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HC takes up plea against deploying teachers for SIR

NEW DELHI
The Delhi High Court on Friday sought the Election Commission's response to a public interest litigation plea challenging the "large-scale" deployment of government school teachers for the special intensive revision (SIR) in the national capital. » **PAGE 2**

Rajasthan allows political workers to assist police

JAIPUR
The BJP government in Rajasthan has amended the police rules to allow members of political parties to be inducted into community liaison groups, which assist the police in intelligence gathering, crime prevention and maintaining law and order. » **PAGE 2**

Bill tabled in RS to punish insult to National Song

NEW DELHI
The Home Ministry introduced the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, in the Rajya Sabha on Friday, to punish any insult to National Song Vande Mataram. » **PAGE 4**

U.S. hits Iran after Trump's threats over Red Sea

DUBAI
U.S. missiles struck targets across Iran, reaching as far as its Caspian coast, on Friday after President Donald Trump vowed "major punishment" for Tehran and its Houthi allies in Yemen for extending the war to a second major shipping chokepoint, the mouth of the Red Sea. » **PAGE 12**

SC to hear pleas alleging police excesses

Police continue to use excessive force against protesters, counsel tells court | CRPF says it is verifying media reports on pellet injuries; no action so far: official | CJP to launch website to archive videos, photos documenting 'police brutality'

Aaratrika Bhaumik
Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear on Monday two freshly instituted petitions alleging police excesses during the July 20 crackdown on student protesters in the national capital. The development came hours after Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant clarified in open court on Friday that "no petition" had previously been filed on the issue. He criticised "reckless" reports suggesting that the court had refused to list such a matter. The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), which is spearheading the protests, announced on Friday that it would launch a website to archive videos and photographs documenting alleged police brutality during the crackdown. It said the material would form



Holding firm: CJP supporters protesting at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, on Friday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

the basis of legal proceedings seeking the registration of FIRs against the police personnel allegedly responsible for the violence. Meanwhile, after *The Hindu* reported that two unarmed protesters were struck by pellets allegedly fired by Rapid Action Force (RAF) personnel, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) said on Friday that

CJP firm on Education Minister's resignation

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A two-member delegation of the Cockroach Janta Party, which met Union Ministers J.P. Nadda and Jitendra Singh on Friday, reiterated their demand for the resignation of

Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. They also sought a public apology to the protesting students who were "brutally thrashed" on July 20.

FULL REPORT ON
» **PAGE 3**

presspersons had engaged in "reckless" reporting. "In the last two days, a completely false statement was made that a matter was filed, and the media is absolutely free from all responsibility, recklessly falsely reporting that the Chief Justice refused to list the matter," he said. Later in the afternoon, senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan mentioned before the Bench that two petitions had since been formally instituted and assigned diary numbers. Seeking their urgent listing, he submitted that police personnel were continuing to use "excessive force" against student protesters. Mr. Sankaranarayanan urged the court to intervene immediately, saying the alleged police violence was continuing on a daily basis.

'WILL NOT RELENT'
» **PAGE 7**

Govt. sacks 47 NTA officials, tightens law on paper leaks

Maitri Porecha
Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

In a move to crack down on exam malpractices, the Centre has taken a slew of actions, including strengthening the anti-paper leak law and terminating the services of up to 47 officials in the National Testing Agency (NTA). The Cabinet on Friday cleared a proposal to introduce amendments to the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, endorsing the anti-paper leak law with tougher penalties and time-bound trials. "...More reformatory actions will follow. This is part of a complete overhaul of the NTA that has been in controversy over paper leaks," a source said.

FULL REPORT ON
» **PAGE 4**

Fatal journey



Wreckage of a vehicle crushed under boulders that fell from a hillside at Karunallah in Lahaut-Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh on Friday. Thirteen people were killed while two survived by jumping out of the vehicle. An infant was among the deceased. PTI (REPORT ON PAGE 5)

SC proposes special courts for Manipur violence cases

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday proposed the establishment of special courts to conduct day-to-day trials in cases arising out of the 2023 Manipur violence and directed the investigating agencies to expedite the probes to ensure no further "inordinate delay". A Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Jyomalya Bagchi and V. Mohana was hearing pleas relating to the violence. Referring to reports, the Bench noted the prevailing situation had made the examination of witnesses difficult.

'EXPEDITE PROBE'
» **PAGE 4**

U.S. announces permanent tariffs; India remains at 10%

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
WASHINGTON

Even as the U.S.'s temporary 10% tariffs come to an end, it has announced permanent tariffs related to its investigation into forced labour on 60 of its trading partners, including India. India's tariff rate, however, remains at 10% instead of the proposed 12.5% after it banned the import of forced labour goods earlier this month.

The U.S. had in February imposed a temporary 150-day 10% tariff on all of its trade partners, which expired on Friday. In March, the office of the U.S. Trade Representative had also launched two separate investigations under Section 301 of the Trade Act, 1974. The new tariffs announced late Thursday night (India time) are a result of the findings of one of these investigations – the one on whether the U.S.'s trade partners were doing enough to prevent the import of goods made using forced labour. The second investigation, into whether other economies were using excess manufacturing capacity to export to the U.S. in a manner that was hurting the U.S. economy, is still pending and could result in further tariffs.

'Correct rights abuses'
"President Donald Trump recognises that decades of moral suasion have not eradicated forced labour from global supply chains," U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said in a statement.

"The U.S. has had a forced labour import ban for nearly a century, and rigorously enforces it; it's



Donald Trump

well past time for our trading partners to do the same... Today's action will begin to correct what is both a human rights abuse and a distortive trade practice to improve the welfare of workers everywhere," he added.

The draft report of the investigation, released in June, had proposed a 12.5% tariff on 54 countries as they had "failed to impose and effectively enforce" prohibitions on the import of goods produced using forced labour.

Now, after final findings, 10% tariffs will apply to countries that impose a forced labour import prohibition, have committed to enforce such a prohibition through a trade agreement with the U.S., or have imposed a partial regime with the effect of preventing the import of certain forced labour goods.

These economies include India, Argentina, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Canada, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom. The U.S. will impose a 12.5% tariff on all other countries it probed.

'MIXED REACTION'
» **PAGE 11**

Gujarat deluge erases monsoon deficit, but overall rain still low

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

A spell of exceptionally heavy rainfall over Gujarat, aided by a low-pressure system that tracked westward from the Bay of Bengal and its interaction with a western disturbance, has virtually wiped out India's rainfall deficit for July – the most important monsoon month – even as large parts of northeast India continue to remain rainfall-deficient.

As of Friday, rainfall across the country for July stood at 215.5 mm against a normal of 215 mm – eliminating the monthly deficit after a dry start to the month. However, cumulative monsoon rainfall from June 1 to July 24 remained



A view of the waterlogged Limbayat Mithi Khadi area in Surat after a creek overflowed following heavy rain on Friday. PTI

16.1% below normal nationwide, according to India Meteorological Department (IMD) data. In percentage terms, east and northeast India (E&NE) continued to be the worst-performing region with a seasonal deficit of 31.9%,

while south peninsular India recorded a 26.8% shortfall. "The deficit has come down now," IMD Director-General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra told *The Hindu*. "The low-pressure system developed over the

Over 40,500 evacuated amid Gujarat rain fury

AHMEDABAD
More than 40,500 people have been shifted to safer locations and 6,367 rescued as monsoon rains battered Gujarat for the third consecutive day, triggering widespread flooding, disrupting transport and inundating large parts of south and central Gujarat. » **PAGE 5**

Bay of Bengal moved across Odisha to Gujarat and Rajasthan, and gave sufficient opportunity for good rainfall during the past week. A western disturbance also passed through north India, and there was interaction between the two."

While heavy rainfall has been reported from parts of Assam and Nagaland, Mr. Mohapatra said it would be incorrect to characterise the northeast as witnessing an exceptional rainfall event. "When central India gets more rain, northeast India generally gets less because the monsoon trough is located south of its normal position. We also cannot confirm any cloudburst... but the exceptionally heavy rainfall this time is over Gujarat."

The base-level of rainfall in the E&NE is higher than other parts of the country. Therefore, even a rainfall deficit in statistical terms can translate to significant rain in absolute terms. For

instance, between June 1 and July 24, the normal rainfall in the East and northeast India is 66.4 cm. This year, even with a 31% deficit, it is 45.2 cm. Regionally, that is still the highest rainfall in India and more than the actual 39 cm in central India and 23 cm in the southern peninsula.

Earlier this year, the IMD had forecast below normal southwest monsoon largely on the back of a developing El Nino. In its long-range outlook, it projected below-normal seasonal rainfall over much of east and northeast India and parts of southern peninsular India, while expecting above-normal rainfall over central India and adjoining regions.

INBRIEF



Amit Shah meets family of J&K policeman killed in terror attack

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday spoke to the family of Jammu and Kashmir police Head Constable Ashiq Hussain Qureshi, who was killed in a terrorist attack in Anantnag earlier this week. Mr. Shah spoke to Qureshi’s son during the visit of BJP MLA and Leader of Opposition Sunil Sharma to the residence of the slain policeman. Mr. Sharma said Mr. Shah assured the family that the government stands firmly with them. “Visited the home of martyred Head Constable Ashiq Hussain Qureshi to pay respects, offer condolences to his family. Grateful to Hon’ble Union Home Minister Shri @AmitShah Ji for speaking to the martyr’s son and assuring the family,” Mr. Sharma said in a post on X.

Cricketers Akash Deep, Mukesh Kumar appointed DSP in Bihar

Indian cricket team’s fast bowlers Akash Deep and Mukesh Kumar on Friday were directly appointed Deputy Superintendents of Police (DSP) in recognition of their outstanding sporting achievements. Several other national and international athletes also got government jobs under the “Medal Lao, Naukri Pao” scheme in Bihar. Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary handed over the appointment letters to a total of 19 athletes, including Mr. Deep and Mr. Kumar. He said it is a matter of pride for Bihar that for the first time an athlete has been appointed to a high-ranking position like DSP. He added that this will boost the morale of the State’s young athletes and motivate them to excel in sports.

Chhattisgarh UCC panel holds first meeting to draft Bill to be tabled in Winter Session

Press Trust of India
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Friday said his government will table a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill in the upcoming Winter Session of the Assembly.

Talking to reporters at the Raipur airport before heading for Bengaluru, Mr. Sai said the government was committed to implementing the UCC.

A five-member committee, headed by Supreme Court Justice (Retd.) Ranjana Prakash Desai, was constituted last month for UCC implementation in the State.

Mr. Sai said, “The panel’s first meeting is being held today. We will get the UCC passed in the upcoming Winter Session of the Assembly.”

Officials said the meet-



Chhattisgarh CM Vishnu Deo Sai

ing was held at Mantralaya Mahanadi Bhavan in Nava Raipur Atal Nagar.

The Madhya Pradesh Assembly on Tuesday passed a UCC Bill with provisions to ban polygamy and make the registration of live-in relationships mandatory, while excluding the tribal community from its scope. A committee headed by Justice Desai had drafted the Bill.

Besides Desai, the UCC committee includes retired

IAS officers Shatrughan Singh and M.K. Raut, senior advocate Mohan Pawar and former principal Jyoti Rani Singh.

The committee has been tasked with examining the existing legal framework relating to the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code in Chhattisgarh and making recommendations on issues such as marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, adoption and other related matters.

It will also seek suggestions from citizens, social organisations, legal experts and other stakeholders apart from studying UCC-related legal frameworks adopted by other States.

The panel will prepare a draft of the proposed UCC and submit it to the State government along with legislative and administrative recommendations, government officials said.

Will restore mangroves lost to encroachments: Minister

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

In the Sundarbans, hundreds of acres of mangrove forests have been lost to encroachments, including the construction of shallow fish ponds. West Bengal Environment and Forest Minister Manoj Kumar Oraon, who recently visited an island where over 100 hectares of mangroves have been encroached on, said on Friday that such areas would be restored.

“In one of the islands with green mangrove cover till a few years ago, I saw that the entire island has been turned into fisheries. There are hundreds of such examples,” Mr. Oraon said, referring to Kripakhali in the Sundarbans.

The Minister said when



In the Sundarbans, hundreds of acres of mangrove forests have been lost to encroachments such as shallow fish ponds. FILE PHOTO

one travels along the water bodies and creeks of the Sundarbans, from the outside it appears that there is a dense mangrove forest, but inside the forest, the mangrove cover has been cleared and the land has been encroached upon.

Mr. Oraon made the re-

marks at a workshop titled ‘Strengthening Mangrove Governance in the Indian Sundarbans through Technology Driven Innovation, Knowledge Partnership and Co-management’. It was organised by the Nature Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS) in col-

laboration with the State Forest Department.

A report prepared by NEWS highlighted that over 600 hectares of mangrove forest have been encroached upon for the construction of bheries (shallow fish ponds) at 10 locations. The representatives of NEWS said the mangroves encroached upon could be much higher as the estimates have been made at only 10 sites.

‘Set up authority’

Speaking at the workshop, Pradeep Vyas, president of NEWS, called for the setting up of a mangrove management and conservation authority in the State.

Dr. Vyas, a former forest official who has served in the Sundarbans for over a decade, also called for pro-

moting the saltwater crocodiles in the area, saying the species can have a lot of tourism potential.

West Bengal, particularly the Sundarbans, holds the largest share of mangrove cover in India, accounting for 42.45% of the national total with approximately 2,119.16 sq. km.

Rajendra Jakher, Chief Conservator of Forests and Field Director of the Sundarban Tiger Reserve, in his address at the workshop said the number of saltwater crocodiles is between 234 and 264.

Emphasising that the Sundarbans are a fragile ecosystem, where all factors are not within the control of local authorities, he said factors in control of the Forest Department are being managed well.



BLOs verifying the details of residents during a door-to-door drive as part of the ongoing SIR drive in the national capital. FILE PHOTO

under considerable stress over the past few days while balancing her responsibilities as a teacher and duties as a BLO.

The EC’s counsel submitted that the SIR is a nationwide exercise and teachers are required to perform poll-related work only during non-teaching hours or on holidays. He said teachers receive honorarium and compensation for the work, adding that only 10-14% of teachers are ultimately deployed.

“If a request is made for nine teachers, the school

deploys only three to four. I don’t have a problem with four teachers showing up,” the EC’s counsel said, describing the poll panel’s approach as “liberal”.

‘What if they need rest?’

The Bench observed that if the EC states that participation by teachers is voluntary rather than mandatory, the court could dispose of the matter. “Can they be said to be mandatory? Somebody is not interested in your honorarium or compensation. They need rest. It should be voluntary. Tak-

ing shade of Article 324, you can do whatever you want?” the court orally remarked. “If you are calling them volunteers, make that statement. We will dispose of it,” it added.

Article 324 grants EC the power of “superintendence, direction and control” over polls in India.

‘Students affected’

The plea contended that the mass deployment of government, municipal and government-aided school teachers for the SIR is adversely affecting the education of lakhs of students in Delhi. It alleged that in several schools, regular teaching staff had been withdrawn during school hours, forcing classes to be handled by guest teachers or teachers from unrelated subjects.

The plea sought a direction to the authorities to “rationalise” the deployment of school teachers by capping it at 10% and scheduling their duties outside teaching hours.

The High Court listed the next hearing in the plea for July 28.

Rajasthan allows political workers to assist police in preventing crime

Press Trust of India
JAIPUR

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Rajasthan has amended the police rules to allow members of political parties to be inducted into community liaison groups (CLGs), which assist police in intelligence gathering, crime prevention and maintaining law and order.

The amendment removes a provision that barred members of political parties or their affiliated organisations from joining the community liaison groups.

A Gazette notification was issued on July 20 to delete Clause C of sub-rule (5) of Rule of the Rajasthan Police Rules, 2008.

The notification deletes the clause that made a member of a political party or its affiliate ineligible for membership of a community liaison group, without altering other eligibility conditions prescribed under the rules.

Under the existing provisions, a person convicted by a court remains ineligible for membership, is facing criminal proceedings, is suspected of involvement in criminal activities



Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma.

or has links with criminals, or is involved in property, land or other civil disputes.

The community liaison groups function as a bridge between the police and the public and assist law enforcement agencies in gathering local intelligence, identifying criminal activities, maintaining public order and strengthening community policing.

Eligibility criteria

Only local residents falling within the jurisdiction of a police station or gram panchayat are eligible for appointment.

The rules also stipulate that a community liaison group member should be a “respectable citizen” with good moral character.

