

INBRIEF



Amit Shah chairs meeting with Gujarat BJP leaders

Union Home Minister Amit Shah visited Gujarat BJP headquarters, Kamalam, in Gandhinagar on Thursday and held a meeting with the State unit's top leadership. During his visit, Mr. Shah met the senior party leadership for nearly an hour and half, a source said. Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and Deputy CM Harsh Sanghavi attended the meeting, along with State BJP president Jagdish Vishwakarma and other senior office bearers. Mr. Shah, who was in Ahmedabad to offer prayers at Lord Jagannath temple before the beginning of the 149th Rath Yatra early this morning, went to Kamalam late in the afternoon.

Delhi court allows jailed MP Rashid to attend Parliament

A Delhi court on Thursday allowed jailed Lok Sabha MP Engineer Rashid to attend the Monsoon Session of Parliament in custody on all dates. Special Judge (NIA) Prashant Sharma was hearing the plea filed by Rashid seeking custody parole to attend the upcoming parliamentary session scheduled from July 20 to August 13 and allowed the plea. Custody parole entails a prisoner being escorted by armed police personnel to his place of visit. Rashid was arrested for allegedly funding separatists and terror groups in Jammu and Kashmir. He has been lodged in Delhi's Tihar Jail since 2019.

BJP to hold protests against J&K govt. coinciding with NC's Delhi agitation demanding Statehood

Peerzada Ashiq

The J&K BJP has announced to hold Union Territory-wide protests on July 20, which coincides with the ruling National Conference's (NC) proposed sit-in at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi over the demands for Statehood and constitutional guarantees. The State unit of the Congress has supported the NC's move.

The BJP is preparing to organise protests over the J&K government's "outsourcing of jobs" and will assemble outside the Civil Secretariat in Srinagar on July 20.

"J&K's youth deserve merit, not outsourcing and backdoor appointments. We will gherao the Civil Secretariat in Srinagar on July 20 and raise a voice for transparent recruitment



CM Omar Abdullah

and justice," said BJP spokesman Manzoor Bhat.

In Jammu, senior BJP leader and Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma held a meeting of office bearers and district presidents at the party headquarters. A BJP spokesman said Mr. Sharma reviewed the organisational work and upcoming programmes.

"The BJP's stand is clear and consistent. Article 370 is history, and Jammu & Kashmir is moving forward on the path of peace and

PM Modi to flag off India's first hydrogen-powered train from Haryana's Jind

Unlike traditional trains, it generates its own power through chemical reaction between hydrogen and atmospheric oxygen; PM will also inaugurate, lay foundation of projects worth ₹25,000 crore

The Hindu Bureau

In a push towards sustainable transport, modern healthcare, and advanced connectivity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit Haryana, Chandigarh, and Punjab on Friday on a day-long tour in which he will unveil initiatives valued at over ₹25,000 crore. The highlight of the multi-State visit will be the flagging-off of India's first-ever hydrogen-powered fuel cell train at Jind in Haryana.

Designed and integrated indigenously, this 10-coach train is among the world's longest and most powerful hydrogen-fuelled passenger trainsets, powered by a 3,200 horsepower propulsion system.

New expressways

Unlike traditional trains, it generates its own electricity onboard through a chemical reaction between hydrogen and atmospheric



India's first hydrogen-powered train, the NaMo Green Rail, is ready for operations on Jind-Sonipat route in Haryana.

oxygen, leaving behind water vapour.

Besides, the Prime Minister will proceed to the Eklayva Stadium in Jind to lay foundation stones and dedicate to the nation national highway projects worth ₹12,470 crore, including Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway, a 157.92 kilometre, four-lane access-controlled stretch built at a cost of ₹9,680 crore, slashing the Delhi to Katra travel time from 14 hours to six hours and

Jind-Gohana Greenfield Highway (NH-352A) which will reduce transit times from two hours to just 40 minutes.

Mr. Modi will also lay foundation stone for a state-of-the-art Sikh museum in Kurukshetra, celebrating the legacy of the Sikh gurus, alongside the new medical colleges in Bhiwani and Narnaul that will be dedicated to the nation.

In the afternoon, the Prime Minister will arrive

in Chandigarh to inaugurate and commission healthcare and road infrastructure projects worth ₹4,700 crore.

Tertiary health centres

The infrastructure includes PGIMER Chandigarh's Advanced Mother and Child Centre, a 300-bed tertiary care facility tailored for high-risk pregnancies and intensive newborn treatment along with an advanced neuroscience centre, which will be an integrated hub offering neurology, neurosurgery, and neuro-critical care diagnostics under a single roof. Prime Minister Modi will also lay the foundation stone of PM-ABHIM Critical Care Block, a 150-bed emergency response and disaster backup facility.

Mr. Modi will also inaugurate the six-lane greenfield highway from IT City to Kurali (Mohali) to streamline inter-State transit between Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir.

Will not tolerate graft, Vijay warns Ministers, officials

The Hindu Bureau

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Thursday warned his Cabinet colleagues and senior officials that he will not tolerate corruption or irregularities in their departments.

Sources said the CM made it clear during a Cabinet meeting that he would not hesitate to take action against anyone found guilty and that no one could fault him for doing so.

According to a source, Mr. Vijay told officials that they should not think "we will be in power for only five years and that you can do whatever you want; we will continue to govern the State". He also advised Ministers not to make a spectacle out of inspections related to their departments. "We are here to serve the people. Don't bring the government into disrepute. I will also take action against officials unwilling to cooperate with the government in implementing its programmes and achieving its goals," Mr. Vijay said.

Details of the upcoming State Budget were also discussed during the Cabinet meeting. Addressing re-



Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay chairing a Cabinet meeting in Chennai on Thursday.

porters later, Law Minister R. Nirmalkumar said it was a routine meeting ahead of the Budget. "Deliberations were held on what should be included in the Budget and how it should be presented. These matters cannot be disclosed publicly yet," he said.

'Political pact'

Claiming that M.K. Stalin's DMK, the AIADMK led by general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami, and the BJP were trying to form a government together, the Minister said, "Unable to run their own parties, the DMK and the AIADMK might merge with the BJP in two or three years, securing, perhaps, two Cabinet Minister posts each for Mr. Stalin's family and Mr. Palaniswami's family."

SC closes Tamil Nadu rolls revision case after Bihar verdict

The Hindu Bureau

The Supreme Court on Thursday closed the proceedings on 13 petitions filed by political parties and leaders challenging the conduct of a special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Tamil Nadu.

Petitions disposed of

A Bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant took note of submissions by petitioners that the case did not require further adjudication in view of the apex court judgment in the Bihar SIR. The Bench then disposed of all 13 petitions on the issue.

On May 27, a Bench headed by the CJI delivered its judgment on a batch of petitions challenging SIR in Bihar and upheld its power to conduct the exercise by the Election

Commission. It had held the exercise "breathes life" into the constitutional mandate for fair elections and advanced the "constitutional imperative of free and fair elections".

The parties, including the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, had challenged the SIR as a "de novo citizenship verification process" which ran the risk of disenfranchising lakhs of voters in the State.

The petitioners had referred to the "unilateral imposition" of the intensive exercise without consultation with State governments as an "erosion of the federal structure".

'State's role reduced'

"Tamil Nadu's role has been reduced to a mere executing agency, despite the measure's significant implications for its electorate," one of the petitions had contended.

13 Bangladeshi nationals held in Gurugram sent to Bengal for deportation proceedings: police

Press Trust of India

Thirteen alleged Bangladeshi nationals residing illegally in Gurugram have been apprehended, and a special escort team is en route to West Bengal's border town of Malda with them for their handover to the authorities concerned, police said on Thursday.

Special drive

Officers said the individuals were identified by the Crime Branch, Sector-39, under the Gurugram police's special verification drive targeting Bangladeshi nationals residing here illegally.

Those found with suspicious documents or those unable to produce valid proof of lawful residence in India will face legal action as per the provisions of law, they said, adding that the



Police personnel with 13 alleged Bangladeshi nationals detained during a special verification drive in Gurugram.

process to deport the 13 alleged immigrants has been initiated.

All necessary security arrangements have been made to ensure the safe execution of the process, according to police.

'Move according to law'

The entire deportation process is being carried out by the Gurugram police strictly in accordance with ap-

plicable laws, prescribed procedures and security protocols, ACP (Crime) Naveen Sharma said.

Mr. Sharma further added that police are conducting intensive verification of documents and identities of individuals residing in slum areas, colonies, rented accommodations, industrial areas, hotels and other locations across the district.

Court-issued injunctions help to stop five child marriages in Rajasthan's Sikar on a single day

Mohammed Iqbal

In a major boost to the efforts for eliminating child marriage, five such alliances were prevented on a single day in Rajasthan's Sikar district through court-issued injunction orders, following coordinated action by the police and voluntary groups working for the protection of child rights.

Among the children rescued were two boys aged nine and 12 years, who were to be married to the girls of similar ages under the traditional Aata-Saata (exchange alliance) practice. Another case involved a girl below the age of 18 years.

Gayatri Seva Sansthan, a partner organisation of Just Rights for Children (JRC),

Among those rescued were two boys aged 9 and 12, who were to be married to girls of similar ages

received information that a minor girl was being married in a village under Gokulpura police station. When the organisation's members, accompanied by the police, reached the village to intervene, some people attempted to conceal the facts and the girl's family tried to mislead the police by claiming that she was an adult. The girl's date of birth was eventually verified through school records, which confirmed that she was below 18 years of age. It was also found that she was being married to a 42-year-old widower.

During the intervention, the team discovered that two more marriages involving boys aged nine and 12 years from the same family were scheduled to take place after a couple of days under the Aata-Saata custom.

Gayatri Seva Sansthan immediately approached the Additional Judicial Magistrate, Sikar, under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, seeking injunction orders to prevent the marriages. The court issued injunctions directing that none of the children could be married before attaining the legal age of marriage, thereby preventing all five child marriages.

Issued by the court of the Judicial Magistrate under Section 13(1) of the Prohibition of Child Marriage

Act, an injunction order empowers the authorities to proactively prevent a child marriage before it occurs. The court also usually declares that a child marriage solemnised in contravention of the order would be void ab initio (from the beginning).

After his marriage was stopped, the 12-year-old boy said he dreamt of becoming a lawyer and feared that the marriage would have forced him to abandon his education and take up work instead.

'Not confined to paper'

Gayatri Seva Sansthan's Director Shailendra Pandya said here on Thursday that Sikar was emerging as a leading district in effective implementation of the law against child marriage.

"During Akshaya Tritiya earlier this year, Sikar witnessed the first-ever use of court injunctions to prevent the child marriages of two girls," he said.

Mr. Pandya, a former Member of the Rajasthan State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, said the interventions by voluntary groups had sent a strong message that the law against child marriage was no longer confined to paper and was now being enforced firmly.

JRC national convener Ravi Kant said the sustained awareness campaigns launched by non-governmental organisations were supporting the local communities in coming forward to report child marriages being planned in their vicinity.

Rights body flags illegal coal trade near Assam-Arunachal border

The Hindu Bureau

A local unit of the International Human Rights Council (IHRC) said coal is being illegally extracted and collected from abandoned Coal India Limited mines near the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border, and transported through an allegedly "entry system".

The Tinsukia District Committee of the IHRC outlined such activities in its investigative report into the alleged coal trade released on Thursday.

The report revealed years of illegal operations in the Itakhola area of Ledo under the Margherita Subdivision.

L. Ratan Singh, the general secretary of IHRC's Tinsukia committee, said the committee found a



Itakhola in Assam's Tinsukia district, where coal is allegedly being extracted illegally.

large number of coal-laden vehicles - from vans and pickups to trucks and dumpers - pass daily through the Itakhola area after bringing coal from the officially abandoned mines.

The committee said that an alleged coal mafioso has been running this illegal business with the assis-

tance of a former Coal India Limited official. "The coal supplied through this network is being used to operate five brick kilns, as well as coke kilns," it said.

The committee further claimed that the alleged entry system - an accounting method for financial transactions - is controlled from a roadside dhaba, which collects the entry fees from the vehicles.

Role questioned

Questioning the role of the district authorities, police, North Eastern Coalfields (a subsidiary of Coal India Limited), Forest, and Railway officials, the committee said it would submit a comprehensive report on the illegal coal trade to President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Safety drive to be held for loco pilots and assistants

R. Srikanth
CHENNAI

The Chennai Division of Southern Railway has announced a 15-day safety drive to be strictly followed by loco pilots (LPs) and assistant loco pilots (ALPs) to avert Signal Passed At Danger (SPAD) incidents, which occurs when a train moves past a red signal without proper authorisation.

