

2 Malayalis among 7 dead in B'luru following wall collapse due to rain

K'taka CM orders probe; announces compensation of ₹5 lakh to families of the victims

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

THE downpour in Bengaluru on Wednesday evening claimed the lives of seven people, including a six-year-old girl, and left nine others injured when a compound wall of Bowring and Lady Curzon Hospital on Chandni Chowk Road opposite St Mary's Basilica in Shivajinagar collapsed.

The deceased included three women and four men, while the injured, who are undergoing treatment, are stable. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has ordered a probe into the incident.

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said six of the victims were from Kerala who had come to the city to conduct an awareness programme on nutrition. "I was told that the local residents informed them it would rain and they had gone to purchase raincoats when the wall collapsed on them," he said.

"We will speak to the Kerala government and ensure a smooth handover of the bodies." The wall collapsed around 5.30 pm when the rain was most intense. The 8 ft high and 20 ft wide wall, built with cement hollow blocks, collapsed on street vendors and others taking shelter from the rain. The fire department and civic authorities had to use an earthmover to remove the debris and retrieve the bodies.

Mohammed Suhail, elder brother of deceased 30-year-old Fayaz Pasha, said that they have been selling chappals next to the compound wall for the last 15 years.

"I was just 10 feet away. The wall suddenly collapsed on my brother and many others. My brother who was trapped was rushed to the emergency ward of the hospital, but he was declared dead on arrival. My brother has two children - a three-year-old and one-year-old," he added.

Syed Akbar, a local vendor, said people could not lift the heavy cement blocks to rescue those trapped under. "The wall was almost two decades old and was in a dilapidated condition. Those under the debris could be moved only after an earthmover was pressed into service," he added.

City Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh said the police received the information around 5.30 pm.



The wall of Bowring and Lady Curzon Hospital that collapsed due to heavy rain at Shivajinagar in Bengaluru on Wednesday | NAGARAJA GADEKAL

Deceased Keralites part of study tour group of Kudumbashree

RONNIE KURIAKOSE @Kochi

THE Malayalis who died after the wall collapse in Bengaluru have been identified as Smita and Latha, natives of Ramamangalam in Ernakulam district. They were part of a Kudumbashree group on a study tour to the city. Three other members of the group, Preetha, Siji and Maya suffered injuries and are undergoing treatment. "We are connecting with the team and doing the needful," a Kudumbashree staffer told TNIE.

"We were a group of 56 members who came to Bengaluru for a study tour. We are part of the Kudumbashree's Nutrimix group in Ernakulam. We came to Shivajinagar in the evening for some shopping before we made our way back. Because of the sudden downpour, the group got separated and took shelter wherever they could find.

Some were near the wall. Because of the intensity of the wind and rain, the wall of Bowring and Lady Curzon Hospital came crashing down on them. Rescue efforts were under way immediately, and we took them to the same hospital. It is an unfortunate incident," Anoop K M, who was part of the study tour, told TNIE.

"Two died and three suffered minor injuries. The injured are stable. Arrangements have been made to send the bodies to Ernakulam. We will depart tonight itself. The Kerala government and the larger Kudumbashree family were very supportive," he said. Following the incident, Congress leader K C Venugopal held talks with Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, seeking the best possible treatment for the injured, compensation for the victims' families and arrangements to shift the bodies to Kerala.

HC upholds age cap in surrogacy, terms it 'reasonable restriction'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Kochi

THE Kerala High Court has held that the age limits prescribed for intending parents and surrogate mothers are meant to ensure safe pregnancies, healthy childbirth, and the well-being of both the surrogate mother and the child. The court observed that the age criteria under the Surrogacy Act are reasonable restrictions designed to promote safe medical practices and minimise health risks associated with surrogacy procedures for the intending couple, surrogate mother, and child.

The remarks were made while dismissing a petition filed by a couple challenging the constitutional validity of the upper age limit imposed on intending parents. In the present case, the wife was aged 44 and the husband was aged 57. Though married in 2006, they had no children. Since the husband had crossed the upper age

SAFE MEDICAL PRACTICES AIM

The court observed that the age criteria under the Surrogacy Act are reasonable restrictions designed to promote safe medical practices and minimise health risks associated with surrogacy procedures for the intending couple, surrogate mother, and child.

limit of 55 years, the couple was not eligible to avail surrogacy. The petitioners currently have three viable cryo-preserved embryos at a private hospital. The only medically viable option available to the couple is gestational surrogacy. However, due to the upper age restriction, they are unable to proceed with the surrogacy procedure on the ground that the husband has crossed the prescribed age limit. The Central government sub-

mitted that the upper age limits for men and women were fixed after consultation, expert studies, and extensive deliberation. The age limits were stipulated to balance the interests of the parents and the child, while also considering delayed marriages in India. The social impact as well as health aspects were also taken into account. The restrictions regarding age are essential to prevent situations where the child may be exposed to risks associated with potential parental age-related concerns, such as health complications or inability to provide adequate care, submitted the Central government.