Cracks deepen in AIADMK dissidents’ camp; Palaniswami reviews performance of party

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Cracks in the dissidents’ camp of the AIADMK deepened on Friday after former Law Minister C.Ve. Shanmugam stayed away from the official review meeting for his Villupuram district and former Food Minister R. Kamaraj made it to the event in Tiruvarur.

Mr. Shanmugam’s decision was in line with the stand taken by many of his colleagues such as Natham R. Viswanathan, P. Thangamani, and S.P. Velumani. About 10 days ago, a few other members of the camp, including Leema Rose Martin and G. Hari, took part in the review sessions for their respective districts of Tiruchi and Tiruvallur.

Many of the dissidents have not yet reconciled themselves to the new posi-



C.Ve. Shanmugam



R. Kamaraj

tions offered by party general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami, who removed many of the rebels from the post of district secretary. They even shot off a letter to Mr. Palaniswami, expressing their unwillingness to take up the new assignments. Early this week, many of them owing allegiance to Mr. Shanmugam had announced their resignation from the AIADMK as a mark of protest against disciplinary action taken by the party on certain dis-

trict-level functionaries in Villupuram district.

Meanwhile, the AIADMK general secretary reviewed the performance of the party in Salem and Tiruvallur (south), apart from Villupuram and Tiruvarur. After taking part in the review session, the newly appointed secretary of Villupuram R. Pasupathy, said the party had, of late, been “doing well.” He held Mr. Shanmugam responsible for the defeat in three Assembly constituencies in the district.

M.P., Rajasthan police search for cannon stolen from Narwar Fort

Press Trust of India
JAIPUR

A joint team of police from Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan has conducted a search in Rajasthan’s Karauli district for a nearly 400-year-old cannon weighing around 3.5 tonnes that was stolen from the Narwar Fort in Madhya Pradesh’s Shivpuri district last week.

However, no breakthrough has been made so far, Karauli police said on Friday.

“There were specific inputs that the antique artillery piece had been brought to the Gavda Meena village in Karauli district, about 250 km from the Narwar Fort. Search

The stolen cannon may fall into the hands of antiquities trafficking racket if not found quickly, said the M.P. police

has been going on in the village,” Sadar SHO Girraj Prasad said.

Preliminary investigations suggest that some individuals reached the rear side of the fort in a vehicle last week and fled with the 3,500-kg cannon kept there.

Karauli Additional Superintendent of Police Satyendra Pal Singh said Madhya Pradesh police had sought their assistance in the investigation.

Police suspect that the

cannon could be buried, for which digging took place at several locations in the Rajasthan district using excavators, while a specialised team equipped with underground metal detectors has been called in from Bharatpur to assist in the search. More than 50 police personnel have been deployed, while security has been tightened in and around the village, officials said.

Mr. Prasad said every location showing signs of recently dug soil is being examined.

Madhya Pradesh police fear that the stolen cannon may fall into the hands of an organised antiquities trafficking racket if it is not recovered quickly.

Centre sacks 47 NTA officials, tightens exam security law

The proposed amendments to anti-cheating law include steeper jail sentences, higher financial penalties and setting up of fast-track courts; it follows after the meeting with CJP representatives

Maitri Porecha
Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

In a move to crack down on exam malpractices, the Centre has taken a slew of actions, including strengthening the anti-paper leak law and terminating the services of up to 47 officials in the National Testing Agency (NTA).

The Union Cabinet on Friday cleared a proposal to introduce amendments to the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, endowing the anti-paper leak law with tougher penalties and time-bound trial mechanisms.

Sources in the Ministry of Education said that the NTA had terminated 47 officials from their services. “Legal and criminal actions will also be taken against some of these officials. More reformative ac-



Paper leaks and technical glitches have caused severe mental stress and delayed academic futures for many, students say, ANI

tions will follow. This is part of a complete overhaul of the NTA that has been in controversy over paper leaks,” a source said.

The proposed amendments to the anti-cheating law include steeper jail sentences, higher financial penalties and setting up of fast-track courts for speedy trials.

The policy shift comes on the heels of a late-night

video address by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who stated that stringent action would be taken against the paper leak mafia.

The announcement followed after Union Ministers J.P. Nadda and Jitendra Singh concluded their meeting with Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) representatives Ashutosh Ranka and Saurav Das.

Imprisonment for those involved in organised ex-

amination fraud has been hiked from the previous 3-5 year bracket to five to 10 years in prison. Maximum fines for those involved in organised racket have been hiked up to ₹10 crore.

The law gives statutory backing to set up dedicated fast-track courts empowered to expedite cases. Fast-track courts will be mandated to conclude investigations, dispose of cases, and pronounce judgments within three months, the sources said.

Fast-track courts have already been notified in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, with the Delhi High Court notifying the establishment of a specialised court on July 23.

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 was officially brought into force on June 21, 2024. However, there have been zero convictions under this Act.

Pradhan must resign ahead of Lok Sabha debate on paper leak: Rahul

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha did not function for the fifth straight day on Friday as the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, made it clear that Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has to resign before Parliament starts discussion on paper leaks.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said imposing preconditions before allowing a discussion on the NEET paper leak would send a “wrong message” to the country.

The Congress leadership, however, has decided to convene a meeting on Sunday to discuss its stance on the new anti-paper leak law that the government plans to bring to Parliament next week.

“Our first demand, corrupt Education Minister has to go,” Mr. Gandhi told presspersons after the House was adjourned. The Opposition leader said the Chair did not allow him to respond to the Parliamentary Affairs Minister. Soon



In one voice: Opposition members protest in the well, amid proceedings in the Lok Sabha on Friday. PTI

after the Lok Sabha reassembled at noon after an adjournment, Mr. Rijiju urged Mr. Gandhi to ask Opposition parties to start discussion on paper leaks.

Speaking in the House, Mr. Rijiju said the government had repeatedly appealed to the Opposition to allow a discussion on recurring paper leaks.

Mr. Rijiju also cited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of a stringent anti-paper leak law and fast-track courts to prosecute those involved in such offences, saying the government had already

demonstrated its commitment to safeguarding students' future.

As Mr. Rijiju concluded, Mr. Gandhi rose to respond. However, Jagdambika Pal, who was in the Chair, said he would be given an opportunity after Ministers tabled official papers. Amid the laying of papers, Opposition members raised slogans demanding Mr. Pradhan's resignation and trooped into the Well of the House, forcing another adjournment.

The House was later adjourned for the day till Monday without Mr. Gand-

hi getting an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Gandhi alleged that he was denied an opportunity to present the Opposition's position. “Whenever someone is named, it is normal parliamentary practice to allow that person to respond. But when I stood up, I was not allowed to speak and my microphone was switched off,” he said. He reiterated that the Opposition would not engage in any discussion until three demands were met: the resignation of Mr. Pradhan, action against those responsible for the alleged police assault on protesting students, and an apology from Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

No Question Hour

Earlier in the day, Speaker Om Birla urged members to allow Question Hour to function. He reminded the Opposition that he had agreed to a discussion on paper leaks, but the protests continued. As a result, Question Hour could not be taken up for the fifth consecutive sitting.

In a major overhaul, NTA begins senior-level recruitment drive

Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

In a bid to rebuild its structure following the recommendations of the K. Radhakrishnan-led High-Level Committee of Experts, the National Testing Agency (NTA) is looking to recruit senior-level officials to overhaul its academic, operational, cyber security, and investigative capabilities.

On Friday, NTA, an autonomous body, advertised for vacancies in top-tier senior leadership roles and opened recruitment for young professionals via the UPSC Pratibha Setu portal.

Officials to face action

The hiring reforms come amid massive student protests across the country against the NEET paper

leak that has put the functioning of NTA under scanner. Sources said the testing agency fired 47 officials from services, some of whom are set to face legal and criminal action.

NTA has opened hiring for four General Manager positions on a three-year contract basis. These include experts in assessment research, development, and psychometrics who can build item banks, refine normalisation methodologies, manage equating procedures, and spearhead pilots for Computer-Adaptive Testing and AI-assisted assessments.

NTA wants to hire officials who can focus on empanelment standards, capacity planning, exam-day logistics, accessibility for candidates with bench-

mark disabilities, and multi-agency coordination.

Another area where the NTA wants to focus on is the cyber-security ecosystem protecting NTA systems, networks, applications, and candidate data. It is trying to recruit senior officials to oversee internal vigilance, digital forensics, and anti-malpractice operations.

A separate Expression of Interest for fresh empanelment of subject matter experts and translators has also been floated.

“This hiring drive is the first stage of a broader restructuring process. Further recruitments across the 10 functional verticals recommended by the High-Level Committee are expected to roll out in the coming weeks,” an official said.

SC seeks Centre's response on NEET reforms

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday indicated that it would closely monitor the Centre's proposed overhaul of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) and directed the Union government to file a detailed response on whether it intends to shift the NEET-UG examination to a computer-based test (CBT) and the safeguards it proposes to put in place to protect examination data.

A Bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and Alok Aradhe observed that extraordinary measures, such as deploying the Indian Air Force to transport question papers during this year's re-NEET examination, could only serve as temporary fixes.

“We cannot let such a situation go on like this. We

have to focus on institutionalisation... Here, because of what had happened, you deployed the Air Force, but that is only an ad hoc arrangement, not a permanent one,” the Bench orally observed.

The hearing came a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the alleged NEET paper leak controversy for the first time, announcing the creation of fast-track courts to ensure the expeditious trial of such cases amid the ongoing protests led by the Cockroach Janta Party.

The observations were made while the court was hearing a batch of petitions filed by the Federation of All India Medical Association (FAIMA), the United Doctors Front (UDF) and others seeking to replace the National Testing Agency (NTA) with an independent statutory body to con-



duct the examination.

At the outset, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Union government, submitted that the issue was receiving attention at the highest levels of the executive and that the Centre was making every possible effort to address students' concerns.

“The government is going 10 extra miles as children's problems have to be addressed... I can assure you from my personal

knowledge, it is being monitored, supervised, and everything is being done at the highest executive level,” Mr. Mehta said.

The Bench then turned to the reforms proposed by the seven-member High Level Committee of Experts, constituted by the Ministry of Education in 2024 under former ISRO chairman K. Radhakrishnan to review the functioning of the NEET examination system.

The committee recommended a series of structural reforms, including a transition to a computer-based examination. The court referred to the NTA's affidavit outlining the progress made in implementing the recommendations.

Security of data

Questioning the proposed transition, Justice Narasimha expressed concern over

the security of data to prevent further incidents of paper leaks. “Please reflect on that also and tell us... How is data transferred? How does data protection occur? That's very important because when you shift to this, leaks could occur, making data unsafe. And the entire thing breaks down,” he said.

The judge directed the Centre to file a further affidavit setting out its roadmap for implementing the reforms, including the proposed cybersecurity framework, and the safeguards proposed to prevent data breaches.

The Bench posted the matter for further hearing on August 3 and directed the Centre to file a comprehensive affidavit setting out its roadmap for implementing the Radhakrishnan Committee's recommendations.

Cabinet clears ₹1,264-crore rail project for Karnataka, A.P.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday approved the third and fourth lines of the Ballari-Guntakal rail section across Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The project is estimated to cost ₹1,264 crore.

The multi-tracking project covering three districts across the two States will increase the existing network of Indian Railways by about 46 km and will be completed by 2028-29. The proposed multi-tracking project will enhance connectivity to approximately 99 villages with a combined population of about seven lakh, the Railway Ministry stated.

The project will improve rail connectivity to several tourist destinations, including Ballari Fort and Sri Kumara Swamy Temple. It is planned under the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan with focus on enhancing multi-modal connectivity and logistics efficiency, the Ministry added.

Manipur violence: SC proposes special courts to hear cases

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday proposed the establishment of special courts to conduct day-to-day trials in cases arising out of the 2023 Manipur violence and directed the investigating agencies to expedite the pending probes to ensure that there is no further “inordinate delay”.

A Bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana was hearing a batch of petitions relating to the ethnic violence in the State. Referring to status reports filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Special Investigation Team (SIT), the Bench noted that the prevailing law and order situation had made the examination of witnesses difficult, with many having been displaced or relocated.

The court also pointed out that the prolonged suspension of Internet services had impeded the collection of digital evidence, while restrictions on the movement of investigating

officers had hampered field investigations, contributing to delays in the probe. “We tentatively propose to constitute special courts, with the concurrence of the State of Manipur and the High Courts of Manipur and Gauhati, for trials to be taken up on a day-to-day basis, especially in light of the inordinate delay that has already taken place,” the Bench said.

To facilitate the establishment of the special courts, the Bench directed Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the State government, the SIT and the CBI, to collate details of cases in which investigations have been completed and chargesheets filed, as well as those in which the probe is still under way.

The top court also impressed upon the investigating agencies to conclude the pending investigations expeditiously and file the remaining chargesheets. It directed the Manipur Chief Secretary and the Director General of Police to extend full cooperation to the investigating agencies.

Amid ruckus, Ministry tables Bill in RS to punish insult to National Song

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Amid disruptions over the police action on student protesters, the Home Ministry introduced the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, in the Rajya Sabha on Friday, to punish any insult to National Song *Vande Mataram*. The objections raised by Left MPs against the introduction of the Bill were defeated by a voice vote.

The Bill, which proposes to amend the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, extends the punishment for acts of disrespect towards national symbols such as the National Flag, the Constitution, and the National Anthem, to the National Song as well.

Left objections

Union Minister of State for Home Nityananda Rai introduced the Bill. Deputy Chairman Harivansh, who was on the chair, invited CPI(M) MP John Brittas and CPI MP Sandosh Kumar P. to speak for one minute as



Nityanand Rai

they had given notices to oppose the Bill on the grounds of legislative competence or its constitutionality.

Mr. Brittas said Parliament cannot re-write a constitutional settlement through an ordinary legislation.

“The Constituent Assembly, after nearly three years of exhaustive deliberation, consciously refrained from placing the National Song and the National Anthem on the same constitutional footing,” he said, adding that the government cannot manufacture patriotism and nationalism through a piece of legislation.

Mr. Kumar's reference to the ruling establish-

ment's role in freedom struggle was deleted by the Chair.

Mr. Harivansh said the core point is that *Vande Mataram* should unite Indians, not divide them. “The leaders of India's freedom movement, including Rabindranath Tagore, had understood this. That is why it was confined to two stanzas only,” he said. He added that the government is purposefully manufacturing a division between Rabindranath Tagore and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the author of the National Song.

Countering the statements, Mr. Rai said the Left MPs were trying to mislead the House. He said that on January 24, 1950, Rajendra Prasad said both National Song and National Anthem should have equal status and the government respects it.

He sought permission to introduce the Bill. It was put to vote amid slogans by the Opposition and Mr. Harivansh announced that the Bill was introduced. He then adjourned the House for the day.

Bittu quits Union Ministry, set for key party role in Punjab

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Minister of State for Railways and Food Processing Ravneet Singh Bittu on Friday resigned from the Union Council of Ministers amid indications that he will play a key role in the BJP's organisational activities ahead of the Assembly election in Punjab next year.

“The President of India, as advised by the Prime Minister, has accepted the resignation of Shri Ravneet Singh from the Union Council of Ministers, with immediate effect, under clause (2) of Article 75, of the Constitution of India,” a Rashtrapati Bhavan press communique said.

RS term expired

Mr. Bittu's Rajya Sabha term expired on June 21, 2026.

Another Union Minister, George Kurian, had also resigned from the Union Council of Ministers on June 23, 2026, after his Rajya Sabha term ended on June 21. He was not renominated to the Upper House. Mr. Bittu, a three-time



Ravneet Singh Bittu

Lok Sabha MP, had recently hinted that he would be moving to Punjab to take an active role in State politics.

According to party sources, he may contest the upcoming Assembly election from the Ludhiana (Central) Assembly constituency.

Mr. Bittu's move to Punjab is being seen as part of the BJP's continued efforts to consolidate its organisational base and strengthen the party's grassroots presence in the State in the run-up to the 2027 polls. Before entering the Rajya Sabha, Mr. Bittu had represented Anandpur Sahib once and Ludhiana twice in the Lok Sabha.

Indian sailor killed in attack on ship in Black Sea

Delhi High Court declines interim injunction against OpenAI in ANI copyright suit

Assam flood toll hits 61; two districts severely hit

Over 40,500 shifted to safer places as rain batters Gujarat

A helicopter is shown in flight, hoisting a person from the water. The person is suspended by a rope. Two people are standing on the shore, watching the rescue. One person is wearing a blue shirt with 'FIRE' written on the back, and the other is wearing a red shirt.