This safety drive comes in the wake of the suspension of the loco pilots and assistant loco pilots of the Yelagiri Express for signal jumping on July 6.

Based on this incident and a few previous ones, the Chennai Division announced that a safety drive would be held till July 24 for all loco and assistant loco drivers.

A senior loco pilot said all the loco pilots were being punished for the mistakes of a few crew members. He said that though they welcomed the safety procedures, the loco pilots were under severe work pressure due to a large number of vacancies, which remained unfilled for several years. The work pressure involves running the mail and express trains on time, as the loco staff would otherwise be penalised in the name of punctuality.

Another loco pilot said they did not have any grievances regarding the facilities given to them. But inadequate rest and poor sanctioning of leaves were detrimental to the morale of the LPs and ALPs.

Oppose education Bill, Kerala Minister urges MPs from State

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Kerala Higher Education Minister Roji M. John has appealed to all MPs from the State to oppose the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025, arguing that several of its provisions would centralise control over higher education and weaken the constitutional role of States.

In a letter addressed to Kerala MPs in both Houses of Parliament, Mr. John said while the government was projecting the Bill as a reform measure aimed at improving higher education, research and innovation, he contended that its provisions had wider constitutional implications.

“Beneath the language of reform lies a framework that concentrates unprece-

ented powers in the Union government, weakens the constitutional role of the States, and threatens the autonomy of institutions”, the Minister said.

Mr. John argued that the Bill departed from the principle of cooperative federalism and pointed to Clause 49, which, he said, would allow the proposed law to override inconsistent State enactments.

The Minister also raised concerns over the governance structure envisaged under the Bill, especially the limited rotational representation for States in the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan, the apex body that would be replacing the University Grants Commission (UGC), the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE).

Establish digitised inventory for Sabarimala assets, says HC

Court tells Sabarimala Development Project officials to follow all procedural safeguards on public procurement, while considering the approval for a contract to supply cots for Sannidhanam staff

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court has directed the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) to establish a comprehensive, systematic, and preferably digitised inventory management system for all consumable and non-consumable assets maintained at the Sabarimala Sannidhanam and allied establishments.

It further directed the Chief Engineer and the Executive Engineer of the Sabarimala Development Project to ensure that every statutory requirement, financial rule, and procedural safeguard governing public procurement is scrupulously complied



The court was considering queries raised by the Audit department on a contract to supply 1,000 cots for Sannidhanam staff. FILE PHOTO

with, before finalising purchases.

A Division Bench of Justice Raja Vijayaraghavan V. and Justice K.V. Jayakumar passed the directives while considering the approval for a contract to supply 1,000 double-decker mild steel cots for daily wage

staff deployed at the Sannidhanam and the queries raised by the Audit department in this regard. The total estimate for the purchase was ₹1.66 crore, for which the TDB had granted administrative sanction.

One of the objections was that though the cots

SIT visits TDB office as part of ‘gold theft’ probe

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
A special investigation team (SIT) inquiring into the alleged misappropriation of gold from the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple visited the Travancore Devaswom Board office on Thursday.

were to be supplied by a manufacturer in Tamil Nadu, neither its photographs nor technical specifications were placed before the Ombudsman. Moreover, the Ombudsman had noted that the tender process was initiated at the eleventh hour.

CB-CID begins probe into registration of math land

B.Tilak Chandar
DINDIGUL

The Crime Branch-Criminal Investigation Department (CB-CID) on Thursday began an investigation into the fraudulent registration of 1.35 acres of land belonging to the Arulmigu Dhandapani Swamigal Madam (math) at the foothills of Palani in Dindigul district.

A team of 15 police officers, led by Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Ajay Thangam, conducted inquiries in Palani.

The Palani Adivaram police had registered a case against Sub-Registrar Justin Manikandan Subramanian, who was later suspended, and others.

The State government subsequently transferred the probe into the case to the CB-CID.

Handover of files

The police handed over all the case-related documents to the CB-CID team, comprising Inspector Santhanalakshmi, the DSP, and other officials. The team arrived at the Palani Devasthanam head office and conducted inquiries. It examined documents pertaining to the land issue, including the objections raised by the math with the Registration Department, and recorded the statements of the temple officials and staff members.

Meanwhile, the Registration Department has formed a three-member team to conduct an inquiry into the fraudulent registration of the temple land.

ISRO issues memo to curb exodus of staff from key missions

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

With about 100 Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) personnel quitting the space agency in various centres across the country, the Department of Space (DoS) has issued a memorandum to curb the exodus of scientists and engineers who are working in critical missions of national importance, like the Gaganyaan.

In a memorandum issued on July 14, signed by

S.R. Rajashekar, Joint Secretary (Personnel), Department of Space, it stated, “Of late, it is noticed that there has been spate of requests for voluntary retirement and resignation from Group ‘A’ Scientific/Technical personnel of the ISRO including those associated with the prestigious Gaganyaan and other important missions/projects severely impacting the implementation of projects of national importance.”

The memorandum addressed to Directors of the

ISRO Centers and Heads of Units has asked them to address this issue and not to accept any requests for voluntary retirement or resignation from scientific and technical personnel of Group ‘A’ associated with the Gaganyaan or other important missions or projects till their realisation.

“It has been decided that voluntary retirement and resignation requests from scientific and technical personnel associated with the Gaganyaan and other important mission/

projects may not be accepted as a matter of routine,” the memorandum stated.

It further noted that if requests for voluntary retirement and resignation are received from scientific, technical personnel, even below the rank of scientists/engineers-SG it may be sent to the DoS for final decision.

Union Minister of State Jitendra Singh downplayed suggestions of a manpower crisis. “I believe Mr. Narayanan [ISRO Chairman V.

Narayanan] has made a statement on that. As many go, that many will come - the project shouldn’t suffer. The team is large; nobody is going away; they come and go. The memo was issued so that decisions can be taken at a much more mature level. The ISRO has a culture of working in continuity, with even retired personnel involved in projects... For instance the former chief S. Somanath worked closely on the Gaganyaan. Now he’s not there. Does that

mean work on Gaganyaan stops?”

During the last Budget session of the Parliament, Mr. Singh on February 11, 2026, in a reply to a question on the details of the sanctioned, in-position and vacant positions in the ISRO, said that the overall sanctioned strength (Science and Technology and Administration) was 18,142. Of this there was a vacancy of 2,613 personnel. (With inputs from Jacob Koshy in New Delhi)

INBRIEF



Wild elephant on rampage along T.N. boundary captured

A wild sub-adult tusker that terrorised several villages under Palamaner, Bangarupalem, Gudipala and Chittoor mandals on the Chittoor-Tamil Nadu border was captured on Wednesday evening, after a day-long operation involving five kumkis (trained elephants) and about 50 forest personnel, apart from veterinary experts. Speaking to *The Hindu* on Thursday, District Forest Officer G. Subburaj said the animal’s unpredictable movements posed a threat to residents and motorists, prompting the Forest Department to launch the operation.

Teacher fired over ‘religious homework’ given to student

A Class 2 homework assignment has snowballed into a controversy at a private school in Hyderabad after the parents of a Hindu student alleged that their child was asked to memorise and recite the Kalma. The development led to protests by BJP workers outside the school on Thursday. The police detained several protesters, including BJP leader Karuna Sagar, who asked why an FIR had not been registered. With the controversy escalating, Success The School in Saidabad, terminated the teacher.

TTD gets donations worth ₹96.98 crore in a single day

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), which manages the operations of the Lord Venkateswara Temple at Tirumala, received a staggering ₹96.98 crore in donations to its various trusts and schemes in a single day on Tuesday as devotees rushed to beat the deadline for a sweeping overhaul of donor privileges. The unprecedented inflow came on the eve of the implementation of TTD’s revised donor privilege policy, which took effect on Wednesday. As many as 2,460 devotees made donations during the day.

Culinary game



Blue brigade: A staff member prepares ‘Argentina puttu’ in the blue and white colours of the Argentine flag at a hotel in Ennakulam, Kerala, for customers celebrating the country’s entry into the FIFA World Cup final. The dish was prepared using blue colour derived from butterfly pea flower (*Shankhpushpam*) extract. R.K.NITHIN

SC rejects plea against recounting in Council election in Karnataka

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed an appeal by Pranesh M.K., Deputy Chairman of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, challenging a High Court of Karnataka direction for a recount of votes polled in the 2021 Council election.

Mr. Pranesh was elected as MLC by a narrow victory margin of six votes.

The appeal was heard by a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant. Justice Vipul M. Pancholi, part of the Bench along with Justice Joymalya Bagchi, pro-

nounced the verdict.

The High Court order of January 29 last year was based on a petition filed by Mr. Pranesh’s rival and Congress candidate A.V. Gayathri Shanthie Gowda.

The Supreme Court reserved the appeal for judgment on March 11 this year. The judgment is yet to be uploaded on the Supreme Court website.

Meanwhile, celebrations began at the residence of Ms. Gowda in Chikkamagaluru on Thursday, minutes after news broke out that the Supreme Court had dismissed the appeal by Mr. Pranesh, challenging the outcome of the election.

Women bus riders up 87% to 12.12 lakh after Kerala govt. offers them free travel

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

After the roll-out of the Priyadarshini free travel scheme for women and transgender people on the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) buses, the average daily ridership of women passengers on Ordinary buses increased from 6.48 lakh to 12.12 lakh, an increase of 87%. Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, Transport Minister C.P. John said that women’s participation in KSRTC’s Ordinary services now accounts for about two-thirds of the capacity of its Ordinary buses.

According to the latest review, the share of women passengers on KSRTC



As per the latest review, the share of women passengers on KSRTC Ordinary buses rose to 66.6% after the scheme’s rollout. R.K.NITHIN

Ordinary buses increased from 50.9% to 66.6% after the roll-out of the scheme.

‘New travel demand’

“This is not merely a shift in the existing number of passengers but the creation of new travel demand

(induced demand) for public transport,” the Minister said. Despite the roll-out of the scheme on Ordinary buses, the number of male passengers using these services has remained almost constant. This indicates that the in-

were heated arguments between the police personnel and protesters.

The YSRCP leaders alleged that Yedukondalu died due to indiscriminate beating and torture by SI Haneef and Constable Madhav, and demanded disciplinary action against them. YSRCP district president Kakani Govardhan Reddy, Tirupati MP Maddila Gurumoorthy, MLC Meriga Muralidhar, and former MLA Kiliveti Sanjeevaiah demanded justice for the family.

Police officials promised that justice would be served to the family, following which the protest was called off.

crease in women passengers has not come at the expense of other passengers, the Minister said. Furthermore, the additional passengers have been accommodated within the existing network. This has significantly reduced the fuel required per passenger and lowered carbon emissions, he added.

Meanwhile, the Transport Minister dismissed reports claiming that the KSRTC had terminated 200 temporary employees. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] alleged that the KSRTC had dismissed 200 temporary employees recruited through the Employment Exchange in Kasaragod, Kozhikode, and Thrissur districts.

DGMA tells firms not to deploy sailors via Hormuz

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA) has directed ship owners, ship managers and recruitment and placement service companies to avoid deploying Indian sailors on vessels travelling through the Strait of Hormuz.

In an advisory, the DGMA also said masters of vessels operating in Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and adjoining waters shall maintain a heightened level of security vigilance. They are directed to monitor navigational warnings, security advisories and updates issued by the competent authorities, and implement all applicable ship security measures, in accordance with International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) code.

The advisory came after the attacks on two vessels this week – *MT Al Bahiyah* and *MT Mombasa* – in the Strait of Hormuz. They were carrying 30 Indian seafarers among a combined crew of 46. One Indian lost his life while another sustained injuries aboard *MT Al Bahiyah*. On *MT Mombasa*, nine Indian nationals were injured.

‘Third language should start in Class 6 and stop in Class 9’

SC asks Centre to not bring a third language in Class 9 as part of three-language scheme; T.N. govt. says schools under Centre’s Navodaya scheme are incompatible with two-language policy in State

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Supreme Court judge, Justice B.V. Nagarathna, made an oral appeal in open court to the government to not introduce a third language (R3) in Class 9 as part of the three-language scheme, saying it would be too stressful for children with Board exams just a year away.