The court observed that unregulated reproductive practices can lead to serious harm. It held that the age restrictions are not arbitrary and strike a careful balance between individual choice and public health. Reproductive rights, though fundamental, are not absolute and are subject to reasonable restrictions, it said.

EXPRESS READ

Chargesheet soon in case against Ranjith

Kochi: The Special Investigation Team (SIT) has completed its probe into the sexual assault case against filmmaker Ranjith and will soon file a chargesheet before the court. SIT officials said sufficient evidence has been gathered against Ranjith in connection with the alleged sexual assault. Meanwhile, the investigation team has given a clean chit to actor Bobby Kurien and assistant director Shalini.

KERALA FILM CRITICS AWARDS

Eko tops; Mohanlal, Kalyani and Anaswara adjudged best actors

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @T'Puram

EMERGING the top winner at the 49th Kerala Film Critics Awards, Eko, directed by Dinjith Ayyathar and produced by MRK Jayaram bagged the Best Film award for 2025.

Dominic Arun was chosen the Best Director for Lokah: Chapter 1 - Chandra, while Mohanlal won Best Actor for his performances in Thudarum and Hridayapoorvam. The Best Actress award was shared by Kalyani Priyadarshan for Lokah: Chapter 1 - Chandra and Anaswara Rajan for Rekachitram and Mr & Mrs Bachelor.

Playback singer and composer MG Sreekumar was selected for the Chalachitra Ratnam lifetime achievement award.

Filmmaker Priyadarshan will receive the Ruby Jubilee Award, instituted to mark the 40th year of the Kerala Film Critics Association, in recognition of his contributions to Malayalam cinema.

The Chalachitra Prathibha honours will be conferred on actor-producer TG Ravi, actor-costumer Indrans, lyricist Kaitthapram Damodaran Namboothiri, production controller Kalliyoor Sasi, actor Urmila Unni, and singer B Arundhathi.

Rekhachitram was named Second Best Film.

In acting categories, Prakash Varma (Thudarum) and Dileesh Pothan (Ronth) shared the Best Supporting Actor (Male) award, while Henry Rose (Rachel) and



Subha Vayanad (Santhi: The Reflection of Truth) won Best Supporting Actor (Female).

Special Jury Awards for excellence in acting went to Sangeeth Prathap (Hridayapoorvam), Sandeep Pradeep (Eko), Manoj Govindan (Periyon), Twinkle Joby (A Pregnant Widow), and Meenakshi (Private).

Among technical categories, Jakes Bejoy was chosen the Best Music Director for Narivetta and Lokah: Chapter 1 - Chandra. Sithara Krishnakumar and J R Divya Nair shared the Best Playback Singer (Female) award, while Navneeth Unnikrishnan won Best Playback Singer (Male).

Sarvam Maya was announced as the Best Popular Film. Daivathankunnu and Pachatheyyam won Best Children's Film. Victoria was recognised as Best Film on Women Empowerment, while Khidki Gaav won for National Integration.

Baby Devananda Jibin won Best Child Artist (female) (Kalyanamaram) and G R Indugopan won the best story award. (Ponman) Awards were also presented for films focusing on environmental issues, social relevance, and strong messaging.

Trip-off, not loadshedding: Power min

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @T'Puram

CITING the difference in technical terms, Power Minister K Krishnankutty on Wednesday commented that the upcoming power cuts in the state are power tripping off, and not loadshedding. "When overusage of power happens, tripping off will take place. This cannot be called loadshedding," the minister said in a press meet held here on Wednesday. Terming climatic shift as the root cause of the ongoing power crisis, Krishnankutty also added that the Kerala State Electricity Regulatory Commission is responsible for the delay in purchase of power.

Mentioning that the power crisis came as an unexpected blow, the minister said that this should not be used to allege that no developments were made during the course of the Left government. "One should not blame that we didn't do a thing for power production. The hydel project was having only 20 megawatt capacity, which has now been raised to 175 megawatt. All of this was done anticipating a surge. Did anyone expect such a heat wave, or that the crisis in the Middle East would happen?" he said.