13 killed after boulders crush vehicle in Himachal

India brushes off Pakistan's allegations of flood situation

SC prohibits unauthorised recording, monetisation of court videos on social media

Justice Mohana also remarked that the court was not attempting to pass a “gag order” on the press, but was merely giving effect to the Supreme Court’s 2022 ‘Model Rules for Live Streaming and Recording of Court Proceedings’, which prohibit the recording, sharing or dissemination of livestreamed court proceedings by unauthorised persons.

SUDOKU






		9		2				4
	8				3		2	1
1	3							8
				8	7		5	3
				4				
4	7		9	3				
3							4	7
9	1		7				3	
5				1		8		

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle

Q	A	S	N	K	F	T	E	A
O	N	E	S	I	E	R	O	T
S	C	A	N	D	U	M	B	C
G	A	A	O	M	E	D	T	C
C	O	N	S	E	R	V	E	R
N	E	A	T	A	V	E	R	N
B	E	A	T	A	N	A	P	T
A	N	A	P	T	O	L	E	M
U	B	U	N	T	U	A	R	G
U	K	N	V	H	A	I		
A	F	R	A	I	D	S	O	F
V	E	N	D	E	T	A		
R	E	N	D	E	T	A		
S	E	F	A	A	T			

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

9	7	5	8	2	1	3	6	4
4	2	8	7	6	3	9	1	5
6	1	3	5	9	4	7	8	2
8	6	7	1	5	9	2	4	3
3	9	4	2	8	7	1	5	6
1	5	2	4	3	6	8	9	7
2	3	9	6	4	8	5	7	1
7	8	6	3	1	5	4	2	9
5	4	1	9	7	2	6	3	8

FAITH

Attaining highest wisdom

The Bhagavad Gita states that Lord Krishna Himself proclaims, “*Vedanam Samavedosmi*, – “among the Vedas, I am the Sama Veda,” said Tirukudanthai Dr. Venkatesh in a discourse. Chandogya Upanishad is part of the Sama Veda, in which he pointed out that Chapter 7, known as Bhumma Vidya (the science of ultimate truth), establishes the cosmic connection between Lord Muruga and Lord Krishna.

In traditional Puranic and Upanishadic wisdom, rishi Sanatkumara (one of the four mind-born sons of Brahma) is considered an incarnation or a cosmic form of Lord Muruga (Kandha/Skanda), the divine commander-in-chief. The Upanishad describes a conversation between sage Narada and Sanatkumara, in which Narada seeks ultimate knowledge. Narada tells Sanatkumara that he has mastered the knowledge through words, but does not know the inner meaning. Sanatkumara leads Narada step by step towards the highest truth. He explains that words are great since all knowledge begins with names.

Then he explains: Speech is greater than the word; mind is greater than the speech; firm determination is greater than mind; awareness or presence of mind is greater than mind. Meditation is higher than the presence of mind; *vijnana* (true knowledge) is higher than meditation; strength is higher than knowledge. Finally, Sanatkumara reveals that higher even than the individual self is the Supreme Self, *Paramatma*, who dwells within every *jivatma* as its inner controller (*antaryami*). One who realises the *Paramatma* attains the highest wisdom and the supreme state.



Caught on camera

Police brutality was on public display at the Jantar Mantar protests

The massive use of force by the Delhi Police, and unidentified people, on student protesters in the national capital clearly breached all known protocols of crowd control. After its initial reluctance, the Supreme Court of India has now agreed to hear complaints of police excesses on Monday, July 27. Meanwhile, multiple video clips that have surfaced online show personnel, both in uniform and in normal clothes, using violence with an apparent intent to harm and terrorise protesters rather than to disperse them. Some protesters have sustained pellet injuries that the police and the authorities have yet to explain. In one video, an identifiable senior official of the Delhi Police is seen slapping a girl who was standing nearby; in another, an unidentified person in uniform with three stars is seen poking a girl from behind while she was walking away. In a third video, personnel are seen surrounding a girl, with one of them groping her while others leer and laugh. Some people not in uniform but wearing helmets are seen in video clips on social media beating protesters. Some have been caught on camera carrying sticks with long nails, while others are seen smashing vehicles. All this has happened while the protesters were, barring a stray incident or two, peaceful. Those who unleashed violence, whether authorised police personnel or vigilantes who infiltrated the student protests, need to be identified, pursued, and held accountable.

The police violence against student protesters in Delhi followed a pattern. In 2020, a mob entered the JNU campus and attacked students even as the police looked away. No serious investigation or arrests followed. In 2019, personnel of the Delhi Police entered the library of Jamia Millia Islamia and beat up students during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. The crackdown on protesters demonstrating against recurring paper leaks in various examinations marked a new low in this trend. There is no evidence that the protesters, who included teenagers, families with toddlers, and women, were involved in large-scale violence that warranted the level of police force used. It is heartening that the Chief Justice of India has clarified that his earlier reluctance to hear the complaints was only technical in nature and that the Court is open to those who seek justice. The Court now has before it two petitions documenting the nature and extent of the force used by the police. There must be a thorough investigation to find out exactly who was involved and whether the use of force was authorised and proportionate. There must be special attention paid to complaints of assaults of a sexual nature and to those targeting women and children. Those found guilty must face the full force of the law.

On guard

The dengue vaccine must be made affordable to those at greatest risk

The CDSCO's approval of the Qdenga dengue vaccine – the first in India's history – follows the vaccine's licensing in over 40 countries and a WHO prequalification, and some of the country's worst dengue years *vis-à-vis* the disease's burden, although that is evidence of better surveillance as well. The Aedes mosquitoes that spread the disease are expanding into semi-urban and rural districts, where conventional vector control is harder to sustain. The time to develop the vaccine itself is understandable. The four antigenically distinct dengue serotypes and the possibility of a 'second infection' by a different serotype producing more severe disease through antibody-dependent enhancement mean that an effective shot has to induce strong immunity against all four at once. This constraint nearly derailed the first licensed dengue vaccine, Dengvaxia, and the controversy in the Philippines in 2017 prompted greater regulatory caution. The design of Qdenga, by Japan-based Takeda, differs from that of Dengvaxia and, unlike the latter, can be administered without screening for a prior dengue infection.

Its protection against the serotypes varies from highest against DENV-2, followed by DENV-1, while uncertainty remains regarding protection against DENV-3 and DENV-4 in people without prior exposure to dengue. This is concerning because while DENV-2 is more common in India, DENV-3 prevalence is increasing. If the DENV-3 serotype dominates the 2026 monsoon season, Qdenga's impact could be substantially lower than anticipated, especially if many recipients are dengue-naïve. Qdenga also requires two doses across three months apart. Clinical data suggest that the first dose protects unevenly, with stronger evidence against DENV-1 and DENV-2 than DENV-3 and DENV-4. If a seronegative person takes the first shot on July 1, when the monsoon begins, and encounters DENV-3 in August, the shot may not suffice to prevent severe illness. Ensuring the highly mobile migrant workforce receives its second dose will be significantly difficult, too; those falling through the cracks may also be exposed to concerns raised in the TIDES trial of a 'negative efficacy' against hospitalisation related to DENV-3 among seronegative children. Finally, following Takeda's tiered pricing strategy worldwide, Qdenga may be too expensive for people living in dense urban slums with poor drainage. To ensure sufficient uptake among the populations at greatest risk, the government must negotiate a lower price. In the end, administering a dengue vaccine properly in a population is no less tricky than developing a vaccine against dengue, and the Qdenga rollout should give no cause for complacency.

India aspires to become a developed country (Viksit Bharat) by 2047, yet youth unemployment is already double the rate of 2012. India, especially the government, may be forced to recognise the weaknesses of India's economy due to the West Asia war shock. However, weakness pre-dates this exogenous shock. Policy-induced shocks from 2016 (demonetisation, a poorly designed Goods and Services Tax, NBFCs, COVID-19 pandemic management) to the economy had already reversed structural change (rise in farm employment, falling manufacturing share of gross value added and in employment); non-farm job growth had slowed. The economy became more unequal, and hence aggregate demand collapsed, and with it investment/GDP ratio. So, GDP growth is much slower (even if government figures of 6.2% p.a. are believed (it is actually at best 4.5%, as the former Chief Economic Adviser recently argued).

An engine of growth

Further, India's growth story will remain incomplete without increasing the work participation rate (WPR) of half the population, i.e., women. In a new study, we estimate that a 10-percentage-point increase in India's female WPR could add nearly two percentage points to GDP growth, making women's employment one of the strongest drivers of economic growth. To sustain rapid growth of 8%-9% and emerge as a global economic power, the nation must harness the immense potential of its youth, especially young women.

Increased female WPR could contribute to economic growth in multiple ways. First, it increases the overall labour supply, thereby expanding productive capacity. When more women enter paid employment, household incomes rise, consumption increases, and savings improve. Higher household incomes also lead to better nutrition, education, and healthcare for children, thereby strengthening long-term human capital. Women's work participation can also improve productivity and innovation. Based on cross-country evidence, Nobel laureate Claudia Goldin argues that gender-diverse workplaces are often more efficient, creative, and competitive. Including women in the workforce is not merely a welfare measure but also a strategy for enhancing national productivity.

However, the work participation rate (WPR) of women in India remains below 30% – among the lowest in the world, comparable to that of countries such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen and West Asia. India's female labour force participation rate (LFPR) is low by international



Santosh Mehrotra

Former Professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and with the Planning Commission



Lajati Keshari Parida

Professor of Economics, University of Hyderabad

Women's employment is essential for growth, productivity, and achieving Viksit Bharat goals

standards, even when compared with countries at similar levels of per capita income. Worse, it declined steadily between 1983 and 2018. As overall job growth in both the farm and non-farm sectors fell between 2012 and 2018, how did women fare? This is a critical question, especially since women are now much better educated than earlier.

Decline in women's work

In the 1980s and during the early 1990s, the WPR for women was high, primarily due to high participation in agricultural activities. However, this trend began to decline as economic growth and structural transformation led to a shift away from agriculture from 2004-05 to 2012. Many rural women withdrew from the workforce due to mechanisation and reduced demand for manual labour.

Fortunately, this period also saw a rise in educational attainment among young women, leading to increased school attendance. In other words, the Indian economy experienced a downward movement in female WPR in the first half of the U-shaped curve until 2018-19, consistent with the argument of Claudia Goldin.

Much has been made by government economists of the increase in women's work participation in India, post 2020. However, this increase built upon a GDP growth slowdown since 2017. Further, COVID-19 had induced economic distress, and large-scale return migration from urban to rural areas. With male workers losing urban employment and moving back to villages, women were compelled to intensify their role in subsistence agriculture and allied activities, often as unpaid family labour (UFL). This surge in UFL reflected a "distress-driven feminisation of agriculture", as women entered or remained in insecure, informal, and unremunerated agricultural work, due to shrinking non-farm opportunities and reinforced gender norms that limited mobility. The share of such work was falling from 1983 to 2012, as was the absolute number of women in such work. The collapse of non-farm work for men and women now meant that adult, poorly educated women returned to agriculture.

The structure of India's economic growth has also contributed to weak female employment generation. Much of India's recent GDP growth has been concentrated in capital-intensive sectors such as finance, information technology, and organised manufacturing, which do not absorb large numbers of workers. Labour-intensive sectors such as textiles, food processing, garments, and small-scale manufacturing saw a fall in absolute terms in employment between

2013 and 2019. In fact fewer women were employed in manufacturing in 2019 than in 2004 which shows how manufacturing jobs collapsed, despite all the hype about "Make in India" and Performance-Linked Incentives for manufacturing. It was not until 2022 that manufacturing work for women rose to a level found in 2004. In much of India, manufacturing, or women's work has not received sufficient policy support.

The north-south divide

We show that young girls' unemployment is much higher than for young men. However, there is a real north-south divide, as highlighted in the book, *India Out of Work*. What is achievable is demonstrated by Tamil Nadu, which has been one of India's fastest-growing States. More than 40% of India's women factory workers are employed in Tamil Nadu. This is remarkable, given that Tamil Nadu accounts for only about 5%-6% of India's population. This concentration is driven primarily by the State's strong presence in textiles and garments (especially in Tiruppur and Coimbatore), footwear, electronics assembly (Sriperumbudur), and automobiles and auto components, as well as by higher female literacy, greater mobility, and well-developed hostel and transport facilities for women workers.

Similarly, Hindi-belt States need to invest in the health (not insurance-based) and public education for all, especially of girls and women, to reduce higher-than-African level malnutrition and stunting rates – as the Southern states have done. They can then also see similar outcomes. There is no chance for India being 'Viksit' without gender equality in all dimensions, especially in north India.

Some increase of female WPR (who re-entered agriculture) across India since 2020 was due to older adult women engaging in animal husbandry and poultry farming – a welcome development for household incomes.

However, what about educated young girls? The gross enrolment rate at the secondary level was universalised between 2010 and 2015, with gender parity achieved even in rural Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. However, educated young women face high and rising unemployment rates.

Worse, the number of young women (aged 15-29 years) who were neither looking for work nor in education, was under 70 million until 2004. It increased to 84 million in 2012 and then rose to over 100 million by 2018. Bihar's female WPR is only 15%. Hence, India will remain out of work, and cannot become a developed country by excluding half its population from productive employment.

India's foreign policy must look seaward

At sea, nationality is usually clear. Responsibility seldom is. An Indian seafarer may be recruited in Mumbai, hired by a company based in Singapore, placed on a ship flying the flag of Panama, carrying Kuwaiti oil, attacked off the coast of Oman, and detained in a fifth country. His family may know that he is in danger without knowing which government, shipowner, or insurer is responsible for bringing him home. No single authority is fully in charge. For thousands of Indian seafarers, this uncertainty is not an exception but a routine part of ordinary working life.

Of the 14 Indians killed in attacks connected to the conflict in West Asia since February 28, at least eight were seafarers aboard commercial ships. Other Indian seafarers have been injured or stranded because their vessel, its owner or its cargo made them targets in a war they did not choose.

Forgotten maritime workforce

India tends to regard seafarers as a shipping matter until trouble arises. Then, they become a consular case. Government figures put the workforce at about 3.2 lakh as of June 2025, nearly three times its size in 2014. The 2026 Seafarer Workforce Report ranks it second behind the Philippines, narrowly ahead of China, with just over 12% of global supply.

They work abroad without ever settling abroad. Their workplace moves. That mobility sits awkwardly with a consular system organised by territory. During a single voyage, a seafarer can cross several jurisdictions. No authority follows him all the way. An Indian mission may not even know that one of its nationals is nearby until his ship is seized, abandoned or hit.

India cannot wait for an emergency to find out where its seafarers are. Data compiled by the International Transport Workers' Federation show that 1,125 Indian seafarers were abandoned in 2025, more than from any other country. In such cases, the file ricochets among a flag State, port authority, owner, insurer and Indian



Syed Akbaruddin

Former Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations and, currently, Dean, Kautilya School of Public Policy, Hyderabad

Indian seafarers need protection beyond borders, flags, and jurisdictions

mission. After the recent strikes in West Asia, the government announced its Seafarer First response.

Officials must now account for every Indian seafarer in West Asia, whatever flag the vessel flies. A dashboard will track ships, threats and crew welfare; each affected family will have a liaison officer.

West Asia is not the only danger zone. In the Black Sea and Red Sea, crews now face missiles, drones and mines. Piracy and hostage-taking persist around the Gulf of Aden and off West Africa. On July 15, the government told shipowners, managers and recruitment agencies to avoid deploying Indian seafarers on vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz until further orders. The dashboard and liaison system should remain available whenever a region is identified as high-risk.

There is a lifeline, there are gaps

Technology adds a peculiar cruelty here. A family in Kochi can watch a ship crawl, dot by dot, across a tracking app and still have no idea whether the person aboard is injured, detained or being sent into danger. A moving dot is a poor substitute for a phone call.

The dashboard can locate a ship. It cannot compel an owner or flag State to act, or secure access to a detained seafarer. Continuous tracking is unrealistic. When the system is activated, recruitment agencies should supply current crew and route data from owners and managers. India needs a standing maritime consular protocol that specifies who takes charge from the moment a distress signal is received.