She said a third language should be introduced in Class 6 and stopped in Class 9. “Third language should stop in Class 9, not start in Class 9,” Justice Nagarathna, heading a Division Bench, said. The pressure of the Class 10 Board exam starts as early as in Class 8, she added.

“Tell the Union of India to please not do this... Tell the government not to do it. Why introduce third language in Class 9? That is stressful. Why not Class 6?” Justice Nagarathna said.

The judge, who is in line to become the first woman Chief Justice of India as per the seniority norm, recalled how, while she was



in school, the teaching of lessons meant for Class 10 would begin in Class 8 itself. “And this was in 1976. You can just imagine what the pressure would be on children now,” she remarked.

‘Backdoor’ ploy
The Supreme Court was hearing petitions filed on the introduction of Navodaya schools in Tamil Nadu. The State government, during the previous Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) regime, had maintained that the schools envisioned under the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya Scheme were “fundamentally incompatible” with the two-language policy followed in Tamil Nadu.

The State had, in earlier

hearings, argued that the Navodaya scheme based on the three-language formula was a deviation from the mandate of the Tamil Nadu Tamil Learning Act, 2006.

The State had submitted that the three-language formula was considered a core pedagogical and administrative framework of the Navodaya scheme.

It required compulsory instruction in Hindi, English, and the mother tongue/regional language.

The Tamil Nadu government had maintained that the imposition of the scheme was a “backdoor” ploy to make Hindi compulsory.

The apex court suggested that Tamil Nadu could have its “own education

Bombay HC directs Centre to file reply to Kunal Kamra’s plea

Chinmay Gaikwad
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Thursday directed the Union government to file an affidavit by July 29 in response to a petition filed by stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra. The plea challenges the constitutional validity of the Sahyog Portal and the 2025 amendment to Rule 3(1)(d) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. Mr. Kamra has contended that the provisions enable content take-downs without safeguards.

A Division Bench of Acting Chief Justice Ravindra Ghuge and Justice Gautam Ankhad scheduled the matter for hearing on August 14. The court granted Mr. Kamra time till August 6 to file his rejoinder to the government’s reply.

Senior Advocate Navroz Seervai, appearing for Mr. Kamra, submitted that the Centre had not filed its affidavit despite being granted opportunities. He said the matter pertained to Article 19(1)(a) and concerned freedom of speech and expression.

Mr. Kamra’s petition argues that the mechanism creates a parallel content-

The plea challenges the validity of the Sahyog Portal and the 2025 amendment to IT Rules, 2021

blocking framework that circumvents safeguards under Section 69A of the IT Act, 2000.

The plea contends that the Portal permits content blocking without prior notice to users, violating natural justice principles and the free speech guarantee under Article 19(1)(a).

It says Rule 3(1)(d) and the Portal are *ultra vires* the IT Act and contrary to the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India* (2015).

Mr. Kamra has also challenged the delegation of powers to States and departments to issue information-blocking directions, contending that such powers fall within the Centre’s exclusive legislative domain under List I of the Seventh Schedule.

The Karnataka High Court, while deciding a challenge by X Corp, had held the Portal is not an instrument of censorship but ensures cooperation between intermediaries and government agencies.

T.N. BJP chief appears in court in cash seizure case

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu BJP president Nainar Nagenthran on Thursday appeared before a court in Chennai and received a copy of the chargesheet filed in a case relating to the seizure of ₹3.99 crore on the Nellai Express ahead of the 2024 parliamentary election.

On April 6, 2024, a Flying Squad team seized ₹3.99 crore from three men aboard Nellai Express at Tambaram. It was alleged that the cash was meant for distribution to voters in Tirunelveli, at the instruction of Mr. Nagenthran, who was contesting the election as the BJP’s candidate. The Flying Squad officials informed the Tambaram police, who registered a case and arrested the three men. One of the arrested persons, S. Sathish, was the manager of the Blue Diamond hotel in Purasawalkam, owned by Mr. Nagenthran, and a member of the BJP.

A couple of weeks later, the case was transferred to dCrime Branch-CID, which filed chargesheet against 13 persons, including Mr. Nagenthran and the BJP’s former organising secretary, Kesava Vinayagam.

Robust infrastructure forms backbone of military operations: Rajnath Singh

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday underlined the critical role of strategic infrastructure in future conflicts, asserting that roads, tunnels, airfields and ports will remain indispensable despite the induction of advanced weapons and cutting-edge military platforms into the armed forces.

Addressing the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) Strategic Infrastructure Conclave in New Delhi, Mr. Singh said that while military prowess, precision capabilities and modern technologies shape the outcome of wars, robust infrastructure forms the backbone of military operations.

“Sometimes, the first



Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Director General, Border Roads, Lt. Gen. Harpal Singh at the Strategic Infrastructure Conclave organised by Border Roads Organisation in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

front of a war is not at the border itself, but on the road that leads our soldiers to the front line. The person who builds that road is as vital a guardian of national security as the soldier who stands at the border,” he said.

Highlighting the organisation’s transformation over the past six-and-a-half decades, the Minister said the BRO has evolved from a road construction agency into one of the world’s leading strategic infrastructure organisations.

Mr. Singh cited landmark projects such as the Atal Tunnel, Umling La Pass road and the Sela Tunnel as examples of the agency’s engineering capabilities and commitment under some of the world’s harshest conditions.

SC orders shifting of contempt pleas on ‘bulldozer justice’ to High Courts

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday passed a ‘standard order’ shifting contempt petitions alleging continued instances of ‘bulldozer justice’ to the State High Courts, reasoning it was too unwieldy to hear them all, and many would require an enquiry into facts.

The move comes in less than two years after the apex court declared illegal demolitions conducted by States on private properties and homes, especially of people accused in criminal cases, as an “arbitrary use of power”.

The court’s November 2024 judgment termed the “chilling sight of a bulldozer demolishing a building, when authorities have



The move comes less than two years after the SC declared illegal demolitions by States as ‘arbitrary use of power’. PTI

failed to follow the basic principles of natural justice and have acted without adhering to the principle of due process” as a lawless state of affairs where “might was right”.

The judgment issued a series of directions mandating due process before demolition and stressing that the State cannot engage in retributive action. The court had established

that erring officials would be hauled up for contempt and personally liable to restore the demolished property.

On Thursday, a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said High Courts were better suited to hear petitions seeking contempt proceedings against officials for violating the November 2024 judgment.

Each one of the contempt petitions involves disputed facts which would require separate and in-depth enquiries, the Chief Justice said. The CJI even suggested separate Benches to hear the contempt pleas.

“...Maybe these are title disputes after all... In the High Courts, you may get a better opportunity to make your case on facts... Besides, if there is a violation of this judgment throughout the country, as you allege, can everybody come directly to the Supreme Court?” Justice S.V. Mohana said.

The court said High Courts could obtain the necessary records from district courts while deciding these pleas. Any interim protections granted by the Supreme Court in these cases would continue.

ED arrests accused in Loni co-op society case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested an accused in connection with the Loni Urban Multi State Credit and Thrift Cooperative Society (LUCC) case involving alleged misappropriation of about ₹10,314 crore belonging to over 30.51 lakh investors.

The accused has been identified as Ravi Shankar Tiwari alias Ravi Tiwari.

On Wednesday, the agency produced him before a special court that sent him to ED custody for 10 days.

The ED’s investigation is based on several First Information Reports registered in Lalitpur in Uttar Pradesh, and Teekamgarh in Madhya Pradesh against LUCC, the Lustiness Janhit Credit Cooperative Society Limited, and Option One Industries Limited.

ED searches 13 places in ‘terror-funding and illegal infiltration’ case

Devesh K. Pandey
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate on Thursday conducted searches at 13 locations across five States in connection with an alleged terror-funding and illegal infiltration network.

The case is linked to an FIR registered by the Anti-Terror Squad (ATS) of Uttar Pradesh. The searches were carried out in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, West Bengal, and Maharashtra.

The ATS FIR pertains to an organised syndicate allegedly involved in facilitating the illegal infiltration of Rohingya and Bangladeshi nationals into India, arranging forged Indian identity documents. It also aided their rehabilitation in various parts of the country.

Investigation revealed a “deep-rooted financial network comprising certain



Gold coins and ₹40 lakh in cash seized at Harora Al-Jamiatul Islamia Darul Uloom in Kolkata.

charitable trusts registered under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act. They allegedly received substantial contributions from some United Kingdom-based entities.

The funds were diverted through multiple bank accounts, mule accounts and layered transactions to facilitate illegal activities.

“To generate sustainable income for infiltrators, a trust provided money or alternative arrangements, such as an e-rickshaw, jobs, or cash benefits,” said an agency source.

Fourth Trinamool Rajya Sabha MP quits; those facing pressure must leave party, says Mamata

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

A day after Mamata Banerjee’s long-time aide Madan Mitra deserted her and joined the rebel camp of MLAs, another high-profile exit rocked the party with Rajya Sabha MP Koel Mallick resigning on Thursday.

Ms. Mallick, a well-known actor, met Union Minister and BJP leader Bhupendra Yadav in New Delhi. She was sworn in as an MP three months ago and is the fourth Trinamool Rajya Sabha member to quit after the party lost the Assembly polls in May.

Following the exit, Ms. Banerjee said that those facing pressure from Central agencies should leave with “all their belongings” before July 21.

“I request those who are facing various pressures from the ED, CBI or BJP to leave before July 21. Leave



Mamata Banerjee

with all your belongings,” the Trinamool chairperson said on social media.

Ms. Banerjee, who is facing one of the biggest challenges of her political life, said those who remain with her will be her “greatest strength”. “They will build the future. If we could begin a fresh in 1997 (when she left Congress and set up Trinamool), we could certainly do so again in 2026,” she said.

“BJP leaders say they will erase our name and symbol. But many political parties have changed their

names and symbols over time, while their identity has endured. You may change a name through the force of power, but you cannot erase an ideology or a direction,” she added.

Ms. Banerjee, who has exhorted her supporters to join the Martyrs’ Day rally on July 21, alleged that the administration and the police are pressuring people to stay away from the event. “I know the police are telling people not to come and threatening to stop them. I appeal to the administration to remain neutral,” she said.

‘Things will change’
She said the rebels are doing everything with the “backing from Delhi”. “Remember, life is long. If things start to shake in Delhi, the situation here will change,” she said, adding that it does not matter how many MPs are bought.

SC set to hear appeal against Orissa HC’s ban on animated film

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court agreed to urgently hear on Friday an appeal against the Orissa High Court ban on the release of an animated film *Mahaprabhu Jagannath* for not strictly adhering to the religious text of *Skanda Purana*.

Appearing before a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Thursday in an oral mentioning, senior advocate Devadatt Kamat, representing the film’s makers, Ele Animations, said the movie was due for release on Friday across the country.

‘Commercial loss’
The country-wide ban would lead to massive commercial loss. He said the work was a children’s film and has been cleared for release by the Central Board of Film Certification.

The release date had been fixed two months ago. The ban order was uploaded only at 9 p.m. on Wednesday, compelling the filmmakers to rush to the apex court for relief.

“The ground taken by the High Court is that the work is not strictly in accordance with the *Skanda Purana*... The High Court has banned it across the country... on the basis of a writ petition. Even the writ petition had only sought a ban within Odisha,” Mr. Kamat submitted.

The Bench said it would take up the petition first in the list on Friday.

The petition in the High Court had sought the cancellation of the film’s certification and a ban on its public screening in the State.

The petition objected to the portrayal of Lord Jagannath in the film and had sought a detailed judicial scrutiny.

Cong. to 'strongly oppose' move to reintroduce delimitation Bill

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

Bills on FCRA, *Vandemataram* listed for Monsoon Session

Panel flags autonomy risks under VBSA Bill

"The committee expressed apprehension that concentration of extensive regulatory powers in a single central regulator could lead to bureaucratic or ideological overreach, thereby affecting the institutional autonomy presently available under the existing UGC framework," the draft report said.

On the draw



SC verdicts say state has the duty to preserve life of a person on indefinite fast

NEWS ANALYSIS

Opposition leaders, film industry members rally behind Sonam Wangchuk

HC gives final two weeks to Kejriwal, Sisodia to respond to CBI's plea in Delhi excise case

INDIA bloc will take a collective call on delimitation: Raut



The Congress said that there were questions about the fate of the Maha Vikas Aghadi in Maharashtra.