A local vendor offers a plate of freshly cut fruits to a tourist unwinding on Kovalam beach in Thiruvananthapuram | B P DEEPU

When we somehow get a nod for a dam, one person will come wearing a bag. If they say that it will be difficult for birds to fly because of this, won't all the media and controversy be behind it

K Krishnankutty Power Minister

The minister also commented that the increased use of electric vehicles and people's shift to induction cookers following the LPG crisis also accelerated the current scenario.

In a controversial take, the minister also criticised that environmentalists obstruct major

Milma okays ₹4 hike, dairy farmers need to wait as rollout stalled

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @T'Puram

MILMA has decided to raise milk prices by Rs 4 per litre, but dairy farmers waiting for immediate relief will have to wait longer as the cooperative has left the implementation date hanging.

The Board of Directors approved the hike at its meeting on Wednesday, formalising a recommendation that the government had recently cleared. However, Milma chairman and managing director K S Mani said the exact date of implementation would only be decided after the current election code of conduct ends, adding that the incoming governing body under the new government would take the final call.

The uncertainty drew a sharp response from members of the Ernakulam Regional Co-operative Milk Producers' Union, who had been pressing for immediate implementation. They walked out of the board meeting in protest.

Election code of conduct

Milma chairman and managing director K S Mani said the exact date of implementation would only be decided after the current election code of conduct ends, adding that the incoming governing body under the new government would take the final call.

The decision comes after a prolonged tussle between Milma and the government. The cooperative had originally sought a hike of between Rs 4 and Rs 6 per litre, with regional unions arguing that rising costs of cattle feed, labour, and essentials, combined with falling milk output during summer, had pushed dairy farmers into a serious crisis. The government had initially blocked the increase citing election timing, triggering public protests including a demonstration by the Ernakulam Regional Union at Milma headquarters. It eventually relented and granted permission following persistent pressure.



Six months needed to complete fireworks blast probe: Justice

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Kochi

JUSTICE C N Ramachandran Nair, heading the judicial probe into the Mundathiccode fireworks unit blast, on Wednesday said that the inquiry would require at least six months, citing the need for a detailed and comprehensive examination.

As part of the initial steps, he will hold discussions with the district collector and the police commissioner. Underscoring the complexity of the investigation, Justice Nair said the findings would have long-term implications for devaswoms, temple committees, and religious institutions, all of whom would be heard in detail.

Pointing to the challenges, he noted that 16 people died in the incident and only a small number of individuals had direct knowledge of what

transpired. "Even the person who conducted the fireworks display is among the deceased. These are serious limitations," he said.

The probe will examine whether the blast originated within the fireworks storage area or was triggered by external factors. It will also look into whether the incident occurred during the process of tightly packing and hammering fireworks to enhance their sound and explosive impact. While the police are already investigating the cause, the judicial inquiry will independently examine all aspects of the incident.

Justice Nair observed that reducing the use of explosive materials could significantly limit the scale of such accidents. Referring to the findings of the Puttingal fireworks tragedy commission, he noted that it remains unclear whether the government intends to impose stricter curbs or a ban on fireworks. "Fireworks are used across the world, but the emphasis elsewhere is on colours and visual display. Here, the focus is largely on sound, which requires higher explosive content," he said, highlighting a key safety concern.

Artist alleges ban on temple programmes after IUML entry

LAKSHMI ATHIRA @Malappuram

SOPANA musician Njeralath Harigovindan has alleged that he was barred from participating in temple programmes after joining the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML). He said he was excluded from five temple events he had been scheduled to attend in April. While maintaining that he has no complaints or regrets over the decision following his political shift, he raised concerns about the larger direction of society.

Harigovindan said he began receiving phone calls from acquaintances associated with the CPM soon after joining the IUML.

"They told me that the Muslim League is a communal party. Later, I was trolled online and AI-generated images of me wearing caps associated with the Muslim community were circulated. That was the most hurtful experience. The police should take strict action against those creating such content, as it can fuel communal polarisation," he said. He added that several of

his scheduled performances were cancelled in the aftermath. "Many of my bookings were stage programmes where I demonstrate sopana music instruments and perform poems I have written. However, several temple committees, many of which are governed by CPM and RSS supporters, informed me that some members were uncomfortable with my participation after I joined the Muslim League," he said.

Harigovindan said he views the Muslim League as a democratic party. "Some even suggest that I converted to Islam because I joined the party. That is not true," he said.

Citing the housewarming ceremony of the Chooralmalam-Mundakkai landslide survivors, he said the event reflected the party's secular approach. "At the township, all beneficiaries were treated equally, irrespective of their religious background. A section of CPM and RSS supporters is unable to accept that the Muslim League functions as a secular democratic party. This attitude must change," he said.



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