In major shipping centres, Indian missions need a designated officer who knows the port authority, hospitals, insurers and local lawyers. Such relationships cannot be improvised after a ship is hit. Some flag States are quick to register a ship and slow to enforce the Maritime Labour Convention when wages stop, a crew is abandoned or repatriation is due. India must press them to honour those obligations.

India's bilateral maritime agreements usually recognise Indian certificates and expand access to jobs. However, they say little about legal assistance, consular access, or repatriation. Shipowners choose the flag under which vessels operate, but they still need crews. The Philippines and Indonesia face similar challenges. Together, the three countries could push for common standards on repatriation, detention, and deployment in conflict zones through the International Maritime Organization and the International Labour Organization. Otherwise, an owner constrained by one country's rules can simply hire elsewhere.

A cook in the ship galley does not become a combatant because the cargo is disputed or the owner has acquired enemies. India should oppose attacks on commercial shipping, whoever carries them out. Open sea lanes mean little if civilian crews cannot sail through them safely.

The right to know

Before signing a contract, a seafarer has a right to know who really owns the vessel, where it will sail, whether it is under sanctions, whether its insurance is valid and whether its owners have abandoned a crew before. Routes can change after departure. A seafarer ordered into a designated high-risk region should be able to refuse and return home without penalty.

On May 14, the Directorate General of Shipping prohibited licensed recruitment agencies from placing Indian seafarers on 366 vessels linked to abandonment unless specified compliance requirements were met. A seafarer should not have to hunt for the list. Recruitment agencies must show it to him before he signs and face penalties if they ignore it.

India's maritime ambitions are usually measured in ports, corridors, naval deployments and tonnage. In a seafarer's home, the questions are more immediate. Where is he? Who employs him? Who is responsible if he does not return? The flag above the vessel may be foreign. India's responsibility to its nationals is not.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Agents of change

The reported use of force against peaceful protesters is deeply distressing. Yet, amid this crisis, it is equally important to step back and examine the larger picture. The recent actions of a 19-year-old who exposed critical security flaws in the CBSE's On-Screen Marking (OSM) portal demonstrated how strategic civil action can effectively draw the government's attention to

pressing educational concerns. This is not to diminish the significance of peaceful protests, which remain essential for democratic accountability. However, the youth of this country possess far greater potential than merely sustaining prolonged protests, which often come at the cost of their own education, careers, and well-being. Their innovation and technological

capabilities can be channelled into building community learning hubs, student-led mental health support systems, career mentorship networks, and transparent exam-crisis response frameworks. **Sowbakayatha S.J.,** Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

Cinema, politics, change

Through their ecstatic and flamboyant celebrations following the release of

Jana Nayagan, young fans have, in effect, cocked a snook at the complexities of our politics by democratically transforming candidate Vijay into Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay. Attempts to obstruct the film's release during the Assembly election campaign may now be coming back to haunt its political opponents. This should serve as a warning to practitioners of old-style

politics that the younger generation is increasingly unwilling to be taken for granted. Much like a cinematic denouement, political change, too, may arrive when least expected — perhaps through an angry young man. **R. Narayanan,** Navi Mumbai

A star in the making

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi has proved himself once again

in the first T20 of the three-match series against Zimbabwe. The youngster is a valuable asset to Indian cricket, and the selectors should give him opportunities across formats. With grooming and support, he has the potential for a bright future. **Parthasarathy N.,** Chennai

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

GROUND ZERO



Protesters seeking Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over the NEET paper leak, at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

The ‘cockroaches’ who refuse to crawl away

Over the last week, Cockroach Janta Party-led protests demanding the resignation of the Union Education Minister and reforms to the education system have spread across the country. Students and others have continued their demonstrations despite allegations of state excesses. **Nikhil M. Babu, Shrimansi Kaushik, Serena Josephine M., and Vinaya Deshpande** report from across India on a movement that won't fade

Lathis, tear gas, and even pellet guns did not stop them. On July 23, three days after thousands of people, mostly students, were targeted by security forces, many of them returned yet again to Jantar Mantar, New Delhi's designated protest site, demanding the resignation of the Union Minister of Education, Dharmendra Pradhan. Their chants rang out across the protest site, “*Sharam karo, sharam karo*; Dharmendra Pradhan *isteefa do* (Have shame and resign, Dharmendra Pradhan).”

Among the sea of protesters gathered, a group of them, mainly supporters of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), has remained at the site for 34 days. The CJP was founded by Abhijeet Dipke as an online satirical response to remarks by the Chief Justice of India, who referred to unemployed youth as “cockroaches”.

By 5 p.m., much like the previous two days, the area was packed. It had transformed into a high-security zone, with metal barricades lining the streets and security personnel keeping watch as dense crowds of largely Gen Z protesters – many of them cheeky and defiant – waved flags, raised slogans, and recorded the proceedings on their phones. Posters read, ‘RIP democracy’ and ‘Paper leak? Modi *hai to mumkin hai* (Paper leak? It is possible if Narendra Modi is around)’.

Preeti Mishra, 34, stood out in her orange T-shirt and blue backpack as she carried a cardboard box filled with power banks. She moved between tents at the protest site, distributing them. Mishra, the mother of a two-year-old boy, was also here on July 20, during the Chalo Sansad (March to Parliament) campaign led by the CJP.

“We were marching to Parliament. The police were standing at the first two barricades, but did not try to stop us. However, when we reached the barricade near the Parliament Street police station, they suddenly lathi-charged us,” she said. She and many others fell. “I panicked,” she said. “But some strangers formed a circle around me and other women. They moved us to safety.”

It was only when she went back home that night and scrolled through her Instagram feed that she found hundreds of similar stories, many worse than hers. There were videos showing people in plain clothes tripping protesters, striking women with batons, and a police officer in uniform slapping a woman protester. Moved by what she saw, Mishra crowd-sourced ₹40,000 from friends and family to buy 40 power banks, which she distributed across the site, so that protesters could continue staying in touch.

The CJP protests, led by the youth, has become one of India's largest student mobilisations in years. Its trigger was the leak of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) paper for medical college admissions in May, which affected over 22 lakh students. Many feared they would not get another chance to take the exam due to financial constraints. This pushed a generation of angry youth onto the streets of Delhi.

Though the current protest started on June 20, it gained momentum when activist Sonam Wangchuk sat on an indefinite hunger strike from June 28. It received another shot in the arm when Wangchuk was forcibly removed from the protest site by security forces on July 18, ahead of the call for the Parliament March. The CJP movement has since spread across cities in India, with protes-



Exams like NEET provide students an opportunity to prove themselves. Many women need these opportunities to escape early marriage... That right is being snatched from them

VISHWAMOHINI
Student from Delhi

ters in Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai, Patna, Kochi, Kolkata, Guwahati and elsewhere demanding that Pradhan resign, the families of the students who killed themselves over the paper leak be compensated, and that no FIRs be filed against protesters.

From crackdown to comeback

Given the crackdown on protesters on July 20 in Delhi, followed by security forces pulling down tents, dismantling parts of the main protest stage, and nearly clearing the site, many thought it would be difficult for the movement to recover.

But videos of police brutality went viral and angered the youth. One 21-year-old woman, who was injured during the protest, required ventilator support. At least two people suffered injuries from pellet guns allegedly fired by personnel of the Rapid Action Force, the specialised anti-riot unit of the Central Reserve Police Force. When fired from close range, pellet guns can cause serious injuries and even prove fatal.

While the police are mandated to use minimal force during protests, with warnings at each step, many said this did not happen. The forces also allegedly used shock batons. Meanwhile, the Delhi Police claimed that 118 police officers were injured after protesters attacked them, compared to 60 protesters who sustained injuries. An official communication from the police on July 20 said, “Some segments of the media have mentioned sporadic use of violence/detentions at Jantar Mantar by Delhi Police. It is informed that no such incident has taken place and protest is being handled professionally.”

These videos sparked outrage. By the night of July 20, people started regrouping at Jantar Mantar. By the next afternoon, the number had swelled to thousands.

Vishwamohini, 19, an undergraduate student of history from Delhi, said she came to the protest after seeing the videos online. “This is the first time I’m taking part in a protest,” she said. “Exams like NEET are important because they provide students an opportunity to prove themselves. Many women need these opportunities to escape early marriage and move forward in life. That right is being snatched from them.”

Her friend, Anumeha, 19, said she felt guilty

sitting at home and watching fellow students being attacked. “We wanted you (the government) to come here and speak with the students, but you did not. Now we have all been forced to come here,” she said.

Her father is a supporter of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). “He told me not to go to the protest – not because the issue is not important, but because I might be lathi-charged or have cases registered against me, which could affect my future. Even he knows that we are protesting for the right cause,” Anumeha said.

As many as 16 metro stations were shut around the protest areas, while Internet services were disrupted within at least a 2-kilometre radius. The University of Delhi and Jawaharlal Nehru University issued advisories asking students to refrain from participating in protests in and around Jantar Mantar. The Association of Indian Universities also urged institutions to counsel students to “remain focused on their academic pursuits.”

A wider education crisis

Scores of people from other States have been living at Jantar Mantar for days. Ripu Giri, 21, a political science student from Bihar, held a placard written in Bhojpuri, “*Bihar se aa gaini ja ho, ab garda udi ho bhaiya* (People of Bihar have come now, something different will happen),” a reference to the popular TV series *Panchayat*. Below it was BR-24, his district code – a marker of identity shared by other students from Bihar, who often addressed each other by these codes as a term of affection.

Harsh Raj Kumar, 21, from Patna, said, “Our Chief Minister’s educational qualifications are debatable. There are paper leaks happening nearly every year. There are no jobs. Bihar students have to migrate to other cities for employment.”

He added, “When the political leadership goes to other cities, they talk about uplifting the masses and development. But when they come to Bihar, they talk about liquor and scams of the past as if the students of the State don’t deserve education and development.”

Rajnish Singh, 23, a postgraduate student from Kanpur University in Uttar Pradesh, lamented the lack of teachers in government schools in his State. “Around 80,000 teachers’ posts are vacant. Children struggle with basic reading and writing,” he said.

Neha, national president of the left-leaning All India Students’ Association, who had been on a hunger strike for 23 days, explained why NEET had become the focus of the protest, despite these various other issues in the education sector also deserving a highlight, including the drawbacks of the National Education Policy, 2020. “The National Testing Agency has been functioning as the face of corruption in the education system,” she claimed. “It is closely associated with the government. Since its inception (in 2017), the organisation, which was meant to prevent paper leaks, has instead facilitated them.”

The BJP government has been in power at India’s Centre since 2014. The Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, said there have been 152 paper leaks in 10 years.

Where the battle began

More than 2,000 kilometres away in Chennai, after staging a protest with the Communist Party of India’s-affiliated Students’ Federation of India near Panagal Park in T. Nagar on July 20, the CJP-Tamil Nadu launched a sit-in protest at Balan Ialam, the State office. Tamil Nadu was the first State to protest against NEET a decade ago.

By July 23, the sit-in protest had entered its fourth day, drawing a steady stream of youths from diverse backgrounds. Akmal Kabir, the State organising secretary of the CJP-Tamil Nadu, said the response had exceeded the organisers’ expectations, as protesters had also travelled from neighbouring Kerala and Andhra Pradesh.

Many students used rap, theatre, visual art, and storytelling to voice their opposition to NEET. Among them was Aravind E., a college student from Chennai. A resident of Old Washermanpet, Aravind joined the sit-in for two days



There are paper leaks happening nearly every year. There are no jobs. Bihar students have to migrate to other cities for employment

HARSH RAJ KUMAR
Student from Patna

and spent one night at the venue.

“Initially, the protest started with a few students, but by Wednesday (July 22), around 500-600 people had joined. More students have continued to come here since. The protest has sparked a larger conversation among students, with many voicing their concerns,” he said.

Aravind said there have been large-scale irregularities surrounding NEET. “The exam has become increasingly difficult for many students to access. Over the years, several students have lost their lives. Many others have faced severe mental stress. One participant told us he had spent 4-5 years preparing for the exam but was still unable to clear it. NEET should be scrapped,” he said.

When gaps exist within a city such as Chennai, one can only imagine the difficulties faced by students in villages, Aravind added. “I don’t think it is possible for me to travel from Old Washermanpet to Anna Nagar for a coaching class. Accessing coaching itself requires privilege,” he explained.

The Tamil Nadu Students Youth Federation, which comprises 20 student organisations, has started organising protests across the State. S. Ilayaraja, chief coordinator of the federation, said, “Earlier, we saw children from economically weaker sections and rural backgrounds dream of becoming doctors and joining medical courses. NEET has shattered many of those dreams.”

Ilayaraja said Tamil Nadu had called NEET a “scam” 10 years ago, even as other States had stayed silent. “We had identified the concerns surrounding NEET much earlier than others. Today, Tamil Nadu continues to keep the demand alive through democratic protests,” he added.

Across the city, several students and youth activists were detained by the police while attempting to stage protests at multiple locations this week. They were later released.

Ilayaraja raised concerns over alleged police excesses, claiming that personnel were being stationed outside colleges and that those without identification badges were being deployed during protests. Comparing the situation with the protests in Delhi, he alleged that such measures reflected a growing sense of a “police State”.

Resistance despite rain

In Mumbai, rain has not deterred thousands from protesting this week. On July 22, when 27-year-old Rhiya Yadav, wearing a hoodie, stood in front of a police van on a busy street in Dadar, she had no idea that the moment would make her the face of resistance in the city. A photo of her act went viral in no time.

The model, dancer, scriptwriter, and businesswoman, whose father is a *fauji*, said she was angered by the violence against protesting students in New Delhi. When Yadav realised that the police did not have a memo to detain the youths, she tried to stop the van.

Yadav said the system was broken. “We are here to fix and maintain it,” she said. So far, no FIR has been registered against her. She has not been served any notice either.

However, others have not been as lucky. Shreya Subramaniam, a 29-year-old school teacher, said she was dragged by policemen on the streets, like she was “a goon.” She had joined the protest at south Mumbai’s Azad Maidan.

She said she was apprehended outside a metro station, along with other youth. “They dragged each one of us by our legs. We fell on our backs and hurt our spines,” she said. Subramaniam fainted at the Yellowgate police station due to the pain and was taken to hospital later, she claimed.

But despite that experience, she continued to protest at different sites for three days. One night, at 3:45 a.m., her phone rang. It was a digital notice sent to her by the Mumbai Police, asking her to appear at a police station the next morning.

Several youth claimed that they had received early-hour digital notices. Some claimed that they were asked to send their live locations by the police, some said their phones were confiscated without their permission, and a few said their devices were accessed without their consent.

“This is nothing but illegal surveillance,” said advocate Kalyani Manikrao Mangave, a lawyer providing free legal aid to the students. “Since the day the protest began, we have received at least a thousand calls about alleged illegalities.”

The Mumbai Police have denied any wrongdoing, claiming that they handled the protests and protestors with sensitivity. They have booked 13 FIRs against over 400 people. Nearly half of them are below 25 years; nearly one-third are women.

The aftermath

On the night of July 23, Wangchuk broke his fast in the presence of two Union Ministers, after the government gave a written assurance that cases against students would be taken back, if they were not violent, said the Lehigh Apex Body.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a Bill to introduce stringent action against paper leaks, along with fast-track courts to examine exam fraud cases. The government agreed to compensate families of the students who killed themselves over the paper leak, and refrain from filing FIRs against protesters.

Yet, there is no sign of the protests abating. After meeting two Union Ministers on July 24, CJP spokesperson Saurav Das told the media that Pradhan must resign or be removed from the Cabinet. Echoing this, a 19-year-old in Mumbai said, “Sonam Sir has withdrawn his protest, but we will continue ours. All we want is Pradhan’s resignation and accountability at the highest level. We will not relent until that happens.”

nikhil.m@thehindu.co.in; shrimansi.kaushik@thehindu.co.in; serena.m@thehindu.co.in; vinaya.deshpande@thehindu.co.in

KERALA



The internal bickering in the Association of Malayalam Movie Artists has hit a new low with public spats, court cases and police complaints. **G. Krishnakumar** tracks the developments in the association

Turmoil in Tinsel Town

Suspense thriller: The announcement of resignation by Shwetha Menon, the first woman president of the Associational of Malayalam Movie Artistes, following a no-confidence motion against her by a section of the members during the association's general body meeting, and the subsequent war of words among members and court cases have pushed the actors' body into an unprecedented crisis. R.K. NITHIN

On June 21, 2026, a balmy Sunday morning, Malayalam movie stars had started arriving in their luxury vehicles at a convention centre in Ernakulam.