PM speaks to Amir of Qatar, condoles loss

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday spoke to Amir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and conveyed his heartfelt condolences on the passing of the Father Amir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. He said the late leader's enduring legacy will continue to guide the two countries.

A IN-Y

Beyond weight loss: how GLP-1s can affect your skin, hair and nails

Monisha Madhumita

TO STAY POWERFUL AFTER 75,
IGNORE STRESS, CRITICISM AND
ACCOUNTABILITY; GET SOME
FRESH AIR OVERSEAS, ENJOY
REGULAR NAPS, AVOID STAIRS
AND TREAT YOURSELF TO
FRESH MANGOES AND
SWEET MELODIES!

Soumyadip Sinha

Cyclosporiasis outbreak: what is gastrointestinal illness that has affected over 1,500 in the U.S.





Wealth of lacunae

Cybersecurity, transparency are non-negotiable in vital installations

The ransomware attack against a contractor involved in the Kudankulam nuclear power project is concerning, even if nothing threatening the plant’s integrity was stolen. In 2019, malware was found on the same facility’s administrative network, but the NPCIL maintained that the operational reactor network was unaffected. The new incident extends the same theme. India’s breach disclosure regime is inconsistent and often plainly opaque. Affected organisations tend to believe admitting a breach will damage public confidence, share prices, contracts, and invite regulatory scrutiny. So, they tend to ease their language in public statements and avoid disclosure until compelled. Many organisations also lack mature incident response capabilities, not uncommonly because they treat cybersecurity as a matter of compliance rather than necessity. So, assessing what data has been affected in the early stages of an attack becomes technically impossible. According to public information, the facility’s core infrastructure is unaffected; instead, a group called ‘World Leaks’ mounted a ransomware attack compromising systems belonging to Reliance Infrastructure, one of the engineering contractors of Units 3 and 4. The data in the incident were hosted by Yotta Data Services, which said it detected suspicious activity on its servers on May 29.

According to open-source intelligence platform RansomLook, the data began appearing on World Leaks on June 11. However, the NPCIL issued a formal clarification only on July 15, following widespread media reports. Some 14.3 GB of files have been released, including the layouts of ventilation systems, floor plans of an alleged “control room”, supplier and vendor lists, and insurance paperwork. While the files have not been independently authenticated, the actors and their incentives merit a closer look. The NPCIL has said that the files only pertain to infrastructure beyond the facility’s nuclear island. However, such information can still serve so-called intelligence preparation activities. India is the third-most breached country and has already brooked similar attacks against AIIMS Delhi, airlines, and State government portals. In this milieu, the government has positioned Kudankulam as the centrepiece of India’s nuclear power ambitions. As CERT-In is conducting an investigation and Reliance and Yotta have shared their findings with the government, CERT-In and NPCIL should also clarify the nature and authenticity of the files, whether data were exfiltrated before detection, and whether any credentials or supplier accounts have been exposed. Radical transparency is impossible here but basic cyber-hygiene and proactive communication are non-negotiable.

Breaching the target

Rising inflation leaves no room for a cut in interest rates

India’s retail inflation breached the RBI’s 4% target for the first time under the new CPI series, rising to 4.38% in June from 3.93% in May and about 2.7% a year earlier. The latest print reflects a broader pass-through of price pressures that had, until recently, remained concentrated at the producer level, largely driven by spiralling transport and fuel costs since the U.S.-Iran conflict in late February. Consequently, the gap between wholesale and retail inflation has only marginally narrowed. Wholesale inflation (WPI), now based on 2022-23, remained elevated at 9.87% in June, up from 9.68% in May. Fuel and power continued to exert the greatest pressure on producers, recording inflation of 27.41%, only marginally lower than May’s 28.18%. As India imports nearly 90% of its crude oil requirements, the value of merchandise imports surged to \$70.8 billion in June from about \$54.1 billion a year earlier, even though import volumes did not rise proportionately. This underscores how imported inflation, amplified by crude prices that briefly crossed \$110 a barrel, has driven systemic price pressures across the economy. The rupee’s sharp depreciation during the conflict added to these pressures, although RBI intervention in the foreign exchange market helped cushion the fall.

The transport category merits closer examination. Transport inflation more than doubled to 4.31% in June from 1.75% in May, while the subgroup, “transport services for goods”, remained elevated, rising to 7.70% from 7.63%. Another notable pressure point has been restaurants and hotels. Although the government announced a modest reduction in commercial LPG prices earlier this month, it has done little to offset the steep increases through May and June, when the price of a 19.2 kg commercial cylinder in Delhi climbed to around ₹2,930 before easing marginally. The system-wide impact is also evident in food prices, with the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) rising to 5.32% from 4.78% in May. Another significant price pressure on the CFPI that must be factored in is the projection of a deficient southwest monsoon and its impact on agriculture, though the extent will become clearer in the weeks ahead. Meanwhile, despite the Centre more than doubling import duties on gold and silver from 6% to 15% in May, Commerce Ministry data suggest that bullion imports have remained robust amid global uncertainty, contributing to higher jewellery prices and household inflation. Although the ceasefire announced in late June briefly eased crude prices, they have begun rising again. Given continuing geopolitical uncertainty and persistent upstream price pressures, inflation is unlikely to return to the RBI’s 4% target soon, leaving no room for a rate cut at the Monetary Policy Committee’s August meeting.

When Parliament assembles next week, there will be debates, disruptions and legislation. Television studios will reduce complex issues to political arithmetic, and headlines will declare winners and losers. Yet, I cannot help asking whether the true measure of Parliament is not by the number of Bills it passes, but by the questions it chooses to confront and resolve. For the past several days, one such question has been waiting outside its doors. My husband, Sonam Wangchuk, scientist, engineer, educator and social reformer, has been on an indefinite fast. Every morning I watch with growing anxiety as his body weakens. His body is paying the price for a conviction that education deserves the nation’s urgent attention. Every day begins with the same silent question: how much longer can his body endure?

This is not merely a family’s private concern. It has become a test of our national conscience. Those who choose the path of non-violent sacrifice hope their suffering will awaken society’s conscience to a greater purpose. If this fast culminates only in the resignation or reshuffling of the Union Education Minister, India would have reduced an extraordinary act of conviction and personal sacrifice to an ordinary political outcome. Public accountability is the cornerstone of democracy. Ministers must have the moral courage to own their failures and step aside when necessary. But individuals are transient; institutions endure. More important than replacing a Minister is defining an educational future for which every Minister, regardless of party, is held accountable.

Fifteen years ago, around half of India’s population was under 25. Economists celebrated this as India’s demographic dividend, perhaps the greatest developmental opportunity available to any nation in the 21st century. In one of my articles, I had argued that while India has invested significantly in access to education, it has missed out on excellence. Enrolment has grown, but learning has not been transformed. If India aspires to become a Vishwa Guru, it must educate this generation differently. But India seems to have missed the opportunity.

What demographic dividend is

A demographic dividend is realised by producing better thinkers, wiser leaders, confident innovators, skilled researchers and teachers, ethical entrepreneurs, honest public servants and compassionate citizens. This, therefore, is the moment to rise above personalities, parties and politics. Sonam Wangchuk’s fast should become the catalyst for a national awakening on the future of education. The question is larger than whether one Minister should resign. It is whether India will dare rebuild the education system that will shape the next century. We need more than a reshuffle – we need reform, renewal, and a renaissance. In my view, that renaissance rests on



Gitanjali J. Angmo

Founder of the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives, Ladakh, and an education reformer and public intellectual working to reimagine education, democracy, ecology and Himalayan futures through grassroots leadership and innovation

A personal sacrifice must inspire India’s education renaissance movement

Beyond political reshuffles, renew education in India

10 urgent reforms. First, reform the system of examination. Assessment determines learning. As long as examinations reward memory, schools will teach memory. If examinations reward thinking, schools will cultivate thinkers. Within three years, every examination, from school boards to JEE, NEET, CUET and the UPSC, should progressively evaluate conceptual understanding, application, creativity, analytical reasoning, ethical judgement and real world problem-solving rather than recall. Competency-based assessment should become the national norm.

Second, India must dismantle the coaching culture that it has inadvertently created as a parallel education system. Families spend fortunes on coaching because India’s entrance examinations reward repetition more than reflection. Multiple examination windows, greater weightage to school performance and portfolios, and redesigned entrance tests can gradually restore learning to schools and childhood to children.

Respect for teaching

Third, build the world’s best teachers: No education system can rise above the quality of its teachers as is seen in Finland, Singapore, South Korea and Japan. India needs a National Teacher Excellence Mission that treats teaching as one of the most respected professions through rigorous preparation, continuous professional development, mentoring, research opportunities and leadership training.

Fourth, every vacant teaching position represents thousands of lost learning opportunities. Vacancies from Anganwadis and primary schools to central universities, IITs, IIMs, NITs and AIIMS should be filled through transparent, merit-based recruitment within three months.

Fifth, reconnect education with society. Education must prepare young people not just for employment but also for citizenship. Every undergraduate should complete a semester of apprenticeship, research, entrepreneurship, rural immersion, community service or industry experience before graduation. Knowledge acquires meaning when tested against reality.

Sixth, India must restore faith in its government schools. Every child deserves an equal education until the age of 13, regardless of income or geography. Laboratories, libraries, sports facilities, digital infrastructure, sanitation and qualified teachers should become guaranteed minimum national standards. This can only happen when policymakers have a personal stake in public education and those responsible for governing public institutions also trust them with their own families.

Seventh, trust educational institutions with greater academic freedom that they deserve. Governments should define learning outcomes and ensure accountability. They should not

micromanage pedagogy, curriculum innovation or research. The world’s finest institutions flourish because they are trusted to innovate, collaborate and respond to local contexts. Academic freedom produces excellence.

Eight, what is measured improves. Transparency is one of the most powerful drivers of reform. A real-time national public education dashboard should be set up, on which every stakeholder can compare schools and universities using verified measures of learning outcomes, teacher vacancies, infrastructure, research output, accreditation, employability, and student well-being.

Ninth, public investment in education should rise to at least six per cent of GDP, accompanied by an increase in research funding to at least two per cent of GDP. Nations become knowledge economies not through aspiration alone, but through sustained investment in schools, universities, laboratories and ideas.

Tenth, educational reform must outlive electoral cycles and not begin afresh every time governments change. India needs an independent statutory national education reform commission that establishes measurable national benchmarks, audits implementation, publishes annual progress reports to Parliament, tracks outcomes across every State/Union Territory and holds governments accountable to measurable outcomes rather than political rhetoric.

Education beyond political divides

None of these reforms belongs to one political party or to one ideology. Every government has contributed something valuable, yet every government has also inherited unresolved structural weaknesses. Education must become India’s first genuinely bipartisan national mission. History offers nations only a few defining moments when public attention, moral conviction and political urgency converge. This may be one of them. Parliament will eventually adjourn. But whether the child entering class one this year will grow into an innovator or an imitator, a responsible citizen or a passive spectator depends on the education we choose to build today.

The question before India is no longer who will lead the Ministry of Education. It is whether we, as a nation, have the vision and the resolve to build an education system worthy of our children. That responsibility belongs not to one government or one political party, but to every citizen who believes that education is the foundation upon which every other national aspiration rests.

If Sonam Wangchuk’s fast helps us begin that journey, then his sacrifice will not merely have drawn attention to a crisis. It will have helped awaken a nation. History will remember whether we dared to transform a personal sacrifice into a national renaissance. That responsibility belongs to all of us.

It is not all bad between India and Pakistan

Ever since a letter written by 117 eminent Pakistanis and Indians emerged in the public domain, an acrimonious debate has begun on whether India should reopen dialogue with its neighbour, with most pointing to the inability of Pakistan to ever live peacefully with India. While this is understandable in the aftermath of the Pahalgam horror (2025), the fact remains that India and Pakistan have, on many occasions, shown far greater circumspection than their western counterparts and have also quietly cooperated to a surprising degree. Clearly, there is potential for cooperation. Equally, however, this potential has been hit progressively harder by terrorism.

Wars, yet with restraint

Every foreign correspondent writing on the India-Pakistan relationship, will frame it with reference to their three wars (1947, 1965, 1971). But few realise that during all three wars, both sides made efforts not to bomb each other’s cities and civilian spaces. But there were some targets, such as the church at Ambala that was hit in 1965 as Pakistan tried to target the air base. Military historian Rana Chhina notes that the only serious attack on civilian areas was at Chhearta, hours after a ceasefire was called, but originally meant to target a key radar station in Amritsar.

