifies the contents of the same. "Until such verification and acceptance on the part of my client, any emails circulated by Hrithik to the media in an effort to tarnish my client's name and image or to put pressure on her

and/or to outrage her modesty should be treated as fabricated."

The spat began when Kangana recently hinted at Hrithik being her 'ex' when she said in an interview that she fails to understand "why exes do silly things to get your attention". Siddiquee's statement read: "Hrithik needs to understand that by circulating such unreliable emails or by asking my client to relinquish all her legal rights and liberties and quietly record her statement with the police without asking any questions, proves the extent of his desperation and nothing else. "If he really wants to clear his public image, then he should answer all questions publicly and not keep quiet on the main subject matter of his notice. Such acts of deviation or putting pressure will not work with my client. His acts of commissions and omissions have proved it all, so far. Hope better sense prevails before it is too late."

On Friday, IANS quoted Hrithik's lawyers as saying they would prove their client had no relationship with Kangana. "The facts have been now presented to the authorities. Let's not get confused in this war of words. We will prove that our client Hrithik Roshan has had no relationship with Kangana Ranaut. We have presented solid evidences of this nature to the investigating authorities. They should present any credible evidence if they have to those who are authorised to investigate this matter. We are not interested in playing the game of notices and counter-notices. We are only pursuing this to bring out the correct facts and that will happen through bonafide investigation. Facts will very soon come out. We would like to remind that this case is not about man vs woman, powerful vs weak, it's about lie vs truth," IANS quoted the lawyers as saying.

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SC sets aside HC order on Ulhas river

Snehal Fernandes
■ snehal.fernandes@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: Boosting efforts to protect the Ulhas river, the Supreme Court (SC) has stayed all orders passed by the Bombay high court (HC) on the river that were contrary to the directions passed by the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

While issuing notices to various government agencies and municipal corporations responsible to keep the river free of pollution, a division bench of justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose and justice Amitava Roy stated, "In the meantime, the operation of the impugned order shall remain stayed".

In 2013, NGO Vanashakti filed a petition with the NGT to direct the Maharashtra Pollution Control Board to shut all polluting industries discharging untreated effluents into the Ulhas river in violation of environmental rules. "With the state and the country rapidly moving towards a water crisis, it is imperative that we do everything to protect our remaining rivers," said Stalin D, the petitioner.

The special leave petition (SLP) filed by Vanashakti with the SC, challenging the decision of HC to admit the petition stated, "The directions given by the NGT have been virtually brushed



■ The Ulhas river.

HT FILE

aside (by the HC) without consideration. No reference is made to all reports filed before the NGT, which forms the basis of the NGT order. The impugned order of the High Court completely undermines the order of the NGT without saying in what manner the NGT order was wrong."

It was in a significant order last July that the tribunal's western bench invoking the principle of 'polluter pays' directed various government agencies to cough up Rs95 crore to restore and compensate for polluting the Ulhas river. In addition, the NGT had also constituted a committee headed by the divisional commissioner to submit an action plan including preventive, remedial and restoration measures for the river.

Following this, the government agencies moved the HC, which stayed the tribunal's order of depositing the said amount, and constituted another committee above the one formed by the tribunal. Vanashakti then filed the SLP



■ A procession to mark Hanuman Jayanti, at Vile Parle on Friday.

PRAMOD THAKUR/HT PHOTO

DGCA finally brings drones under safety radar

Soubhik Mitra
■ soubhik.mitra@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: India's aviation safety regulator has for the first time brought drones under its radar.

A draft circular issued by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Friday looks at plugging the grey area over use of unmanned aircraft (UA) in Indian skies. In the absence

of guidelines, there have been many safety scares sparked off by drones straying into the flight path of passengers' planes, but the police were unable to book offenders, said officials.

The DGCA has invited feedback on the circular for a month, after which it will become a civil aviation requirement or an aviation regulation. "We had received many complaints of drones being flown

close to airports. Now, people using UAs will have to be aware of the multiple permissions needed to be taken and the police will get a rulebook to charge offenders," said a DGCA official.

Just like every aircraft has a registration number, drones will get a unique identification number, read the circular. Companies using these devices will have to procure a UA opera-

tor permit. Foreigners will not be eligible for this permit, it added. "The applications for these permits will go through massive scrutiny because drone operations could pose a huge security threat," said another DGCA official. The regulator has also put an age cap on people permitted to fly drones, as manufacturing of UAs is part of practical curriculum of many engineering

colleges. "Children seem to fly drones as a fun activity, so an age restriction for issuing permits is essential," said an independent air safety expert.

Among other primary requirements, UA operators will have to take prior permissions from security agencies, local police and follow notice to airmen (NOTAM) issued by the air traffic control (ATC) towers for operating drones.

Rape attempt at Grant Road hotel: 19-yr-old arrested

Sagar Rajput
■ sagar.rajput@hindustantimes.com

MUMBAI: Krunal Desai, 19, the accused allegedly involved in the rape attempt on a 17-year-old student at a hotel near Grant Road station, was arrested from Gujarat on Friday.

Desai allegedly called the girl to the spot on Tuesday, threatening to circulate her morphed images on social networking sites and Whatsapp, if she refused. Scared, the girl went with her friend to meet Desai. The accused attempted to rape her inside the hotel room. When she resisted, he assaulted and strangled her, after which she fell unconscious. Desai left the spot

thinking she was dead, said the police.

An officer from the police station, "The accused may have been in love with the girl, but as she turned down his advances, he may have taken such an extreme step."

Police said Desai had booked a room in the hotel a month ago. "Desai didn't call up his family at Tardeo since Tuesday, instead visited his relatives in Gujarat. We traced his location on the basis of Desai's call from a PCO in Gujarat," said the officer. Netaji Bhopale, senior inspector, Gamdevi police station, said, "We are now trying to find out whether he has been involved in any such incident in the past."