Waving and exchanging pleasantries with a battery of media persons who eagerly clicked pictures and took visuals of the stars of tinsel town, they walked into the conference hall where the annual general body meeting of the Association of Malayalam Movie Artistes (AMMA) was scheduled to be held.

Inside the hall, they smiled and hugged each other, shook hands with some, and engaged in small talk. The atmosphere was all amiable, pleasant and genial.

None had an idea that it was the calm before the storm.

A few minutes into the proceedings, a raging Shwetha Menon, the first woman president of the actors' body, stormed out of the meeting, announcing her resignation from the post.

It was a no-confidence motion moved against her by a section of the members that provoked Shwetha to announce her resignation. An incensed Shwetha also announced that she was quitting from the primary membership of the organisation.

What unfolded after her announcement was a full-fledged war of words among various actors, reportedly owing allegiance to various factions and groups in the organisation.

Shwetha, who was elected to the president's post less than a year ago, defends her decision to call it a day. "I decided to quit as I was unwilling to be a puppet in the organisation," she asserts.

The latest crisis in the actors' body began with Ansiba Hassan, who had stepped down as joint secretary of the organisation four months ago, accusing her former colleague on the executive committee Tiny Tom of making communal and defamatory remarks against her. Thus began the ugliest public spat among the members the association, having a strength of around 500 actors, since its formation.

A slew of incidents and police complaints by warring members followed the tempestuous annual general body meeting.

"It was a historic meeting on all counts," notes Ansiba, who shot to fame through the Mohanlal-starrer *Drishyam* franchise, about the outcome of the meeting.

Courtroom battles

The simmering distrust in the association has now boiled over to a protracted courtroom battle.

On her part, Shwetha reversed her decision to step down and opposed the formation of an ad-hoc committee to run the affairs of the association till new office-bearers are elected. The Ernakulam Munsiff Court has stayed the functioning of the ad-hoc body till it issues further directives.

Launched in 1994 after several actors voiced support "for an organisation to protect the interests of the fraternity," the association of actors seems to be facing its biggest existential crisis as the rival camps seem to be in no mood to relent.

Almost two years ago, the organisation had faced a similar crisis after the 17-member executive committee led by Mohanlal stepped down "fol-

Malayalam cinema has to remain alert against attempts by the Sangh Parivar to destabilise the secular character of Kerala society. **KAMAL** Filmmaker

lowing the release of the Hema Committee report and widespread media attention regarding sexual harassment allegations against some office-bearers."

The current situation, says actor Joy Mathew, is the outcome of the lack of an able leadership aware of how to run an organisation efficiently.

"We need people who are conversant with democratic values. The association has reduced to a space driven by factional feud mixed with those having a thirst for unbridled power. As most of the elected members had contested individually and not as a panel, the ruling dispensation lacks a common programme or vision," observes Joy, who resigned from the executive committee led by Shwetha amidst the continuing deadlock.

The internal rift worsened after a section of the members questioned the leadership over alleged funding by corporates and sponsorships from individuals who had earlier faced various allegations. Besides holding star-studded stage shows in association with television channels to generate revenue, the association has been accepting donations to carry out welfare programmes, including financial assistance to ailing members.

"I was targeted ever since opposing the executive committee's decision to accept a donation from a temple trust, arguing that religious and political outfits should be kept out of the association," says Ansiba.

"The sponsorship was initially agreed at ₹1 crore but was later reduced to ₹75 lakh. I don't know what happened to the remaining ₹25 lakh," she alleges.

Differences over sponsorship

The differences over accepting sponsorship without checking the credentials of the donors had escalated after actor Maala Parvathi came up with an audio clip purportedly featuring the voice of a woman leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) claiming that a major business group would have donated ₹15 crore to the association if Shwetha had continued at the helm.

"We suspect whether Shwetha's insistence on clinging to the post was somehow linked to a quid pro quo arrangement involving the said funding," alleges Maala Parvathi.

"The association does not need corporate funding. While members may hold political beliefs, they cannot impose party agendas within the organisation," she says.

Actor Baburaj, former joint secretary of the association, unleashed a scathing attack on Shwetha and accused her of collecting

commission for providing candidates from within the organisation to contest in the Kerala Assembly elections on BJP ticket. "The panel led by Shwetha also failed to submit proper accounting statements before the members. The treatment meted out to Ansiba was unjust as the leadership claimed that it has nothing to do with her complaint," he alleges.

Shwetha, who has mostly responded to the allegations through her social media handles, rejects the charges.

"I do not understand the logic behind the allegation that a national party that has been in power for more than 12 years will have to give me money to get candidates in Kerala. I have no reason to hide my political affiliations, if any, as the association's executive panel has members of varying political affiliations, including the Congress, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the BJP," she says.

In a letter sent to the members, she says that her panel has realised "the lapses that occurred due to lack of experience." "We have initiated the required corrective measures within the organisation. However, I will go to any extent to make sure that those named in the Hema Committee report will not lead the association. My fight is against the power group that humiliated me and tried to expel me from the annual general body meeting," she asserts.

Patriarchal structure

The latest episode has exposed the systemic chinks within an organisation struggling to deal with the challenges faced by it and come out of its long-standing image of being a patriarchal structure.

As actors Revathy and Padmapriya point out in a social media post: the "association was meant to stand as a collective voice for all actors. But it has become increasingly shaped by patriarchy and power politics, weakening its founding ideals." The duo were among those who stepped down recently.

The two, who are also the founding members of the Women in Cinema Collective, say that the resignations after the Hema Committee report on the problems faced by women in the Malayalam film industry were not an act of principle. "They were an escape from accountability. Once the attention faded, the same old order returned. Power keeps finding new ways to protect itself. The faces change. The methods change. But the structures enabling inequality remain untouched," they observe.

The seeds of discontent fuelled by allegations that some vested interests were trying to sneak their agenda into the association had prompted voices in Malayalam cinema to raise an alarm.

"Malayalam cinema has to remain alert against attempts by the Sangh Parivar to destabilise the secular character of Kerala society," warns senior filmmaker Kamal.

"It is a fact that such attempts have been visible in Malayalam cinema and it remains a matter of concern. It was disturbing to hear reports that communally loaded references were reportedly made against Ansiba. The senior actors in Malayalam cinema, who had always remained secular, should address the concerns raised by her," he suggests.

Support system

Amidst the high-decibel internal bickering, a few senior members have come forward and highlighted the need to protect the interests of its members. "This organisation holds a lot of relevance in society. It is a big support system for many ailing members, and we cannot allow it to get derailed," feels K.B. Ganesh Kumar, actor and former Minister.

"We have to realise that the association was formed to create and develop fellowship among the members and help those requiring support," reminds actor Raveendran. "There may be differences of views among the members, and it may go out of control too. But we are unanimous in the feeling that nobody should try to disintegrate the association," he adds.

Actor Jayan Cherthala, who resigned from the executive committee led by Shwetha, says all have to abide by the decisions taken at the general body meeting. "There is no point washing our dirty linen in public. The general body is the highest decision-making platform of the organisation," he says.

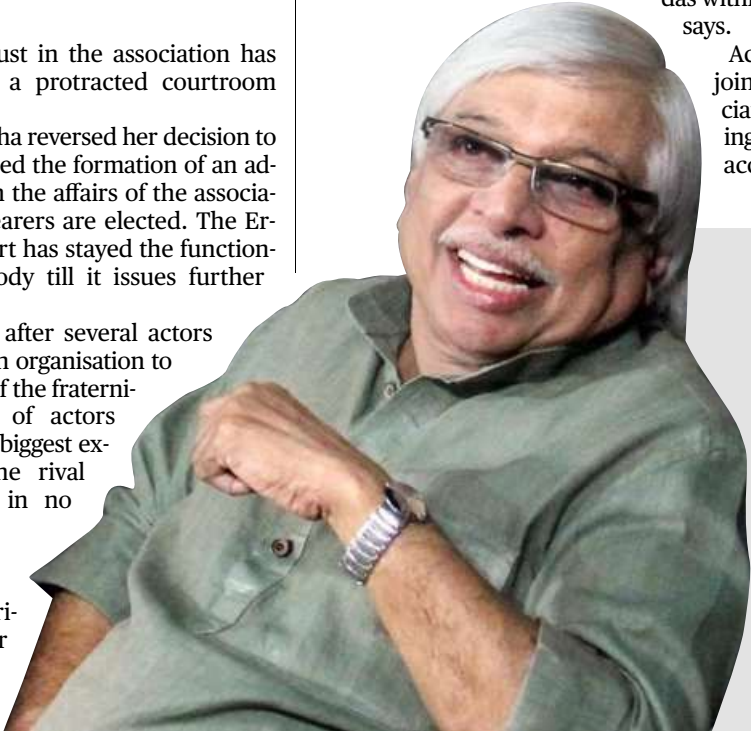
Despite such calls for unity, there are no immediate signs of a thaw among the feuding factions as the association stares at fresh uncertainty following the ongoing legal tussle.

Actor-turned-politician Ramesh Pisharody, who stepped down from the post of the convener of the ad-hoc committee, says that the body will be ready for the next election of office-bearers by the time the court delivers its final verdict.

"How can a person who publicly announced her resignation from the primary membership of the association approach the court as its president to question the formation of the ad-hoc committee?" he asks. "We are here not to engage in a street fight, but to ensure the welfare of our members," he says.

However, Shwetha is yet to relent and seems determined to continue her fight. "I will not surrender and back down," she asserts.

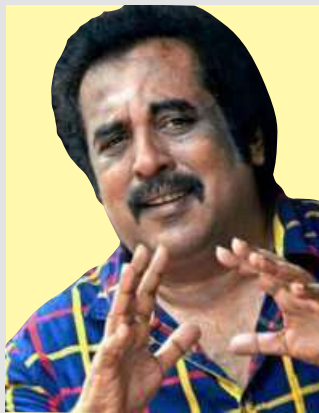
The organisation stares at a bleak future as the warring stars are determined to take the fight to newer levels.



It was a historic meeting on all counts. I was targeted ever since opposing the executive committee's decision to accept a donation from a temple trust. **ANSIBA HASSAN** Actor



There may be differences of views among the members, and it may go out of control too. But we are unanimous in the feeling that nobody should try to disintegrate the association. **RAVEENDRAN** Actor



TELANGANA



Hope hangs by a cloud: A farmer ploughs a paddy field on a tractor on the outskirts of Hyderabad on Thursday. El Niño conditions have weakened the southwest monsoon this year, leading to a severe rainfall deficit across the State. NAGARA GOPAL

Caught between a dry spell and despair

Delayed rains, falling groundwater levels and the looming impact of El Niño have left thousands of farmers across Telangana anxiously watching the skies. While the State has rolled out a contingency plan urging a shift to less water-intensive crops, many cultivators have stayed with their traditional choices, hoping the monsoon will revive. As reservoirs run low and crop stress mounts, they remain caught between official advisories and age-old cropping patterns, report **K. Shiva Shanker** and **P. Laxma Reddy**

Standing in his eight-acre rainfed farm in Aroor village of Sangareddy district in mid-July, P. Narasimhulu gently pulls out a black gram sapling from the parched soil. The frail plant barely reaches his ankle. Raising his hand nearly three feet above it, he says, “By now, it should have been this tall.”

Last monsoon, excess rain had washed away nearly ₹3 lakh that the 40-year-old tenant farmer had invested in his cotton crop. This year, it is the absence of rain that threatens to leave him counting losses again.

“I have spent around ₹60,000 for ploughing and ₹40,000 to sow black gram and redgram in eight acres this *Vanakalam* (rainy) season. There are no rains so far. If we receive good rains in the coming days, I might recover some of the investment. Else, I will lose ₹1 lakh,” says Mr. Narasimhulu, who cultivates leased land.

The vegetation growing between the crop rows offers another reminder of how little rain the fields have received. “We used to weed it out by this time,” he says, pointing to the stunted growth.

His anxiety is shared by several of farmers across Telangana, where a delayed southwest monsoon and the looming impact of El Niño have raised fears of crop losses, shrinking groundwater reserves and a difficult agricultural season. Farmers cultivating paddy, cotton, pulses, cereals, vegetables and fruits across the State have been waiting anxiously for sustained rainfall, worried not just about the current crop but also the seasons ahead.

The southwest monsoon reached Telangana on June 8 and covered the entire State only on June 23, after a delay of 15 days. Encouraged by the first showers, many farmers began sowing. But the rains failed to sustain, leaving fields dry and crops under stress.

Their concern is backed by data. According to the Agriculture Department’s recently released ‘El Niño Contingency Plan for Vanakalam 2026’, groundwater levels have already declined in 18 districts.

If the State receives 30% below-normal rainfall, groundwater levels are projected to fall from 9.46 metres below ground level (mbgl) in June to 10.35 mbgl in July and 11.01 mbgl in August.

Rainfall has also remained far below normal. Between June 1 and July 14, a total 27 of Telangana’s 33 districts recorded deficient rainfall while one district fell in the large-deficit category.

The situation is equally worrying in reservoirs. Most major, medium and minor irrigation reservoirs are at, or close to, their Minimum Draw Level. As per the contingency plan released on July 16, the available live storage is limited and suffi-



I have spent around ₹60,000 for ploughing and ₹40,000 to sow black gram and redgram in eight acres this monsoon. If we receive good rains in the coming days, I might recover some of the investment. Else, I will lose ₹1 lakh.

P. NARASIMHULU,
Tenant farmer in Sangareddy

cient mainly to meet essential needs such as drinking water supply, leaving little scope to provide irrigation unless the remaining monsoon brings substantial inflows.

For a State where agriculture remains a key source of livelihood, the implications are noteworthy. According to the Telangana Socio-Economic Outlook 2026, agriculture accounts for 41.5% of total employment in the State, compared with 22.2% in industry and 36.3% in services. In rural Telangana, nearly 62.6% of the population depends on agriculture and allied activities.

The burden is especially heavy on farmers who rely entirely on rainfall. Tenant farmers cultivating rainfed lands are among the most vulnerable, as irrigated lands command much higher lease rents than dry lands.

Political blame game and preparedness

Political differences over the crisis have sharpened as the dry spell continues.

Senior leaders of the main Opposition, Bharat Rashtra Samithi, accused the State government of creating an “artificial drought” by not operating the pumps at Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme (KLIS).

The party’s Deputy Floor Leader, T. Harish Rao, said the project was conceived to ensure farmers would no longer remain at the mercy of uncertain monsoons if Godavari waters were lifted into Telangana’s reservoirs.

Irrigation Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy said the Medigadda, Annaram and Sundilla barrages of KLIS would not be permitted to operate until experts certified them as safe. He said the structural, technical, geological and geophysical studies recommended as part of the rehabilitation process following the damage to the barrages were nearing completion.

The State has begun preparing for a season that could require farmers to adapt to changing weather patterns rather than wait for the rains.

Through its El Niño contingency plan, the Agriculture Department has drawn up district-wise crop advisories for July and August based on soil type, urging farmers to switch to drought-resistant and less water-intensive crops.

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on June 1 directed officials to educate farmers about shifting to crops that require less water, considering the below-normal rainfall forecast for the current monsoon.

For the second half of July, the plan recommends crops such as cotton, redgram and bajra across most districts.

In August, foxtail millet and redgram feature prominently among the suggested alternatives, along with short-duration crops including green-

gram, black gram, castor and select vegetables. But one crop that is conspicuously absent from the list is paddy.

The paddy paradox

The omission is significant because paddy and cotton together accounted for a little over 87% of the 1.37 crore acres cultivated during Vanakalam 2025. Paddy alone covered 69.89 lakh acres. The total area sown during the previous kharif season was almost equal to Telangana’s net sown area of 1.38 crore acres in 2024-25, making for 50.13% of the State’s geographical area of 276.95 lakh acres, according to the Telangana Socio-Economic Outlook 2026.

According to Uttam Reddy, the State achieved a rare double of record paddy production and procurement in the 2025-26 kharif season. “We procured 71.64 lakh tonnes of paddy worth ₹19,000 crore during kharif, benefiting over 15 lakh farmers,” he said.

Farmers have largely stayed with the same crops they cultivated during the previous Vanakalam.

Compared with the corresponding period last year, the area under paddy till July 14 increased from 5,66,710 acres to 6,37,586 acres. Cotton acreage rose from 37,48,842 acres to 41,52,337 acres while redgram increased from 3,26,357 acres to 3,53,845 acres and soybean from 3,15,565 acres to 3,35,685 acres.