Even in 1971, both sides restricted attacks to military targets, including oil storage sites. Official sources in India note that military casualties for all three wars at 8,211, while Pakistan’s broad figures point to some 15,000. Sadly, no credible sources are available for civilian casualties, though accounts of the war show life going on ‘courageously’ in Pakistani towns, with the same fortitude reported from Amritsar, a flash point in all major wars. Consider that Allied air bombing during the Second World War killed an estimated 3,00,000-6,00,000 civilians in German cities under the new concept of “area bombing”. Attacks against just Dresden, with hardly any



Tara Kartha

Former Director, National Security Council Secretariat

Conflict has made headlines, but quiet cooperation has also shaped India-Pakistan relations

military value, killed 25,000. Then there was the bombing of Tokyo that killed 1,00,000. Allied planes even mined the seas to deny fishing in “Operation Starvation”. Germany was hardly any better, killing thousands but its crimes have been recorded. Those by the West are hard to find, but new ‘doctrines’ of both held human life cheap. In contrast, India and Pakistan militaries kept to a battlefield concept. Once terrorism came into play, all these niceties were set aside. But even as Pakistan suffered terror attacks, including two attempts on General Musharraf’s life, in 2003, a third was foiled quietly with Indian intelligence support; that tacitly it acknowledged strong Pakistani action against terrorist groups. True, this was in the aftermath of 9/11, where Islamabad was told to cooperate or ‘be bombed back into the Stone Age’ according to the General.

Fragile bridges

In yet another instance, after 26/11, President Asif Ali Zardari, instructed his ISI Chief General Shuja Pasha to visit Delhi and cooperate in the investigation. This was flatly refused by the then Chief, General Kayani. A year later U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden was telling the British that Mr. Zardari was afraid of ‘being taken out’. Later, the ‘Memogate’ scandal had Mr. Zardari’s fervent appeal for help against the generals. Later, Nawaz Sharif reached out as well, being the first to congratulate Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and attending his inaugural in 2014. Mr. Modi then made a surprise visit to Raiwind for a Sharif family wedding in December 2015. In January 2016, the Pathankot attack happened. This time, Islamabad registered a case for investigation. Less than a year later, Mr. Sharif himself was forced out of office on corruption charges that were never proven. Mr. Modi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh all invested significant political capital in reaching out to Pakistan. All three faced failure, with Manmohan Singh particularly reviled for his efforts.

Then came the 2005 nuclear confidence-building agreement, which still holds, with the last meeting held in January 2026. In contrast, arms control agreements between Russia and the U.S. have collapsed. The agreement was tested on March 9, 2022, when India acknowledged that a technical malfunction during routine maintenance led to the accidental firing of a missile into Pakistan. No damage was reported, and Delhi ordered a high-level inquiry.

While Prime Minister Imran Khan and politicians reacted strongly, Gen. Qamar Bajwa’s response showed notable restraint. Gen. Bajwa also advocated using Pakistan’s geo-economic potential by opening trade corridors with India, possibly due to the country’s economic crisis. However, most remarkably, even as India faced Chinese incursions in Galwan, both countries reaffirmed their ceasefire commitment during Gen. Bajwa’s tenure, despite the earlier abrogation of Article 370 in 2019.

There are many more instances of cooperation, though not all are publicly recorded. The constant point is that relations deteriorated sharply once terrorism began, initially targeting the military and more recently civilians, as seen in the horrific Pahalgam attack. Pakistan has suffered further as groups it once supported, such as the Taliban, turned against it.

The path to cooperation

In 2025, terrorism rose by 34% amid growing unrest in Occupied Kashmir, the tribal areas and Balochistan. Years of military rule have weakened state institutions. Yet, cooperation remains possible in areas such as glacial melt, stubble-burning alternatives and particularly narcotics trafficking, an area where both countries have previously worked together. The key step is for Rawalpindi to demonstrate clearly an end to its support for terrorism. That could even open the way for a renegotiation of the Indus Waters Treaty to mutual benefit.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nuclear plant security

The reported data breach involving the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu (Front page, July 16) must be treated as a matter of national security, not as a routine cyber incident. This is not comparable to leaks involving examination

papers or administrative databases. Even if the exposed files relate only to conventional infrastructure, they could still help hostile actors map systems, suppliers, and operational dependencies. An independent, time-bound investigation is essential to establish the

facts, fix accountability, and close every security gap. Equally important is transparent public communication. Confidence in India’s nuclear programme rests not only on robust technology but also on the quiet assurance that safety and cybersecurity are never

compromised.
Gopalaswamy J.,
Chennai

S. Janaki

It is touching that readers of this daily continue to write about S. Janaki, a testament to how deeply she struck a chord with generations of listeners

making her an undisputed household name. Her timeless Tamil songs such as *Naatham En Jeevanai (Kadhal Oviyam)* showcased the depth, clarity, and soul she brought to every note. S. Janaki’s voice became the soundtrack of countless lives, carrying joy, longing

and devotion with equal grace. Sung with extraordinary grace and emotion, her songs have left an enduring legacy that will continue to inspire.
Raju Kolluru,
Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

The invisible co-authors

The  Hindu.

A IN-Y

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Value of critical imports identified for manufacturing push

51 \$ in billion. India is seeking to push domestic manufacturing across a pool of items currently worth \$51 billion in imports, as the Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeks to reduce the country's reliance on overseas suppliers. The nation imported \$775 billion worth of goods in the 12 months ended March 2026, a government source said. REUTERS

Indian seafarers stranded on the west of Hormuz

15,000 India has advised ship managers and owners against deploying Indian seafarers on vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz amid rising security risks. Over 15,000 Indians remain stranded west of Hormuz, according to the Forward Seamen's Union of India. REUTERS

Minimum wage raise in Vietnam planned for next year

7.8 in per cent. Vietnam's National Wage Council will submit a plan to raise the minimum wage by an average of 7.8% across the country's four regions in 2027. If approved, the new minimum wage would range from 4.04 million dong to 5.70 million dong (\$153.86-\$217.08) per month, the government said in a statement. REUTERS

Premium Lilium bulbs planted over past 3 days in Choglamsar

50,000 More than 50,000 premium Lilium bulbs have been planted at Choglamsar Flower Field in Ladakh, with the first bloom expected in the first week of September, the officials said. It is set to become India's largest organised high-altitude floriculture park. PTI

Land approved for Phase-II acquisition for three ports in A.P.

6248 The Andhra Pradesh government on Thursday approved the Phase-II land acquisition of 6,248 acres at a cost of ₹1,638 crore for the development of three ports — Mulapeta, Machilipatnam and Ramayapatnam. PTI
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us facebook.com/thehindu X.com/the_hindu instagram.com/the_hindu

How serious is Kudankulam data leak?

What exactly was leaked in the data breach? How did it occur? Did the breach affect any nuclear or reactor-related systems? Who was responsible for protecting the data? Why is the leak significant?

EXPLAINER

Aroon Deep

The story so far:

In Wednesday, reports broke out that multiple gigabytes of data pertaining to operations at the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu had been copied and subsequently leaked as part of a ransomware attack. *Reuters* reported that the breach was part of an infiltration into Reliance Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group's Reliance Infrastructure Ltd, and contained 14.3 GB of data on the power plant's operations. The data has been hosted on World Leaks, which is a Dark Web site hosted by cybercriminals who infect vulnerable firms with ransomware, threatening to leak the data if the ransom is not paid. The site claimed that the ransom was indeed not paid, and so it leaked the data. *The Hindu* opened the site and reviewed the index of files, which amount overall to 1.2TB, a slice of which pertained to the Kudankulam plant.

Was the reactor affected by the data leak?

“The files do not pertain to the core reactor's operations, which are the most sensitive in a nuclear setup,” Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) said in a statement. “NPCIL reiterates that the information claimed to be available in the public domain pertains only to conventional Balance of Plant (BOP) common service facilities and does not relate to any nuclear safety, or nuclear security-related systems or information,” it said in a statement.

A spokesperson for the Reliance Group told *The Hindu* that it “was informed by Yotta Data Services Private Limited (Yotta), its third-party data centre service



A view of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. N. RAJESH

provider, of a cybersecurity incident involving an attempted ransomware attack that resulted in a partial breach of data hosted on one of Yotta's servers,” and that “Yotta has confirmed that enhanced security monitoring and preventive controls are now in place. The Company has directed Yotta to conduct a detailed investigation and submit a report.”

“No ransomware execution, data loss or lateral movement occurred,” Reliance said in a stock exchange filing. The files reportedly include multiple drawings of “blueprints and supplier details, meeting and inspection records, equipment reviews,” and a \$112 million insurance policy against terrorist attacks, though it is unclear what the premium amount for this insured sum is.

What did Yotta say about the cyber incident?

Yotta, which runs data centres across the country, characterised Reliance as its “customer's private cloud environment,” but said it took steps to address the infiltration as it was detected on May 29.

“Yotta's managed endpoint security controls detected suspicious activity on a file server of our customer, Reliance Infrastructure,” the company told *The Hindu*. “We acted immediately: the suspicious process was terminated, and the affected server was isolated, preventing the suspected ransomware from executing. Our technical assessment confirmed no evidence of ransomware encryption and no lateral movement to any other server or system within the customer's private cloud environment.

The incident was limited to this single customer-managed server, with no impact on any other Yotta customer or on Yotta's shared cloud platforms, AI cloud infrastructure, datacentre infrastructure or other services.”

Why does the data leak matter?

The revelations have sparked “absolute commotion” among top officials at the power plant, even as they downplay the impact of the findings.

The plant has commissioned two 1,000 Mwe VVER reactors, allowing for a power supply of up to two gigawatts. The reactors are built in partnership with the Russian firm Rosatom, and the government is planning four more such units, which would triple the installed power production capacity at the facility.

THE GIST

▼ The data has been hosted on World Leaks, which is a Dark Web site hosted by cybercriminals who infect vulnerable firms with ransomware, threatening to leak the data if the ransom is not paid.

▼ Yotta, which runs data centres across the country, characterised Reliance as its “customer's private cloud environment,” but said it took steps to address the infiltration as it was detected on May 29.

▼ The revelations have sparked “absolute commotion” among top officials at the power plant, even as they downplay the impact of the findings.

Why is Maharashtra's Ladki Bahin scheme under scrutiny?

What do beneficiary cuts and CAG findings reveal about its implementation?

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

The story so far:

Ahead of the 2024 Assembly elections, the Maharashtra government launched the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana. Under this scheme, eligible women in the State receive ₹1,500 every month through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). At its peak, the scheme covered 2.43 crore beneficiaries. However, successive rounds of verification over the past two years have led to the removal of lakhs of beneficiaries, bringing the total down to about 1.66 crore women.

The recent information about the removal of lakhs of women from the beneficiaries' list has sparked criticism, and the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has raised concerns about the scheme.

Who is eligible to receive funds under the scheme?

Women who are residents of Maharashtra, aged between 21 and 65 years, with an Aadhaar-linked bank

account, and belonging to a family with an annual income of less than ₹2.5 lakh are eligible to receive benefits under the scheme. Women of any marital status are eligible. However, only one woman per family can avail of the benefit.

The State government has said the scheme is aimed at promoting the economic independence of women. It also seeks to improve their health and nutritional status, and strengthen their role in family decision-making, according to the government. The scheme is implemented by the State's Women and Child Development Department.

What are the red flags raised by the CAG in the latest report?

The CAG said the implementation of the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana during 2024-25 was marked by “significant deficiencies in Budget estimation, expenditure control, and financial management.” While the scheme was allocated ₹29,693.09 crore for the fiscal year, the government incurred an expenditure of ₹33,237.24 crore, resulting in an excess expenditure of ₹3,541.16

crore. The CAG described the excess expenditure as “unjustified” and said the Women and Child Development Department failed to provide any specific justification for the overspending. It also observed that funds for the scheme were mobilised by reappropriating allocations from other schemes. For instance, ₹3,490.75 crore was reappropriated from the Lek Ladki Yojana. The State's supplementary Budget also allocated ₹26,200 crore for the scheme.

The CAG said that the scheme undermined the principles of budgetary discipline, financial propriety and legislative control over public finances. It said that “significant excess expenditure remained unexplained” and that large sums were drawn and parked in the Disbursing Officer's Virtual Personal Deposit Account (VPDA). “This indicates that the funds were not required for immediate utilisation and were drawn without actual expenditure needs, contrary to the principles of budgetary discipline and financial propriety,” the CAG observed.

“A test check of vouchers exceeding

₹1,000 crore relating to the scheme, aggregating ₹29,732.01 crore, showed that ₹15,586 crore drawn between January and March 2025 was transferred to the Drawing and Disbursing Officer's VPDA,” the report said.

Why have so many names been removed from the beneficiaries' list?

At its peak, the scheme had 2.43 crore beneficiaries. According to the Maharashtra government, the number of beneficiaries has fallen from 2.43 crore to 1.66 crore. The government said the names were removed after multiple rounds of verification found that some beneficiaries were no longer eligible. It maintained that there has been no change in the eligibility norms and attributed the reduction to the verification process.

The government also cited that the mandatory e-KYC requirement as a key reason for the drop in the number of beneficiaries, saying many women failed to complete the process. A Shiv Sena leader has now urged the State to extend the deadline for completing the e-KYC process. Meanwhile, the Opposition has accused the government of using the scheme to secure electoral gains. The Congress has demanded the immediate restoration of benefits for lakhs of women who were excluded over e-KYC-related issues, and called for an inquiry into the implementation of the scheme.

The Opposition has also criticised the government for failing to fulfil its promise of increasing the monthly assistance from ₹1,500 to ₹2,100 ahead of the State Assembly elections.

THE GIST

▼ The CAG described the excess expenditure as “unjustified” and said the Women and Child Development Department failed to provide any specific justification for the overspending.

▼ It also observed that funds for the <NO>Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana<NO>scheme were mobilised by reappropriating allocations from other schemes.

PULSE CHECK

Alexander Zverev’s Grand Slam win puts Type 1 diabetes in the spotlight

Diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at the age of four and reliant on insulin therapy and continuous glucose monitoring, Alexander Zverev’s rise to the pinnacle of tennis underscores the challenges of competing with a chronic condition while performing at the highest level of a professional sport

Nitika Francis

On June 7, a five-set epic on the Roland Garros clay ended with Germany’s Alexander Zverev winning his first Grand Slam title at the 2026 French Open. He also became, on his thirty-fourth attempt, the first German to win a major men’s singles title in three decades. He reached the finals stage again at the Wimbledon championships on July 12. And perhaps most of all, Zverev became the first person with type I diabetes (T1D) to triumph in this contest.

While he is far from the first elite athlete to live with T1D, his French Open win is an important achievement. T1D is a strenuous condition to manage for a layperson, let alone a sports person. Zverev himself has called the process of managing blood glucose levels during a tennis set as “playing two games at once”.

Understanding T1D

Like most people with the condition, Zverev was diagnosed with T1D when he was four years old.

T1D is an autoimmune disease that affects the pancreas by destroying its beta-cells, which produce insulin. This is different from type II diabetes, where the body can produce insulin but resists its effects. People with T1D need to take insulin externally to use sugar from food to produce energy.

As the body digests sugars and carbohydrates in food, it breaks them down into glucose, the main fuel for the body’s cells. After a meal, blood glucose levels rise, triggering the release of insulin. Insulin helps absorb glucose from the bloodstream for immediate use or store excess glycogen for later use.

Without enough insulin, or when the body can’t use it effectively, glucose builds up in the bloodstream, causing hyperglycaemia, or high blood glucose. In the short term, this can lead to increased thirst, frequent urination, headache, blurred vision, and fatigue. Over time, persistently high blood glucose can damage the eyes, kidneys, and other organs.

Managing highs

Tennis is both praised and scorned for its unique and dynamic scoring system: it barely has room for luck yet lends itself to soaring comebacks. A game in which a player leads 40-love can suddenly swing to deuce, which could lead to a long tussle for the advantage point. A player who appears to be cruising towards a 6-3 set win can suddenly find themselves locked in four additional games and a tiebreak.

Concurrently, hyperglycaemia causes energy levels in the body to fluctuate. This is usually managed by injecting insulin into the fat tissue under the skin, wherefrom it is absorbed into the bloodstream and carried around the body. Devices to do this include insulin pens, syringes, and insulin pumps.

The insulin pen contains cartridges with the hormone. A user can set the number of units insulin required and push on the injection button. With enough practice, it can be done discreetly in public places as well. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) has advised pen users to administer the shot in their abdomen.

However, a lack of awareness has led to misconceptions about injecting insulin.



Germany’s Alexander Zverev returns to Italy’s Jannik Sinner during their men’s singles final tennis match on the fourteenth day of the 2026 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, on July 12. AFP

Zverev faced such an instance at the 2023 French Open, where a match official told him he could not inject insulin on court because it looked “weird” and that he would have to use his three-minute toilet break for that.

“I said, ‘What does it look like? That I’m doping?’ This argument makes no sense,” he told Eurosport Germany. He added that his bathroom break was not enough and that he generally has to inject around four to five times during a match.

He also caught flak in 2019 for after appearing to check a device inside his gear bag during matches, which was against the rules preventing players from communicating by phone. Germany’s Davis Cup captain Michael Kohlmann told DW-TV that Zverev was, in those cases, checking his glucose monitoring device.

Surviving the lows

On the flip side, insulin therapy carries a risk of hypoglycaemia, or low blood sugar. This can lead to loss of consciousness, cardiac arrest or even death if it isn’t dealt with. Dealing requires ingesting glucose tablets or eating fast-acting carbohydrates and sugars in the form of juices, sodas or candies.

However, fluctuating sugar levels don’t always show symptoms until it is too late, and generally result in loss of consciousness at first.

According to the ADA, 40% of T1D patients are unaware of hypoglycaemia. People with T1D are known to manage the rally between high and low blood sugar with trial and error.

While patients have generally used finger-prick blood tests or glucometers,

continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) devices have become commonplace, and offer more accurate, real-time updates, per the ADA.

CGMs have a sensor in the form of a small piece of material inserted under the patient’s skin using a needle. The sensor transmits real-time glucose levels (via a transmitter) to a smartphone app, receiver or insulin pump. A simple computer on the smartphone or the pump decides how much insulin should be injected, how much carbohydrates to consume, etc.

More than a physical burden

Players like Zverev also have to deal with the uncertainty of when a hyper- or hypoglycemic episode could kick in during a match. A 2025 study by researchers at the University of Georgia School of Social Work found that the hypervigilance required to manage T1D often causes burnout and exacerbates mental illnesses.

Hypoglycaemia can also impair sleep efficiency and quality, which are important for sportspersons’ mental and physical upkeep. Tennis tournaments, especially the majors, have multiple matches in a week and one-day gaps between matches, which means only small recovery periods.

Recovery nutrition in tennis focuses heavily on restoring glycogen levels through carbohydrates. However, the unpredictable nature of the condition also means there’s a risk of a glucose spike, which could leave the athlete without being able to consume the necessary recovery carbohydrates. The physical exertion in a match could later crash the

glucose levels, and render a sleepless night.

Type 1 on the map

Zverev has said he was told he could never become an elite athlete after his T1D diagnosis. He was diagnosed at age four, spent years of his career hiding the condition, and continues to manage it in discreet ways.

“When something unexpected happens, I’ve learned to stay calm and trust the systems I have in place,” he told *Reuters* in January this year. Between points and changeovers, he has said he finds himself calculating when next to take a sip from his bottle or have an energy gel.

Among others, he uses CGMs to help regulate his glucose levels. They have been his tools of choice, although his Halle Open match on June 21, which he lost, was also a bump: a malfunctioning glucose monitor gave him an incorrect reading and he injected more insulin than he needed.

He has also advocated for people with T1D both on and off the court, and set up a foundation in his name to support children with types I and II diabetes.

While he has been having a positive impact on how people live with T1D, Zverev’s legacy off the court has been chequered.

He settled a legal dispute in 2025 over allegations of domestic violence (which he has denied). The Association of Tennis Professionals also closed an investigation in 2023, stemming from allegations of physical abuse by former tennis player Olya Sharypova, citing insufficient evidence.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

Sorry to have kept you waiting. I hope you weren’t bored.”

“Not at all. I was thumbing through this old magazine. And I must say...”

“....thumbing through an old magazine! What do you mean by that?”

“When you thumb through a magazine, book or newspaper, you go through it very quickly.”

“In other words, you don’t read it carefully.”

“That’s right! Here’s an example. I thumbed through your physics textbook. I must say that it is very well written.”

“Very well written. Good grief! It’s probably the most boring book ever written. How about this example? Aruna thumbed through her address book and came up with Sandeep’s telephone number.”

“That’s an excellent example. By the way, you can also say ‘leafed through’. It means the same thing as ‘thumbed through’. For example...”

“...while the wife was getting dressed, the husband leafed through the newspaper.”

“The examiner leafed through the dissertation.”

“Did your Chairman thumb through your proposal?”

“Apparently he didn’t leaf through the proposal. His P.A. told me that he went over it very carefully.”

“What did the Chairman think of it?”

“He gave it the thumbs up.”

“I am not interested in what soft drink your Chairman offered you. I want to know...”

“....soft drink? What are you talking about?”

“You said that the Chairman gave you Thumbs Up.”

“I didn’t say that! I said that the Chairman gave my proposal the thumbs up. Grow up, will you?”

“Gave your proposal the thumbs up? Does it mean what I think it means?”

“I have no clue what you think it means. When you give something the ‘thumbs up’, you approve of it.”

“I see. How about this example? When Laxman asked his father if he could start building on their new site, his father gave him the thumbs up.”

“Sounds great. After I received the thumbs up from my boss, I threw a big party at the Silver Plate. I invited all my friends.”

“You didn’t invite me.”

“That’s because you are not my friend! Anyway, did the President of your association get in touch with the Municipal authorities?”

“Yes, the poor man spent nearly five hours there. The good news is, our proposal to widen the roads was given the thumbs up by the local”

“....really? That’s wonderful news. By the way, it is also possible to say ‘to get the thumbs up from someone’. For example, we got the thumbs up from the local authorities to widen the roads.”

“We got the thumbs up from our parents to see Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon.”

“After seeing the movie Castaway, Rohan gave it the thumbs up.”

“Meaning that he approved of it?”

“Exactly!”

Published in The Hindu on April 24, 2001.

THE DAILY QUIZ

FIFA World Cup: a quiz on FIFA controversies over the years

Joan Sony Cherian

QUESTION 1

In the 2026 World Cup, France entered the quarter-finals after defeating this country. A senator of said country lashed out at one of the French players via social media using racist and dehumanising imagery. Name the country and the French player who took a stand against the racist abuse.

QUESTION 2

In 1998, France hosted the FIFA World Cup. However, before it commenced, a terror plot targeting the tournament was uncovered by intelligence agencies. Which group was plotting the terrorist attack?

QUESTION 3

This South Korean player was suspended by FIFA from two qualifying matches during the 2014 World Cup

for holding up a banner which said “Dokdo is our territory”. Dokdo are islets controlled by South Korea but also claimed by Japan. Name the player.

QUESTION 4

Like the last semi-finals, England and Argentina faced each other back in 1986, then in the quarter-finals. A significant geopolitical conflict underpinned the match, making it extremely tense for both sides. What was the conflict? Two goals scored by this Argentinian player in this fateful match are now among the most well-known goals in football history. Name the player.

QUESTION 5

This plastic whistle-cum-horn which is popular in South Africa’s football stadiums is a symbol of that nation’s sporting culture. However, the intensity of its sound has led many confederations to outright ban them or impose restrictions. Name the instrument.