We are going to recommend supply of seeds of pulses and cereals on maximum subsidy, ensuring loans to eligible farmers and suggest a moratorium on the loans.

G. CHINNA REDDY,
Planning Board vice-chairman

hope and worry. The seedlings are nearly ready for transplantation, but without adequate rainfall, they cannot be moved to the main field.

“We have been waiting for at least moderate rains to go ahead with the preparation of our fields for paddy transplantation, as the seedlings are almost ready. I am just hoping for the best, but officials say there may not be good rainfall this monsoon,” he laments, describing the drought-like conditions prevailing not only in his village but across several pockets of the erstwhile Warangal district.

“During a normal monsoon, I cultivate paddy on six acres and cotton on two acres. But the weather has been extremely harsh this year. The tanks and streams are dry, and the officials say water levels in the major dams and reservoirs are also below normal. As there is no water in the local tank this monsoon, I have been forced to borrow water from a neighbour to raise the paddy nursery,” he says.

His concerns mirror those of farmers across all districts (barring Mulugu) of the erstwhile Warangal region, where deficient rainfall has disrupted *Vanakalam* (kharif) sowing. Warangal and Hanumakonda districts have recorded rainfall deficits well above the State average, placing them among the worst-affected districts since June 1 this year.

A few kilometres away, in Mogilicherla village near Warangal city, 45-year-old farmer Bathini Venu has already altered his plans for the season. “While I own five acres of land, I have taken

another four acres on lease. I have sown cotton on seven acres and left two acres meant for paddy untilled due to the non-availability of water in the local tank,” he says.

He has already invested nearly ₹1 lakh in land preparation and sowing. “Due to the non-availability of water, I am now irrigating the cotton crop using borewell water,” he says. “I pray for good rains in August, but I am not sure what will happen.”

The dependence on groundwater worries paddy farmers elsewhere too, many of whom fear that even if the current crop survives, water availability for the next crop cycle could become a challenge.

The story is no different in Vikarabad district. Anantha Prabhakar Joshi (62), from Gokafasalawad village in Doultabad mandal, says his green gram crop on three acres has already dried up due to the prolonged dry spell. “I have sown the redgram in another three acres, but left another acre without tilling, in which we usually sow paddy due to non-availability of water in the borewell,” he says.

He urges the government to link the VB-G RAM G programme with agriculture to support farmers during drought-like situations.

In Vikarabad’s Amradi Kalan village, another farmer, Salauddin, says he chose not to cultivate cotton after the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warned of a weak monsoon. Instead, he planted *kandi pappu* on three acres.

“There will be a 50% loss from my *kandi* crop. If we receive bountiful rains from mid-July, I may avoid the remaining 50% loss and recover the money invested,” says Mr. Salauddin, who has access to irrigation water for cultivation.

A glimmer of hope

After July 16, however, rainfall activity picked up across parts of Telangana. According to S. Stella, head of the IMD’s Hyderabad Centre, the rainfall deficit for July narrowed from 31% to 25% by July 20, a development she shared during a meeting on El Niño on July 21.

The showers brought much-needed relief to many farmers. The government has also stepped up its response beyond issuing the contingency plan. State Cabinet Ministers have been holding district-level review meetings with Special Officers appointed to monitor rainfall, reservoir and groundwater levels, crop conditions and other indicators. The exercise is aimed at gathering feedback from farmers while spreading awareness about alternative cropping patterns suited to a weak monsoon.

A 27-member State-level expert committee, headed by Planning Board vice-chairman G. Chinna Reddy, has also been constituted to assess the likely impact of El Niño and recommend measures to reduce its impact.

At its first meeting in Hyderabad on July 22, the panel discussed climate-resilient agriculture through scientific crop planning, crop diversification, promotion of drought-tolerant and less water-intensive crops, groundwater recharge and other long-term measures.

“After considering the suggestions made during the meeting, we are going to submit our recommendations to the government soon. We are going to recommend supply of seeds of pulses and cereals on the maximum subsidy, ensuring farm loans to eligible farmers and suggest a moratorium on the loans taken by farmers,” Mr. Chinna Reddy says, adding that the panel may also recommend waiver of interest on farm loans.

For now, recommendations remain on paper while the fate of monsoon rests largely on the skies. For the farmers, this *Vanakalam* is no longer about securing a good harvest; it is about recovering enough to survive until the next season.

KARNATAKA



Difficult task: While the Election Commission has said the Special Intensive Revision is necessary because of migration, changing addresses and a constantly evolving electorate, these are also the same reasons verification has become particularly difficult in Bengaluru.



Tracing voters in an ever-evolving city

From its demography to its geography, Bengaluru looked very different in 2002, when Karnataka last undertook an ‘intensive revision of special nature’ of its electoral rolls. The changing nature of the city makes the Special Intensive Revision particularly challenging for both voters and Booth Level Officers, writes **Rishita Khanna**

After receiving her enumeration form, Lakshmi P. (name changed), a 59-year-old voter from Padmanabhanagar, began searching for her details in the 2002 electoral rolls. She sifted through over 120 voters with the same name. Different spellings, the expansion of her initial and even her parents’ names led nowhere. It was only after she found her husband’s 2002 voter identity card that she realised the family’s electoral record in 2002 was under Uttarahalli Assembly constituency, not Padmanabhanagar.

Relieved that she had finally traced the record, Lakshmi turned back to the enumeration form, only to find that the pre-filled details carried the same spelling error that appeared in her voter identity card.

Should she point it out before submitting the form or later? Did both sides of the form have to be filled? Were all fields mandatory? If the pre-filled details were incorrect, whom should she approach?

Similar questions have haunted voters in Bengaluru – a city with over 1.03 crore voters, making up approximately one-sixth of Karnataka’s total 5.54-crore electorate.

A very changed city

From its demography to its geography, Bengaluru looked very different 24 years ago, in 2002, when Karnataka last undertook an “intensive revision of special nature” of its electoral rolls.

For instance, Whitefield and Mahadevapura had not yet become the dense urban corridors they are today. Yelahanka, Uttarahalli, and Kengeri lay on the edges of a much smaller city. Over two decades since, Bengaluru has expanded in every direction. Assembly constituencies were redrawn and lakhs of people who moved to the city for work, education and marriage eventually transferred their vote here.

Moreover, Bengaluru’s growth earlier hinged on migration from North Karnataka and neighbouring States such as Tamil Nadu, and later from across the country as the city’s technology and services sectors expanded. The city’s electoral rolls, therefore, are itself a record of migration.

With the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) under way, Lakshmi’s experience mirrors the questions many voters and even Booth Level Officers (BLOs) say they are facing while filling the enumeration forms.

Why the city lags behind

While the Election Commission says SIR is necessary because “two decades of urbanisation and migration have significantly altered the electoral rolls”, the very reasons cited by the commission – migration, changing addresses and a constantly evolving electorate – are also the reasons verification has become particularly challenging in Bengaluru, where SIR progress has lagged behind most districts despite 8,972 BLOs being



We are visiting houses in some areas six or seven times just to give the form. Will we get extra payment for visiting six times instead of three?

A BOOTH LEVEL OFFICER

drafted from almost every department.

The city is home to lakhs of people living in apartment complexes as well as hundreds of notified and non-notified slum settlements. While many apartment residents spoke about struggling to understand Kannada-only forms, residents in several slum settlements said their immediate concern was ensuring that their names remained on the electoral rolls, which many said meant “welfare benefits” and proof of residence.

Pointing to the lack of awareness, a BLO assigned for New Timbryard Layout, off Mysore Road, said, “Only a limited number of enumeration forms had reached the area till last week. Those who did not receive one went back to their homes and returned with documents. They could not understand why only some households had received the forms.”

“When I said I would return after receiving more forms, many residents came back carrying Aadhaar cards, ration cards, voter identity cards and every other document, repeatedly requesting me to ensure that their names were not left out of the electoral rolls,” the BLO added.

Link to welfare benefits

For many residents in informal settlements, the anxiety stemmed from more than the fear of losing the right to vote. Many families said their voter identity card was linked to welfare benefits and also served as one of the primary documents establishing their residence in Bengaluru.

For many, however, the confusion began with the form itself. In Telangana, besides Telugu forms, English forms are distributed in Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) limits, while dummy forms have also been made available in Urdu. In Karnataka, however, the SIR enumeration forms are printed only in Kannada. In Bengaluru, where a large section of the population speaks English and many residents do not know how to read Kannada, this has become a recurring complaint. “I don’t know how to read Kannada. I don’t know how to check the 2002 rolls because they are all in Kannada,” said a resident from Bellandur.

Many BLOs express helplessness too. “Many people have filled both sides of the form. People don’t remember where they voted in 2002.

Many who were not required to provide progeny details have filled in their parents’ details because they could not find their own 2002 records in-

stead of leaving the section blank. Others have added details of both their spouse and parents because they did not want to leave any section empty. How do we help them? There are no uniform instructions for us either. Many of us do not know how to read Kannada, yet we are expected to verify forms filled in Kannada. Even during digitisation, this has become a problem,” a BLO from Bescom said.

When the exercise began, differences in spellings across documents, implausible gaps between a child and parent or grandparent, and variations in names across records were categorised as logical discrepancies. The category has now formally become part of the SIR, with many voters reporting that discrepancies were flagged after they submitted their forms.

Multiple BLOs said documentation gaps and discrepancies were more common in cities such as Bengaluru, where people had lost document trails while shifting houses, documents had been issued hurriedly, or where common names had been recorded with different spellings across records.

“My father is named as my husband in one of my documents, while in two documents his initials are expanded. As long as we had documents, we never thought such a situation could arise,” said an anganwadi teacher, who is also working as a BLO. “We did not even have a home. I myself will neither be able to fulfil the mapping criteria nor be able to file a claim because I have many discrepancies in my documents,” she said.

‘Permanent’ elsewhere

The exercise has also brought into focus documentation gaps across different sections of the population. Thousands of workers who spend most of the year in Bengaluru continue to maintain their permanent residence in their native districts, travelling back during agricultural seasons. As a result, many of their older documents remain linked to their hometowns.

“My brother has filled the form for our entire family because forms were given for me, my wife and our three children in Koppal. But we don’t know which documents they will ask for. We have only Aadhaar and a ration card,” said Tanveer, a gig worker.

It was against this backdrop that the State government recently began doorstep delivery of Permanent Residence Certificates (PRCs) and caste certificates, both included in the Election Commission’s ‘indicative’ list of 11 documents. For many voters who had shifted to Bengaluru years ago for work, education or marriage, the move appeared to provide an additional document that could be produced if their eligibility was questioned during verification.

However, uncertainty remains. Election authorities have declined to state clearly and categorically whether a PRC by itself would suffice, saying the issue would arise only during the claims and objections stage after publication of the draft electoral rolls.

It is to be noted that during the SIR in West Bengal, Electoral Registration Officers were instructed to accept only Permanent Residence Certificates issued under the 1999 Rules rather than treating every PRC alike.

Whether Karnataka’s newly introduced PRCs will ultimately serve the purpose many voters expect, will therefore depend on the Election Commission’s interpretation during verification, rather than merely on the State government’s decision to issue them.

Struggles of BLOs

If voters were trying to understand changing rules, BLOs said they were trying to implement them while continuing with their regular government duties. Several said their own offices were already functioning with staff shortages, leaving them to balance routine government work with repeated door-to-door visits, verification, digitisation and mounting public queries.

Initially, when the exercise began, complaints were raised against BLOs for distributing forms from public places such as temples, mosques and

government offices instead of going door to door. BLOs, however, argue that door-to-door enumeration within given timeline is impossible.

“If we make five calls, only one person confirms that they are free and we can go and hand over the form. The rest are not at home because everyone is working. By the time they return, our work is over. In such a situation, what do we do?” one BLO asked.

Many people, even after more than half of the enumeration period had passed, said they had still not received their forms.

For BLOs, delayed distribution often means repeated visits. “We are visiting houses in some areas six or seven times just to give the form. Will we get extra payment for visiting six times instead of three?” one BLO said, flagging also exhaustion and health issues. Some said they found the exercise intimidating because they feared they would ultimately be held responsible for mistakes beyond their control.

However, instead of addressing these concerns, many BLOs said they were threatened with disciplinary action and issued show-cause notices for failing to meet prescribed SIR targets.

Officials working as BLOs said they had been drafted into the exercise with no training while continuing to perform their regular duties. Some said they had even turned to YouTube videos to understand procedures they were expected to implement.

Several women BLOs also pointed to another consequence of the exercise. “They have given our personal numbers on the form. Some men have started troubling us through WhatsApp texts and videocalls at odd hours,” said a BLO from the Education Department.

Yet many BLOs said the greatest difficulty was that they themselves could not answer several of the questions voters were asking.

Many said the same historical electoral rolls and supplementary records that voters were searching for were themselves unavailable in several Bengaluru constituencies, leaving BLOs with little guidance despite being the first point of contact. “The larger problem is that we are expected to verify information that many times we ourselves cannot verify,” one BLO said.

Several officials said the pressure to improve numbers had gradually become the focus of the exercise.

Most ASDDO numbers

An Additional District Election Officer (ADEO) pointed out that Bengaluru has reported one of the highest numbers of ASDDO voters – “absent, shifted, duplicate, dead and others” voters. However, he said those figures often reflected the city’s mobility rather than the accuracy of the exercise. “In many places, BLOs have delivered forms at both addresses, in case of duplicate votes, because they could not establish where the person actually resides. The figures do not depict that picture,” the official said, arguing that distribution figures by themselves reveal very little about how smoothly the exercise is progressing. As of July 22, 25.47 lakh voters within the GBA limits had been marked under ASDDO category.

“Distribution figures are being celebrated, but digitisation figures tell a different story. They show how many forms have actually come back and how many can be verified. In the GBA limits, only 31.28% of forms had been digitised as of July 22, compared with the Statewide figure of 67.23%. Moreover, many forms are incomplete or wrongly filled because people are rushing to submit them. BLOs are under pressure from BLAs and EROs to keep calling voters so the forms can be digitised. But is completing the exercise the only objective?” the ADEO asked.

The question, several officials argued, is not whether ineligible names should be identified, but whether the process can be done without making eligible voters navigate multiple rounds of confusion, missing records and verification in a city whose electorate has drastically changed over the past two decades. It is this complexity, they said, that results in Bengaluru’s daily progress figures being poorer than rest of Karnataka.

INBRIEF



BoB Q1 net slips falls 72 % to ₹1,278 cr. on NMC settlement

Bank of Baroda (BoB) net profit plummeted 72% to ₹1,278 crore after incurring a one-time cost of ₹5,700 crore due to an out-of-court settlement with the joint administrators of United Arab Emirates-based NMC Health. The net profit in the year-earlier period was ₹4,541 crore. Despite the one-time cost, the lender increased its net interest income by 9.5% to ₹12,524 crore in the reporting quarter against ₹11,435 crore in the prior corresponding quarter. In terms of asset quality, net non-performing assets (NNPA) dipped 10 basis points to 0.5% in Q1 compared with 0.6% in the same quarter last year. Gross NPA (GNPA) at 1.99% compared with 2.24%.

Govt. brings ₹3,030-cr. plan to set up three chemical parks

The government on Friday announced a new ₹3,030-crore scheme for setting up three large chemical parks, each spread across at least 2,000 acre, an initiative aimed at making India self-reliant in the sector. Announcing the Cabinet decision, Information & Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said each park could see investments in the range of ₹20,000 crore to ₹50,000 crore and the scheme will act as a “multiplier”. The Cabinet, chaired by PM Narendra Modi, approved Bharat Audyogik Vikas Yojana Rasayan, or BHAVYA-Rasayan Scheme, to establish three dedicated chemical parks in the country, The scheme will have a total financial outlay of ₹3,030 crore.

CG Power Q1 net profit increases 16% to ₹308 crore

CG Power and Industrial Solutions posted a 15.5% rise in consolidated net profit to ₹308.28 crore for June quarter FY27 on the back of higher revenue. In the year-earlier period, net profit stood at ₹266.87 crore, as per an exchange filing. Total income rose to ₹3,364.39 crore from ₹2,906.30 crore. The results include the performance of the operating subsidiaries in Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands and other non-operating subsidiaries. The board has approved the expansion project for manufacturing Extra High Voltage Gas Insulated Switchgear at Vilholi, Nashik. Order intake for the quarter was ₹5,211 crore and un-executed order backlog was 45% higher at ₹18,965 crore.