Visual question: This image showcases a flare being thrown next to a player during a match between Brazil and Chile in the 1990 FIFA World Cup. This player feigned injury alleging that the flare had hit him. Evidence quickly showed that the allegation was false and he received a lifetime ban from football. Name the player. FILE PHOTO

Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:

- The actor portrayed the adult Damien Thorn, the Antichrist, in the third instalment of this famous film franchise, which centres on a child born to the Devil. **Ans: Omen III: The Final Conflict (1981)**
- Shot in West Berlin, Neill acted opposite Isabelle Adjani in this psychological horror drama, which has attained cult status since its release. **Ans: Possession (1981)**
- Neil took a sinister turn in this sci-fi slasher set aboard a haunted spacecraft, delivering the famously chilling line: “Where we’re going, we won’t need eyes to see.” **Ans: Event Horizon**
- He starred in genre master John Carpenter’s lovecraftian homage as an insurance investigator probing the disappearance of a horror writer. **Ans: In the Mouth of Madness (1994)**
- Visual: Sam Neill plays a corporate criminal-cum-vampire who plans to profit from a company that sells blood. Name the film, which stars Ethan Hawke in the lead role. **Ans: Daybreakers**

Early Birds

Tamal Biswas | Siddhartha Viswanathan | Pulkit Sathe | Piyali Tuli | Sudhir Thapa

Word of the day

Votary:

one bound by vows to a religion or life of worship or service a devoted adherent of a cause or person or activity

Synonyms: adherent, devotee

Usage: *She is a votary of Gandhian philosophy and lives a simple life.*

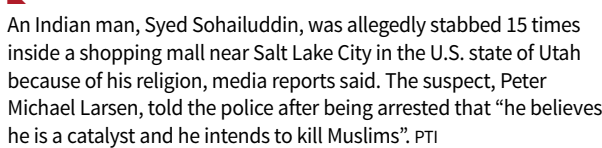
Pronunciation: newsth.live/votary

International Phonetic

Alphabet: /ˈvəʊt(ə)ri/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to **letters@thehindu.co.in** with the subject ‘Text & Context’

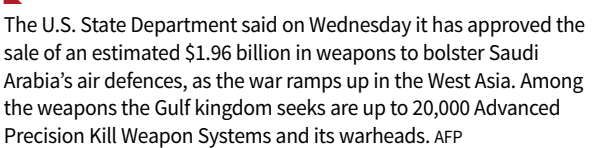
Indian national stabbed in the U.S. over his religion; suspect arrested



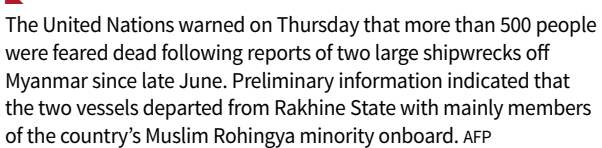
Zelenskyy's dismissal of Ukraine's Defence Minister sparks protests



U.S. approves nearly \$2 billion in weapons sales to Saudi Arabia



Over 500 feared dead in suspected shipwrecks off Myanmar, says UN



Algeria has been experiencing a heatwave that has sparked nearly 1,000 fires in recent days, according to the Civil Protection agency.

'AI chatbots could spread govt. curbs on online speech'

U.S. hosting meet in bid to globalise the fight against far-left terrorism

ek with his obsession for 'fraud' conspiracy theories

Burnham urged to end Labour's 'boys club', put more women in top jobs

A portrait of a middle-aged man with short, dark hair and glasses. He is wearing a dark blue blazer over a light-colored, button-down shirt. He is standing outdoors in front of a stone building with arched windows. The background is slightly blurred.

CM
YK

INBRIEF



Merlier wins Tour de France 12th stage in sprint finish

Belgian sprint star Tim Merlier trebled up at the Tour de France on Thursday as he won the 12th stage at Chalon-sur-Saône. The Soudal-Quick Step rider edged out Dutchman Olav Kooij and fellow Belgian Jasper Philipsen to claim his third stage win of this year’s Tour, and sixth overall. Reigning champion Tadej Pogacar maintained his overall lead of more than three-and-a-half minutes over Jonas Vingegaard.

Lakshya hits double ton, Manav makes century

Lakshya Raichandani’s gritty double century was the standout performance as the first Youth ‘Test’ between Sri Lanka and India ended in a draw in Galle on Thursday. Resuming on 196, the opener made 207 off 324 balls. Wicketkeeper-batter Manav Krishna made 100 off 153 deliveries and was the last man out as India amassed 576.

The scores: Sri Lanka u-19 424 for 9 decl. & 178 for 6 decl. in 39.1 overs (Dulnith Sigera 72, Kavija Gamage 51, Yashbardhan Chauhan 4/49) drew with India u-19 576 in 173.5 overs (Lakshya Raichandani 207, Sagar Virk 134, Kush Patel 42, Manav Krishna 100, Lathendra Akash 3/66).

India pacer Gurnoor handed warning, demerit point

India pacer Gurnoor Brar has been handed a warning and a demerit point for throwing the ball in an “inappropriate and dangerous” manner during the first ODI against England. He was found guilty of breaching Article 2.9 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which is a Level 1 offence.

Wrestler Jaspreet runs afoul of anti-doping rule

Indian wrestler Jaspreet Kaur has returned an adverse analytical finding for octodrine (1,5-dimethylhexylamine) and its metabolite heptaminol from her urine sample collected during the sixth Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, in April. Jaspreet, who bagged a bronze in women’s 70kg category, has accepted the consequences of her Anti-Doping Rule Violation (ADRV) and the disqualification of her result.

LIVE TELECAST

Golf: British Open, Day 2, FanCode, 11 a.m.
Zimbabwe vs Bangladesh: Second T20I, FanCode, 4 p.m.

Firouzja gets the better of Pranesh; other games end in stalemates



Success and survival: Firouzja wore down Pranesh in a marathon 79-move game while Gukesh put time trouble behind him to emerge unscathed against Nihal. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

CHESS

C. Shyam Sundar
CHENNAI

Alireza Firouzja got off to a winning start, dismantling M. Pranesh in a longish game, at the Chennai Grand Masters chess tournament at Hotel Westin Velachery on Thursday. The Frenchman, entering the event in good nick after a title-winning run in the Grand Chess Tour-Croatia leg, wore down the young Indian in a 79-move game.

He had to dig deep as the match went into the fifth hour before taking the point with black pieces.

The Frenchman emerged with a slight edge

from a Sicilian Defence before Pranesh’s 36th move allowed him a breakthrough.

The 23-year-old Firouzja was the only winner on the opening day as World champion D. Gukesh was held by compatriot Nihal Sarin while Uzbekistan’s Nodirbek Abdusattorov, the highest-rated player in the tournament, split the point with USA’s Hans Moke Niemann and local hope Arjun Erigaisi shared honours with Russian Dmitry Andreikin.

Holding firm Abdusattorov held firm despite coming under pressure from Niemann for a major part of the game.

The Gukesh-Nihal encounter saw the former

finding himself in time trouble in the middle before emerging unscathed.

The Chennai GM, playing in the city for the first time since his epochal triumph, ensured a stalemate in 47 moves once he neutralised Nihal’s advantage.

Arjun and Andreikin signed the peace treaty after 42 moves.

The Russian found counter-play against the exposed white king and forced a draw through a succession of queen checks.

The results (first round): Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb) drew with Hans Niemann (USA), Arjun Erigaisi drew with Dmitry Andreikin (Rus). M. Pranesh lost to Alireza Firouzja (Fra), D. Gukesh drew with Nihal Sarin.

INDIA IN ENGLAND

N. Sudarshan
CARDIFF

On a warm summer afternoon at the Sophia Gardens here on Thursday, the English players walked back to the pavilion for the mid-match break with a spring in their steps.

Harry Brook’s men had bowled India out for a seemingly mediocre 233-run total after asking the visitors to take first strike in the second ODI. History – both recent and distant – suggest that it is a very chaseable score. Eight of the previous 12 ODIs, including the last four, have been won by teams batting second.

The record is set to be extended unless the India bowlers, led by the irrepressible Jasprit Bumrah have other plans.

The home side’s decision to bring in speedsters Saqib Mahmood and Gus Atkinson for Josh Tongue and Liam Dawson – who made 68 in Birmingham and bowled two overs of left-arm spin – proved right as nine of the 10 wickets were picked up by the pacers, including five by



Fighting knock: Shreyas top-scored for the Men in Blue with a 71-ball 66. AFP

Atkinson and Mahmood combined.

The Indian top-three made more than half the runs and there was precious little from the rest except Shreyas Iyer, who top-scored with 66 (71b, 5x4, 2x4).

Four of the top-six also fell playing cross-batted strokes and across the line.

Rohit Sharma made an unconvincing 26 (47b, 1x4, 1x6), during which he

England 60/3 in 13 overs Root (29) and Curran (4) were at the crease. Duckett (0), Bethell (4) and Brook (16) were dismissed. Bumrah, Prasidh and Gurnoor took a wicket each

pulled Atkinson for a trademark six but was also dropped by the same man at deep backward square-leg on five.

A top-edged sweep into the hands of wicketkeeper Jos Buttler off Will Jacks

ended his stay.

Captain Shubman Gill (31, 30b, 6x4) played a few pleasing leg-glances and flicks but drilled Atkinson straight to Ben Duckett at cover. Ishan Kishan, who replaced K.L. Rahul in the XI because of the latter’s illness, was out executing a wild pull.

Virat Kohli was assured during his 65-run knock (66b, 8x4), collecting many a boundary in the arc bet-

Rare talent Kranti needs to be nurtured



Kranti. GETTY IMAGES

er’s spell of six for 52 at Chester-le-Street helped the Women in Blue win the ODI series.

Not many seamers since the remarkable Jhulan Goswami have promised as much as Kranti.

Renuka is a magnificent swing bowler no doubt, but the 30-year-old has been troubled by injuries.

If that show with the white ball in England forced the world to take a close look at Kranti, a year later, in the same country, she has shown how far she has travelled as a bowler, this time with a red cherry in her hand.

Her spell in England’s first innings was sensational, as she destroyed the strong England batting line-up with her pace and the relentless attack on the stumps.

That spell (five for 37) was certainly worthy of be-

ing the reason to make it to the famous honours board at Lord’s.

Kranti was understandably proud of becoming the first woman to make it as a Test player.

Kranti was able to put the pressure on the England batting also in the second innings, in which she picked up two wickets. She was, not surprisingly, named the Player-of-the-Match.

It is, of course, early days yet in international cricket for the girl from the small Madhya Pradesh town of Ghuwara.

She certainly has the skillset to serve India for long. And she needs to be taken care of.

Pace bowling is such a demanding job.

SCOREBOARD

INDIA

Rohit Sharma c Buttler b Jacks 26 (47b, 1x4, 1x6), Shubman Gill c Duckett b Atkinson 31 (30b, 6x4), Virat Kohli c Rashid b Archer 65 (66b, 8x4), Ishan Kishan c & b Curran 1 (8b), Shreyas Iyer c Buttler b Atkinson 66 (71b, 5x4, 2x6), Washington Sundar c Buttler b Mahmood 2 (5b), Axar Patel c Buttler b Archer 1 (5b), Shivam Dube c & b Archer 0 (1b), Gurnoor Brar c Atkinson b Mahmood 7 (15b), Jasprit Bumrah (not out) 20 (13b, 3x4, 1x6), Prasidh Krishna b Atkinson

0 (3b); Extras (lb-6, w-8): 14; Total (in 44 overs): 233.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-44 (Gill, 7.4 overs), 2-104 (Rohit, 17.5), 3-111 (Kishan, 20.3), 4-178 (Kohli, 31.4), 5-181 (Washington, 32.4), 6-193 (Axar, 35.4), 7-193 (Dube, 35.5), 8-210 (Gurnoor, 40.2), 9-233 (Shreyas, 43.3).

ENGLAND BOWLING

Archer 10-0-47-3, Mahmood 9-1-52-2, Atkinson 9-1-50-3, Rashid 5-0-34-0, Curran 6-1-23-1, Jacks 5-0-21-1.

Toss: England.

ween mid-wicket and the bowler. His half-century off 50 balls was completed with a pleasing straight drive off Sam Curran, but an attempted heave over mid-wicket ended up in the hands of the third-man fielder.

In the 33rd over, a single Shreyas took in the cover area injured a bird. Jacob Bethell, quite admirably, picked it up and handed it over to the ground staff. But it was India which came out feathered and tarred.

Mini-collapse

Washington Sundar, who had just received treatment for an issue in his thigh, tried to hook Mahmood and was caught by

Buttler. Archer then delivered a double blow, forcing Axar Patel to upper-cut his way into Buttler’s gloves and having Shivam Dube caught and bowled.

But Shreyas, who is perceived to have a deficiency against short-pitched bowling, seemed most at ease, even carving Archer for a six over fine-leg to bring up his half-century from 42 balls.

However, when he was caught behind trying to poke at an Atkinson delivery, there were more than six overs remaining.

Bumrah remained unbeaten on a 13-ball 20 that featured three fours and a six. Will it carry more weight than just mere entertainment?