Telecom infra firms can't share data out of India, says Govt.

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The government has barred communication infrastructure providers, including those involved in cloud-based networks for telecom services, mobile towers and satellite gateways, from sharing any data outside the country, as per an official notification. The Department of Telecom, in a notification for the authorisation framework for infrastructure providers, made it mandatory the entire telecommunication data should be stored within the country.

No copies outside India “Every new authorised entity shall ensure all systems of its telecommunication network and the data, logs and information associated with its telecommunication network shall be stored within India and no copies of such data, logs and information shall be routed, shared or made available outside India,” the notification, dated July 20, said. Authorisation frameworks are part of government strategy to shift from licensing regime to light regulation, as per the Telecommunications Act 2023.

Refinery expansion not to be hit on West Asia flare-up: BPCL

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL) has kept expansion of refineries capacity on despite the tensions in West Asia. “We expect this to be a temporary period (the recent flare-up of tensions in West Asia). However, if you look at the overall dynamics of crude availability in terms of supply and demand, it is still in surplus,” Vetsa Ramakrishna Gupta, director (finance) of BPCL told *The Hindu* in an interaction on Thursday. Mr. Gupta added if the conflict resolved soon, it is expected the crude prices would cool off and Bharat Petroleum would be able to recoup losses. The June-end quarter turned out to be particularly strenuous for India's oil-marketing companies as they sought to shield prices of retail fuels as petrol, diesel and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) despite elevated crude prices because of the conflict in West Asia. As a standard practice, refiners usually reinvest net profits for enhancing capacities and fine-tuning them to accommodate more varieties of crude. In response to the drying up of supplies from



Refiners usually reinvest net profit for enhancing capacity.

West Asia, BPCL diversified sources. It also tapped increasingly into the spot market, where purchases surged to about 69% in the first quarter of FY27 from 44% a year-earlier. He said there were some discounts on spot purchases until the fag-end of June.

More U.S. LPG In Q1, BPCL procured more LPG from the U.S. in the spot market. Subhanakar Sen, director (marketing) told *The Hindu*, “We increased spot purchases from the U.S., and they were available without any disturbance though they take a longer voyage time.” Mr. Gupta added local LPG production was slated to continue the momentum acquired with contingency steps taken at the peak of the conflict to ensure adequate availability.

Shriram Finance Q1 net up 60% to ₹3,453 crore

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Non-bank lender Shriram Finance reported a 60% jump in net profit to ₹3,453 crore in April-June quarter, driven by a healthy jump in core income. Company executive vice chairman Umesh Revankar attributed the increase to a 33.67% jump in core net interest income to ₹8,056 crore.

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

To capitalise on the fast-growing compact SUV market in India, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. on Friday introduced the upgraded Brezza Turbo Boosterjet at price starting from ₹7.4 lakh (ex-showroom). This segment, which now accounts for 30% of the passenger vehicle market, has been growing fast due to Goods and Services Tax (GST) benefit. At present, Maruti sells 15,000 Brezza units

Bank of India PAT up 36.2% to ₹3,068 crore in Q1FY27

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Public sector lender Bank of India (BoI) net profit increased 36.2% to ₹3068 crore on higher net interest income, in the quarter ended June 30 against the same period last fiscal. Net interest income (NII) increased 12.6% to ₹6832.5 crore in the reporting quarter against ₹6068 crore in the year earlier period. Net Interest Margin (NIM) dipped slightly to



BoI is likely to garner \$200 mn in FCNR(B) deposits.

2.52% in the recently concluded quarter as against 2.55% in the year-earlier period.

Gross NPA as a share of gross advances reduced to 1.81% in Q1FY27 as against 2.92% in the year earlier period.

Net NPAs better Net NPA as a share of net advances too improved by 24 basis points to 0.51% in the current fiscal as against 0.75% in Q1 of last fiscal. Bank of India expects to garner \$200 million in FCNR(B) deposits with a target of ₹1.2 billion by September 30.

Maruti Suzuki unveils New Brezza at price starting from ₹7.4 lakh



More bets: The New Brezza is also available with K15C Dual Jet Dual VVT engine with Progressive Smart Hybrid Technology.

monthly. Since its launch in 2016, Maruti Suzuki has sold 14 lakh Brezza units, making it one of the most

sold vehicles in India. The New Brezza is also available with K15C Dual Jet Dual VVT engine with



No takeoff: Reports suggested proposed policy changes were being considered at behest of the Adani Group. G. N. RAO

Adani Enterprises says no plans to enter airline business

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Adani Enterprises on Friday dismissed media reports claiming the Adani Group was exploring an entry into the airline business. “Adani Enterprises is not evaluating any proposal to enter the airline business,” the company said in a stock exchange filing.

Baseless reports It called media reports baseless and factually incorrect. The denial comes amid the Ministry of Civil Avia-

tion's deliberations on easing cross-ownership restrictions between airport operators and airlines. Some media reports had suggested the proposed policy changes were being considered at the behest of the Adani Group. Under existing airport concession agreements, scheduled airlines are typically restricted from holding more than 10% or 26% equity in airport operators. These provisions can also operate in reverse, potentially limiting airport operators from acquiring stakes in airlines.

Zomato's platform fee, delivery levy no abuse of dominance: CCI

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has found the platform fee, delivery charges and restaurant commissions collected by Zomato do not constitute an abuse of dominance and are not anti-competitive practices. They are charges for legitimate and differentiated services being provided, the CCI said. The order was in response to an application by R. Suresh, who alleged Eternal (previously Zomato) was charging an inflat-

ed price for food on its delivery platform as a result of platform fees, delivery charges and the commission it charges restaurants. ‘Abuse of dominance’ Mr. Suresh said he paid ₹198 for a plate of ghee pongal ordered on Zomato from Sree Ariya Bhavan. However, when he went to the restaurant himself, he was charged only ₹105 for the same dish. He further said the higher price on the delivery platform was due to ₹43 delivery partner fee, ₹14.90 platform fee and ₹16.6 Goods and Services

Tax and added the dish's base price was also higher on the platform at ₹123.5, than ₹100 the restaurant charged him in person. “Upon enquiry, the restaurant management informed approximately 33% commission is deducted by Zomato from restaurants, compelling restaurants to artificially inflate prices on the platform,” the CCI order read. “The business model of selling food items through a restaurant and online food delivery services are different,” it added. “So, the price of a food product varies in both the models.”

Generics maker Laurus Lab's Q1 net profit more than doubles

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Generic drugmaker Laurus Labs' consolidated net profit more than doubled year-on-year (YoY) to ₹361.99 crore for the June quarter, driven by a 29% jump in revenue. Revenue from operations rose to ₹2,026.31 crore, supported by a 67% surge in CDMO (Contract Development and Manufacturing Organisation) business to ₹870 crore. Within CDMO, small molecules segment grew 69% to ₹835 crore, driven by growth in late-stage clinical and commercial Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) supplies. Revenue from the Bio (large molecules) segment were up 21% to ₹35 crore. Generics division revenue rose 10% to ₹1,156 crore. Laurus Labs ED and CFO V. V. Ravi Kumar said the company delivered a strong operating performance in Q1 despite challenging macroeconomic volatility. Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation) margins were strong and consistently improved at 31.8%, on improvement in capacity utilisation and operating leverage, he added.

Romania shoots down drone in its airspace for first time: President

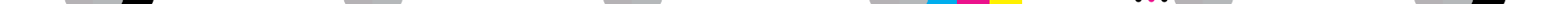


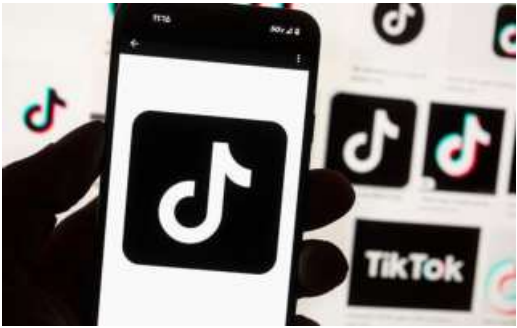
Five drones shot down over Iraq's Erbil: Kurdish counterterror forces



Imran Khan's son says his father needs urgent medical attention



CM YK  A IN-X



An investigation by the European Commission has found that TikTok allows adults to view accounts of minors. AP

TikTok failing to protect privacy of minors, finds EU

Associated Press
BRUSSELS

The European Commission on Friday said it found TikTok had not adequately protected children's privacy rights on its platform by allowing adults to view the accounts of minors.

The action exposed children to cyberbullying, unwanted contact and predatory behavior, Commission spokesperson Thomas Regnier said.

"Children's content must never be visible to strangers," he said. If TikTok does not take steps called for by the European Union's landmark Digital Services Act, "minors are exposed to predators, to grooming and to cyberbullying," Mr. Regnier said, adding that children aged 13 to 15 can "easily" change their accounts from private to public and the private accounts of minors aged 16 to 17 can be seen by anyone on the Internet.

"We do not accept this," Mr. Regnier said. "Putting default settings for minors is not a beauty contest under the DSA. It must be effective."

The investigation comes on the heels of back-to-back crackdowns on Big Tech by Brussels, which has led the world in regulating tech behemoths including Meta and Apple.

TikTok can now defend itself and reply to the findings. If unsatisfied with the Chinese firm's response, the Commission could issue a so-called non-compliance decision and possible fine worth up to 6% of the company's total annual revenue.

The Chinese social media firm, whose parent company ByteDance is based in Beijing, said in a statement it would review Brussels' findings and "continue to engage constructively with the Commission."

NEWS ANALYSIS

Grace Paul Vallooran

Years since whistle-blowers first sounded alarm over social media companies pushing harmful and addictive content towards children, France, on Tuesday, became the first European Union (EU) nation to legislate a blanket ban on social media access to children under 15 years of age.

The ban had been a key priority on French President Emmanuel Macron's agenda since his second term in office. "The brains of our children and our teenagers are not for sale," he had said in a video message earlier this year.

The legislation was approved by both the French National Assembly and the Senate, with the National Assembly voting 279 in favour, 81 against and 66 abstentions.

"I committed to it, it is now passed: social media will be banned for those under 15 at the start of the school year," the President said in a social media post after the vote. The law is set to roll out in two phases overseen by Arcom, France's digital and audiovisual communications regulator.

In phase one, with checks in place for age verification from September, anyone under 15 trying to open a

social media account in the country, will be blocked from doing so.

In phase two, platforms will get until January 2027 to close existing under-15 accounts, which means even the existing accounts will have to undergo compulsory age verification. Exactly how the verification will be done remains unclear. But, authorities have promised to establish a reliable system before the rules are enforced.

Children under 15 will still be able to reach online encyclopedias, educational tools, and scientific directories since the ban excludes non-commercial digital resources. Advertising promoting social media to them, including campaigns by influencers, will be prohibited. Ads for social media platforms must also carry a disclaimer, "Dangerous products for children under 15."

The ban also extends to mobile phones in high schools. However, the exact norms will be decided by each school.

Concerns over young users' exposure to pornography, cyberbullying, and other forms of online exploitation, have been mounting in the country.

Recommendation algorithms on social media platforms are designed in ways that push teenagers towards increasingly extreme or disturbing con-



Screening out harm: France follows Australia's lead, where a similar blanket ban has been in effect since December 2025. REUTERS

tent, says Arcom. The regulator reports that children aged 12 to 17 spend an average of one hour and 21 minutes a day on TikTok alone. Lawsuits against TikTok, filed by several French families, alleging that the platform's algorithm exposed their children to harmful content that contributed their suicides, are ongoing.

The platform has denied the claims.

"We left you in this jungle and it robbed you of your attention," Mr. Macron told teens at an event in April. "We need to slow down and help you become adults, and above all citizens."

A growing wave

France follows Australia's lead, where since December 2025, a similar ban has been put to effect. The On-

line Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act requires platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, X, and Snapchat to implement age verification and take "reasonable steps" to prevent children under 16 from creating accounts. After Australia, other countries including Austria, Spain, Brazil, and the U.K. have been mulling similar restrictions.

The French legislation also comes ahead of expected EU-wide measures, following recent recommendations from an expert committee set up by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

While calling for stronger protections, Ms. von der Leyen said: "Social media is not a toy." Drawing a comparison with product safety rules, she added: "In

Europe, whoever develops a product is responsible for its safety. Car manufacturers must make their vehicles safe. We do not expect children to design their own seatbelts. We do not expect parents to fit airbags at home."

"This is not about whether children can access social media. It is about whether and when social media can access our children," she said.

Our Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology and even State governments, such as Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, have hinted at taking similar routes.

Earlier this month, during his visit to Australia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi praised the country over its ban. "I have followed you closely, and the way you have legislated and worked to protect society in IT and social media is inspiring the world," he told Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

Concerns and blocks

Bans often fail because teenagers rapidly find technological workarounds like VPNs, and privacy-preserving age verification systems are not yet widely implemented, say critics. As per reports, a July 2026 study by Australian government advisors have found that their under-16 ban has so far not been as

effective as expected.

Latest surveys show that Australian teens are following the rules even lesser than they were just two months ago.

In France, the law also faces immediate legal challenges. The Council of State had previously warned that a general and absolute prohibition could infringe fundamental rights – including children's right to access information and parents' authority. The legislation could therefore face scrutiny by the Constitutional Council.

Also, to ensure compliance with the European Union's Digital Services Act, lawmakers removed national sanctions against technology companies from the Bill. Digital Minister Anne Le Hénanff said responsibility for enforcing the rules would rest with social media platforms. Therefore, the policy's impact on the ground remains to be seen.

"Bans alone, without any requirements to change the underlying algorithms and addictive features, will leave children who manage to circumnavigate age-gates, older children and adults exposed to the same risks," Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of international human rights watchdog Amnesty International says on their website, in response to France's blanket ban.

'ICC chief prosecutor removed from post over sexual misconduct charges'

Associated Press
UNITED NATIONS

Member state representatives of the International Criminal Court voted to remove the global tribunal's chief prosecutor on Friday, nearly two years after sexual misconduct allegations against him first emerged, two diplomats have confirmed to AP.

British barrister Karim Khan has been accused of sexual misconduct with a female aide, as outlined by AP in a series of stories, allegations which he has steadfastly denied.

By a large majority, the ICC's 125-member states ousted Mr. Khan from his position, the first time a chief prosecutor has ever been removed from office.

The 56-year-old Mr.



Big move: This is the first time a chief prosecutor of the ICC has ever been removed from office. AP

Khan was temporarily removed from his duties at the ICC in June, pending Friday's vote, after a report by the executive committee of the court's oversight body found he had committed "serious misconduct." According to docu-

ments seen by AP, Mr. Khan engaged in a sexual relationship with the woman and tried to prevent her from pursuing her allegations. Mr. Khan disputes those findings.

Early in the session, a motion brought by Sierre

Leone that would have made it harder to oust Mr. Khan failed and diplomats quickly moved forward to vote on removal, several hours ahead of schedule, according to three diplomatic sources who were familiar with the proceedings.

Countries voted by secret ballot. The court's host state of the Netherlands said it voted for his removal, as did France and Norway, which made their decisions public ahead of the meeting.

"We believe it has been proven beyond reasonable doubt that his conduct constituted sexual harassment and abuse of power," Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister, Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik, said in a statement to AP.

A sea of smoke



A man walks in the ocean at Moutchic beach in Lacanau, southwestern France, on Friday, as clouds of smoke from wildfires rise into the sky. More than 20,000 people have been evacuated from the region after fires swept through over 3,400 hectares, as per the latest estimates. AFP

In Liberia, plenty of rubber being produced but new tyres remain out of reach

Agence France Presse
LIBERIA

Harry Somah scrapes bark from a rubber tree on his farm in western Liberia with a tapping knife, as thick latex pours slowly into a cup.

Rubber is among Liberia's main cash crops, but experts say the poor west African nation is short-changed when tyres and other rubber goods are manufactured abroad.

Mr. Somah, in his 70s, inherited his rubber farm from his father and grandfather before him. It sits in a district of Grand Bassa County known as Compound One, where rubber has been his family's only stable source of income for decades. But he says the compensation is too low.

Just like thousands of other Liberians, the So-

mahs sell their crop to the country's largest rubber company, Firestone Liberia, which is located some 40 kilometres (25 miles) east of the capital Monrovia and has been in the country for 100 years.

In addition to buying rubber from independent farmers like the Somahs, Firestone Liberia, a subsidiary of Bridgestone, also produces its own rubber.

Firestone operates the world's largest contiguous natural rubber plantation, stretching almost 480 square kilometres (185 square miles) and employing more than 4,000 people.

There are also a handful of other rubber companies in Liberia.

Yet tyre and large-scale rubber goods manufacturing does not exist in the country, where most peo-

ple drive on used and worn out tyres.

"Liberia captures only a small portion of the total value generated from its natural rubber", Bonokai George Gould, an economics professor at the University of Liberia and a coordinator for strategic planning at the Central Bank of Liberia, told AFP.

Used tyres

While there is no official estimate of the financial loss from the absence of manufacturing, Mr. Gould said "the economic opportunity cost is considerable". Manufacturing tyres and rubber products creates "industrial jobs, technology transfer, tax revenues, export earnings and the development of supporting industries", he said.

Mr. Gould warned that



Tyre and large-scale rubber goods manufacturing does not exist in Liberia, where most people drive on used and worn out tyres. AFP

Liberia would require "substantial investments in infrastructure, energy, skills (manpower-development) and a conducive business environment" in order to manufacture rubber goods.

Firestone Liberia told AFP that not only is there not "specialised manufacturing capacity or the level

of electrical and industrial infrastructure necessary to produce tyres on a mass scale", but the additional materials needed to make them are not readily available in the region.

The majority of Liberians meanwhile drive on cheap, used tyres, imported from places like Europe, America and China.

Repairing and reselling the poor-quality tyres has become a profitable business, and makeshift shops are ubiquitous.

Monrovia-based re-seller and repairer Mory Soumaoro said he repairs 100 or more used tyres each month. And he said he makes far more money selling used tyres than brand new ones, which people are unable to afford.

Re-sellers like Mr. Soumaoro can buy imported used tyres for \$15 to \$40, and make about \$10 per tyre after markups, he told AFP. Meanwhile new tyres sell for up to \$250.

Lawrence Yealue, chairperson of the National Civil Society Council of Liberia, questioned the process: "We send the raw materials out, what do we get?"

"It comes back into the country with added values

and we pay high cost for it", he said.

'Surviving' by rubber

Liberia's rubber output stood at 73,769 metric tons in 2025, according to the Central Bank of Liberia, with the product accounting for some 2.2 percent of the country's GDP.

President Joseph Boakai cited a lack of "significant downstream manufacturing opportunities, industrial employment" and the need for "expanded tax revenues and improved foreign exchange earnings" when he issued an executive order in June placing an indefinite ban on the export of unprocessed natural rubber. Only processed rubber products such as latex concentrate or ribbed smoked sheets will be exported, he said.

However James Saye-

kea, president of the National Rubber Brokers and Farmers Union of Liberia, told AFP he believed the measure "denies farmers a competitive market to sell their product", with many dependent on the production and sale of unprocessed rubber. It gives a "monopoly to the few processing companies", such as Firestone, he said.

Well-known Liberian businessman Upjit Singh Sachdeva, who has roots in India and owns Liberia-based Jeety Rubber, is promising to produce the country's first domestically manufactured tyres by 2028. In the meantime, it is workers such as the Somahs who carry the rubber mantle.

Speaking of the land bequeathed by forefathers, Mr. Somah said, "That is what we are surviving by".

The Deschamps paradox: was his World Cup-winning *Les Bleus* tenure a success?

The debate over the 57-year-old's managerial legacy will not disappear anytime soon. Critics will argue that his caution prevented France from reaching even greater heights. His supporters will counter that his discipline transformed limitless potential into sustained excellence

Anirudh Velamuri

Dynasties rarely end with a bang. More often, they fade quietly, leaving only numbers and memories to tell the story.

Didier Deschamps departs the France dugout after 187 matches in charge, having won 122 of them, drawn 32 and lost only 33 – a remarkable 65.2% win rate. But statistics alone cannot explain his tenure.

Restoring credibility

He inherited a national team weighed down by embarrassment and disappointment when he succeeded Laurent Blanc in 2012. The side was still scarred by one of the darkest episodes in its footballing history. The disastrous 2010 World Cup campaign in South Africa had descended into chaos, culminating in the players' infamous 'mutiny' against erstwhile manager Raymond Domenech. Blanc's subsequent two-year spell did little to erase that stain.

Deschamps' first task was to restore France's credibility. Fourteen years later, he walks away having delivered far more than most dared to expect, leaving behind a side that measures tournaments not by qualification, but by how far it goes.

The blueprint for Deschamps' managerial philosophy was obvious to those who watched him play.

From Nantes, Marseille and Juventus to the French national team, Deschamps captained almost every side he represented. Leadership came naturally, but so did another conviction that would shape his managerial career: an organised team will almost always outperform a collection of outstanding individuals. Yes, talent mattered. But the collective mattered more.

As a player, Deschamps made his name as a defensive midfielder whose greatest gifts were discipline, intelligence and relentless industry. His job was simple – recover possession and move the ball to those capable of creating something extraordinary. Eric Cantona's famous nickname for him, 'the water-carrier', was less than complimentary. But it perfectly captured Deschamps' willingness to sacrifice personal glory for the team's success.

Those same principles became the foundation of every French dressing room he commanded and helped him early on as he repaired a broken national side, both within the dressing room and beyond it.

His outfits mirrored him: relentless in their work rate, aggressive in their pressing, disciplined without the ball and exceptionally well organised. Superstars were encouraged, but never

The better France became under him, the more was expected of him. Winning the World Cup became the benchmark rather than the dream

at the expense of team structure.

That pragmatism often made him an easy target for critics. What rarely received the same attention was his willingness to evolve. Over more than a decade in charge, Deschamps successfully navigated multiple generations of French talent – from Franck Ribery and Karim Benzema to Kylian Mbappe – adjusting his communication and leadership styles without ever compromising the standards he demanded.

The results speak for themselves. France reached the last four at the World Cup in three successive editions under Deschamps. It lifted the trophy in 2018, fell on penalties in the 2022 final and made a semifinal exit this year. In 2014, it was eliminated by eventual champion Germany in the quarterfinals. In England, a record like that would probably earn someone a knighthood – and then some.

"I'm extremely happy. I'm very proud of everything we've done to reach this stage and to win a World Cup, to take the French team to the highest level," Deschamps told the press at this year's quadrennial showpiece.

Final-chapter irony

The irony is that his final chapter may have vindicated everything he had spent more than a decade preaching.

For years, Deschamps was criticised for being too cautious, too conservative, too reluctant to unleash France's extraordinary attacking talent. In this World Cup, he defied his own patterns, loosened the reins and gave his star-studded side greater freedom. While that produced some of the tournament's most attractive football, it would also be its undoing.

When Spain ended its campaign, it was not

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because France lacked flair. It was because it was overrun. It cried out for the very qualities that had long defined Deschamps' best teams: discipline, composure and control. If anything, it served as a reminder that putting the handbrake on is not always a sign of fear. Sometimes, it is simply what wins football matches, especially in

knockout games at the highest level.

Unlike many of football's iconic players, Deschamps did not walk straight into elite managerial jobs on reputation alone. He earned his credentials by rebuilding clubs that needed rescuing. And he did it thrice.

AS Monaco came first. Appointed in 2001, he guided it to second place in Ligue 1 in only his second season, finishing just one point behind title-winning Olympique Lyonnais. He followed it with the League Cup triumph, famous Champions League victories over Real Madrid and Chelsea, and a run all the way to the final before Jose Mourinho's FC Porto proved too strong.

Then came Juventus. Relegated to Serie B in the aftermath of the Calciopoli match-fixing scandal and burdened with a nine-point deduction, the Bianconeri needed stability as much as results. Deschamps delivered both, leading it straight back to Serie A as champion before resigning just a week after promotion following disagreements over transfer strategy.

His next revival came with Marseille, the club he had famously captained to Champions League glory as a player. In his first season, he ended an 18-year wait for the Ligue 1 title before adding three successive League Cups and two French Super Cups. Reawakening one of French football's sleeping giants made him the obvious choice to succeed Blanc in 2012.

His record on the international stage is extraordinary. Five of the seven major tournaments in which France was eliminated under Deschamps ended with the team losing to the eventual champions. His tenure not only wit-

Deschamps inherited gifted footballers, but his greatest achievement was moulding them into a side that consistently functioned as something greater than the sum of its parts

nessed the makings of an enviable World Cup record, but also saw Les Bleus make the Euro final in 2016 and the semifinals in 2024.

And yet, despite everything he achieved, one question will linger. Could he have accomplished even more?

That says as much about the extraordinary depth of French talent as it does about the man who guided it. Deschamps inherited a stable overflowing with gifted footballers, but his greatest achievement was moulding them into a side that consistently functioned as something greater than the sum of its parts.

Where the truth lies

The debate over his legacy will not disappear anytime soon. Critics will argue that his caution prevented France from reaching even greater heights. His supporters will counter that his discipline transformed limitless potential into sustained excellence. The truth, as is so often the case with the finest managerial careers, probably lies somewhere in between.

Perhaps that is the paradox of Deschamps. The better France became under him, the more was expected of him. Winning the World Cup became the benchmark rather than the dream. Reaching the semifinals became routine instead of remarkable. All said and done, he leaves with France restored to where it belongs – among the game's true heavyweights.

Another French legend, Zinedine Zidane, is widely tipped to be the man who follows him. Deschamps leaves behind a daunting assignment, though.

His are far from impossible shoes to fill, but they are certainly not comfortable ones.

STACKING UP



#	Player	Age	Points	Events
1	Jannik Sinner	24	13,450	18
2	Alexander Zverev	29	8,480	20
3	Carlos Alcaraz	23	8,160	17
4	Felix Auger-Aliassime	25	4,740	23
5	Alex de Minaur	27	4,110	24
6	Ben Shelton	23	3,770	22
7	Novak Djokovic	39	3,760	16
8	Daniil Medvedev	30	3,670	24
9	Flavio Cobolli	24	3,460	27
10	Taylor Fritz	28	3,365	22
11	Alexander Bublik	29	2,610	26
12	Jiri Lehecka	24	2,510	21
13	Casper Ruud	27	2,435	22
14	Andrey Rublev	28	2,380	23
15	Lorenzo Musetti	24	2,315	22



#	Driver	Team	Points	Wins
1	A.K. Antonelli	Mercedes	204	6
2	L. Hamilton	Ferrari	159	1
3	G. Russell	Mercedes	154	2
4	C. Leclerc	Ferrari	126	1
5	L. Norris	McLaren	103	0
6	O. Piastri	McLaren	92	0
7	M. Verstappen	Red Bull	91	0
8	I. Hadjar	Red Bull	60	0
9	P. Gasly	Alpine	42	0
10	L. Lawson	RB	39	0
11	A. Lindblad	RB	22	0
12	F. Colapinto	Alpine	19	0
13	O. Bearman	Haas	18	0
14	G. Bortoleto	Audi	10	0
15	C. Sainz	Williams	6	0
16	A. Albon	Williams	5	0
17	E. Ocon	Haas	3	0
18	F. Alonso	Aston Martin	1	0
19	N. Hulkenberg	Audi	0	0
20	V. Bottas	Cadillac	0	0
21	S. Perez	Cadillac	0	0
22	L. Stroll	Aston Martin	0	0





#	Player	Points	Events
1	Shi Yu Qi	1,00,355	12
2	Kunlavut Vitidsarn	92,565	16
3	Anders Antonsen	91,155	17
4	Jonatan Christie	88,431	17
5	Christo Popov	87,982	20
6	Chou Tien Chen	80,280	26
7	Li Shi Feng	73,083	16
8	Victor Lai	71,865	19
9	Alex Lanier	70,215	17
10	Kodai Naraoka	69,670	20
11	Alwi Farhan	69,419	19
12	Loh Kean Yew	65,700	19
13	Lin Chun-Yi	65,274	18
14	Lakshya Sen	65,213	21
15	Koki Watanabe	59,570	22

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Travis Head	853	884
2	Harry Brook	852	898
3	Joe Root	840	932
4	Steve Smith	831	947
5	Temba Bavuma	775	806
6	Kamindu Mendis	744	784
7	Shubman Gill	743	807
8	Rachin Ravindra	740	740
9	Yashasvi Jaiswal	733	858
10	Dinesh Chandimal	713	755

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Jasprit Bumrah	870	908
2	Matt Henry	861	870
3	Mitchell Starc	838	852
4	Pat Cummins	832	914
5	Marco Jansen	825	825
6	Scott Boland	820	820
7	Noman Ali	817	853
8	Kagiso Rabada	807	902
9	Josh Hazlewood	775	864
10	Nathan Lyon	753	812

Top Indians ▶

	
Sumit Nagal Rank 230 ▲ 11 spots	Manas Dhamne Rank 374 ▲ 5 spots

#	Player	Age	Points	Events
1	Aryna Sabalenka	28	8,550	18
2	Elena Rybakina	27	8,143	22
3	Jessica Pegula	32	6,301	19
4	Coco Gauff	22	5,649	18
5	Mirra Andreeva	19	5,293	20
6	Karolina Muchova	29	5,168	20
7	Linda Noskova	21	5,119	22
8	Iga Swiatek	25	4,539	19
9	Amanda Anisimova	24	4,353	15
10	Elina Svitolina	31	4,351	16
11	Marta Kostyuk	24	3,926	17
12	Victoria Mboko	19	3,570	22
13	Naomi Osaka	28	3,146	18
14	Belinda Bencic	29	2,845	18
15	Jasmine Paolini	30	2,783	19

Top Indians ▶

	
Sahaja Yamalapalli Rank 337 ▲ 1 spot	Vaishnavi Adkar Rank 382 ▼ 5 spots



Pos	Team	Points	Wins
1	Mercedes	358	8
2	Ferrari	285	2
3	McLaren	195	0
4	Red Bull	151	0
5	Alpine	61	0
6	RB	61	0
7	Haas	21	0
8	Williams	11	0
9	Audi	10	0
10	Aston Martin	1	0
11	Cadillac	0	0

Top Indians ▶

	
Lakshya Sen Rank 14	Ayush Shetty Rank 23

#	Player	Points	Events
1	An Se Young	1,17,787	16
2	Wang Zhi Yi	1,06,689	16
3	Akane Yamaguchi	1,00,576	18
4	Chen Yu Fei	87,651	15
5	Han Yue	81,138	14
6	Putri Kusuma Wardani	75,123	18
7	Ratchanok Intanon	72,246	20
8	P.V. Sindhu	67,601	14
9	Pornpawee Chochuwong	66,727	16
10	Tomoka Miyazaki	63,646	22
11	Nozomi Okuhara	60,310	18
12	Chiu Pin-Chian	57,028	24
13	Kim Ga Eun	56,651	16
14	Michelle Li	55,227	21
15	Sim Yu Jin	55,084	10

Top Indians ▶

	
P.V. Sindhu Rank 8	Unnati Hooda Rank 24

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Daryl Mitchell	802	840
2	Shubman Gill	801	841
3	Virat Kohli	767	908
4	Rohit Sharma	758	879
5	Ibrahim Zadran	712	756
6	Babar Azam	689	894
7	Harry Tector	679	730
8	Joe Root	674	810
9	Shai Hope	672	782
10	Charith Asalanka	659	705

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Rashid Khan	682	775
2	Abir Ahmed	675	675
3	Jofra Archer	649	682
4	Mitchell Santner	645	656
5	Keshav Maharaj	645	737
6	Maheesh Theekshana	641	680
7	Shaheen Afridi	604	691
8	Mehidy Hasan	602	722
9	Adil Rashid	599	671
9	Gudakesh Motie	599	638

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Ishan Kishan	892	904
2	Abhishek Sharma	858	931
3	Sahibzada Farhan	848	848
4	Phil Salt	799	881
5	Pathum Nissanka	751	796
6	Jos Buttler	748	794
7	Harry Brook	734	734
8	Tilak Varma	733	845
9	Brian Bennett	716	716
10	Mitchell Marsh	706	706

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Rashid Khan	753	828
2	Abir Ahmed	736	757
3	Adil Rashid	710	747
4	Adam Zampa	700	746
5	Varun Chakravarthy	683	818
6	Nathan Ellis	675	678
7	Corbin Bosch	669	745
8	Wanindu Hasaranga	668	809
9	Mujeeb Ur Rahman	663	757
10	Mohammad Nawaz	658	672