Sindhu stuns Han, enters quarterfinals

BADMINTON

Press Trust of India
TOKYO

P.V. Sindhu produced one of her best performances of the season to outclass World No. 5 Han Yue of China in straight games and storm into the quarter-finals of the Japan Open Super 750 badminton tournament, here on Thursday.

The World No. 10 Indian needed just 35 minutes to register a 21-16, 21-14 win over the higher-ranked Chinese shuttler in their second-round contest.

Sindhu found her rhythm midway through the opening game, striking

the shuttle cleanly and dictating the rallies to take the lead. The former World champion then completely dominated the second game, racing to an 8-0 advantage before comfortably sealing the contest.

The 31-year-old will next face Nozomi Okuhara of Japan, who received a walk-over after top seed An Se-young of South Korea withdrew from their second-round match.

The mixed doubles pair of Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila bowed out in the pre-quarterfinals, losing 20-22, 17-21 to top seeds Feng Yan Zhe and Huang Dong Ping of China in their round-of-16 clash in 47 minutes.

Vishvanath and Ganga clinch gold

ASIAN JR. BOXING

Press Trust of India
JAKARTA

Vishvanath Suresh (50kg) and Ganga (55kg) clinched gold in the u-23 class as India concluded its Asian u-19 and u-23 boxing championships men’s campaign with strong performances here on Thursday.

Vishvanath, the reigning senior Asian champion, eked out a 3-2 victory over

Japan’s Daichi Iwai while Ganga edged past Kazakhstan’s Bexulatan Boranbek by the same margin.

Vanshaj (65kg) had to settle for a silver medal after a 1-4 loss to Ilkhomjon Ergashev of Uzbekistan.

Second-best

In the u-19 finals, Aditya (55kg) went down to Uzbekistan’s Elyor Rustamov 0-5 while Shubham Rajput (90kg) lost to Asadbek Sultanboev from Uzbekistan by the same scoreline.



Well-earned success: Vishvanath, Nisha (u-23 women’s 54kg) and Ganga went all the way. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

U Mumba edges Pune Jaguars for second win in succession

UTT

K. Keerthivasan
PANAJI

Manush Shah remains a vital cog in U Mumba TT’s wheel, even if his form has fluctuated in Ultimate Table Tennis Season 7. A dependable singles player and one of the league’s finest doubles specialists, much of the defending champion’s fortunes rest on his shoulders.

Against PBG Pune Jaguars at the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium here on Thursday, Manush once again proved his worth.

Although he lost his opening singles match, he rose to the occasion in the pivotal mixed doubles as U Mumba edged Pune 9-6 to register its second successive victory.

U Mumba had earlier drawn level through Anna Hursey, whose disciplined counter-attacking game proved too good for Diya Chitale in the second match.

The Welsh youngster prevailed 2-1 to extend her unbeaten run this season



Gaining control: Manush and Hursey outclassed Snehit and Prithika in the pivotal mixed doubles. BUTTERFLY UTT

and make it 3-3 in the tie. The momentum then swung decisively in U Mumba’s favour in the mixed doubles.

Manush and Anna combined brilliantly to outclass S.F.R. Snehit and Prithika Pavade 3-0.

Manush’s sharp angles from deep behind the table complemented Anna’s consistency and composure in the crucial exchanges as the defending champion surged to a 6-3 lead, needing just two more games from the remaining two matches.

In the reverse men’s singles, Lilian Bardet produced another fearless display against Omar Assar, the highest-ranked player

in the league at World No. 35. A compulsive attacker who lives by the sword, the Frenchman stuck to his high-risk, high-reward game plan.

It paid off as he battled to a 2-1 victory and virtually (8-4) sealing the tie.

Pune reduced the margin when Prithika Pavade defeated Anusha Kutumbale 2-1 in the final singles match.

The results: U Mumba bt PBG Pune Jaguars 9-6 (Manush Shah lost to S.F.R. Snehit 11-6, 9-11, 6-11; Anna Hursey bt Diya Chitale 11-9, 9-11, 11-6; Manush & Anna bt Snehit & Prithika Pavade 11-9, 11-4, 11-7; Lilian Bardet bt Omar Assar 7-11, 11-7, 11-10; Anusha Kutumbale lost to Prithika Pavade 8-11, 10-11, 11-10).

Will expansion lead to elevation?

With the 50-over format struggling for identity amid great response to the T20 version, there are question marks over whether the 14-team ODI World Cup will provide enough quality



GETTY IMAGES

R. Kaushik

It feels like it was only the other night that co-hosts Mexico and South Africa kicked off the 23rd edition of the FIFA World Cup, and here we are with only two of the gargantuan 104 matches left to play in the tournament.

One of them, the third-place playoff, is a match no team wants to feature in. It is not even a necessary evil, a consolation prize that offers scant to no consolation. Just days after suffering heartbreaking losses to Spain and Argentina respectively, expecting France and England to put on a show is asking for a little too much. But such are the demands on modern professional sport that the show must go on, no matter that the protagonists believe it is nothing if not a formality.

Contrary to the popular perception that accompanied the expansion of the World Cup to 48 teams for the first time in its long and storied history, this edition has been anything but lop-sided, predictable and undimensional.

The success of Cape Verde, more than anyone else, is a massive shot in the arm for the sport's governing body, which had copped its fair share of criticism when it added 16 nations to the World Cup compared to the previous edition in what was seen largely as a self-appeasing, populist move. Till date, Cape Verde remain the only team not to have lost to Spain in this edition, a result Lionel Messi-fuelled Argentina will seek to reprise in Sunday's final at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

Such has been the overwhelming success of the tournament that FIFA boss Gianni Infantino has thrown up the realistic prospect of an even larger field at the next edition in four years' time. It will be jointly co-hosted by Spain, Portugal and Morocco with a game apiece in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the tournament, first held in Uruguay in 1930.

Just a month prior to this public pondering, Infantino had joked that the only way Italy, the country of his birth and four-time champions, could qualify was if the field was expanded to 64 teams, "or maybe even 208". Obviously, that's not why Infantino's FIFA is mulling another expansion, though it isn't lost on anyone that the Italian national side has hit a terrible roadblock after failing to make it to the World Cup for a third edition on the trot.

Even as the 'Beautiful Game' is considering various possibilities, FIFA's cricketing counterpart, the International Cricket Council, announced an expanded field for the next 50-over World Cup, to be staged in 2027. At a time when the One-Day International version is battling for relevance and primacy, the constant change in formats is anything but ideal.

One would have thought the system in vogue for the last two editions – in



The ODI World Cup. GETTY IMAGES

England in 2019 and in India in 2023 where the 10 participating teams played each other once in a round-robin format with the top four making it to the semifinals – was fair and just because it pitted the strongest sides in the world against each other and offered insurance against a bad day in office or an unkind cut from the elements.

But apparently, those who are more invested in the sport and who are far more qualified to take such calls don't feel so, which is why the 2028 edition will be a 14-team affair, as the ICC had indicated more than five years ago.

Bilateral 50-over contests no longer hold the same interest, attention or standing as they once used to, when T20 cricket was not even in the realms of the imagination. Limited-overs cricket was driven globally entirely by the ODI iteration and series of five, six or even seven matches weren't uncommon. Now, even in the imminence of a World Cup, seldom do teams square off in a series of more than three games. It is perhaps in deference to a pronounced apathy from the fans to whom context has started to matter a lot more in the wake of the 20-over revolution that promises and delivers non-stop excitement, with the bonus of a decisive outcome guaranteed inside four hours (provided teams don't mess around with the overrate).

A thing of the past

Just the other day, Shubman Gill reflected nostalgically on the tri-series showdowns that once dominated the ODI ecosystem. Every summer in Australia, the host nation would lock horns with two other sides over an extended period culminating in a best-of-three finals.

It did sometimes appear too inflated and long drawn-out, but there was so much prestige attached to those trilateral contests. Victory in the finals was often considered next only to clinching the World Cup or the Champions Trophy (instituted in 1998 as the ICC KnockOut Trophy).

Indeed, who can forget the ecstasy in India when M.S. Dhoni's warriors swept the finals 2-0 in early 2008 in the immediacy of the Monkeygate scandal.



The T20 World Cup. GETTY IMAGES

The peerless Sachin Tendulkar was in the forefront of two amazing title clashes that justified Ricky Ponting's prediction that the scoreline in the finals would be 2-0 – except that his team was on the wrong side of the result.

The duels in Sharjah are memorable, not least the one in April 1998 when India sneaked into the final ahead of New Zealand on run rate after Tendulkar's magnificent Desert Storm that was more furious than even the sandstorm which first interrupted and then truncated the final league clash against Australia. And also when Tendulkar celebrated his 25th birthday in style with a second magnificent century in three nights to consign hitherto unbeaten Australia, the great Steve Waugh's Australia, to a crushing defeat.

Now, there are hardly any triangular competitions. Even several bilateral series are played in front of empty stands, and potentially the only occasion when more than two countries play in the same tournament is during the Asia Cup, which switches between 50- and 20-over versions depending on the format in which the next World Cup is to be played.

Rise of the shortest format

Given the packed calendars, the profusion of T20 leagues worldwide and a marked slant towards cramming as many 20-over games as possible into a tight timeframe, the 50-over game has almost been cannibalised, depending largely – if not only – on the flagship World Cup to keep its head just above the swirling water.

How will this 14-team World Cup play out next year? Only time will tell, though this isn't the first time the tournament will have this many teams. In any case, the 'actual' action will only begin from the second stage onwards, when 12 sides will be divided into two groups of six each.

The original plan, envisaged in June 2021, to have seven teams in each of the two pools, has been shelved. Rightly so, because of the fear of one-sided matches which will in turn impact both bums on the seats in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia – the joint hosts – and a larger television audience that drives and decides the market value of broadcast

rights and sponsorship wars, among other things.

One set of pundits has argued that a World Cup, especially of the 50-over variety, must be a tight, compact competition involving only the cream so that the 'sanctity' of the event is maintained. They have dismissed Kenya's conquest of the West Indies in 1996 or Ireland's stunning defeat of England 15 years later as the occasional flash in the pan that does not justify the diluting of the field. They argue that as it is, the ICC ODI team rankings encompass only 20 teams, and to have 14 of them playing in a World Cup is a little much, even if only 12 will eventually be in the running for top honours with two teams being eliminated in the first triangular round.

They contend that if there is a perceived need, or even a case, to have more teams in a World Cup, it should be accommodated in the 20-over kind where 93 teams enjoy ICC rankings, from recently crowned No. 1s England to Costa Rica, who currently bring up the foot of the table.

While they might not be thrilled at the 50-over showpiece entity becoming numerically larger, they may be fine with 20 teams competing in the T20 World Cup for the third successive time.

The vehicle to popularity

In its bid to globalise the sport and spread its tentacles to hitherto untouched territories, the ICC chose to use T20s as the vehicle to catch the eye of those in, say, Japan and Italy, in Fiji and Brazil. That it has succeeded to a large extent in its stated desire to attract new nations to its fold is beyond question – at its Annual Conference in Edinburgh on Wednesday, the ICC officially inducted Mauritius as its 111th member nation.

The growing pull of the dramatic 20-over variant has resulted in the return of cricket to the Olympic fold at the 2028 summer Games in Los Angeles, a shot in the arm for a discipline that has been out of the quadrennial extravaganza since its only appearance at the Paris Games in 1900 when only two contestants, Great Britain and the hosts, battled for the gold medal.

While the 20-over game, with its unquestioned charm and magnetic tug, will lure many other countries to the ICC fold, it is hard to see its longer white-ball counterpart taking deep root in too many nations that are not already playing the sport. Against this backdrop, the debate on whether the 50-over World Cup should continue to mushroom numerically will rage on.

There is no right answer, of course. Cricket is on course-correction mode, seeking to erase its 'elitist' reputation. But when only 12 countries play the longest, most traditional format (Tests) and only eight more are part of the ODI ecosystem, it finds itself in the middle of a grim battle somewhat lightened by the tremendous response to the slam-bang 20-over module.

THE GIST

▼

Bilateral ODI contests no longer hold the same interest, attention or standing as they once used to. There are hardly any triangular competitions

▼

One set of pundits has argued that a World Cup, especially of the 50-over variety, must be a tight, compact competition

▼

The growing pull of the dramatic 20-over variant has resulted in the return of cricket to the Olympic fold